

“You’re Doing It Wrong, Tommy”: Embodied Audiencing Rituals, Cult Texts in Crisis, and the Struggle for *The Room*

Matthew M. Foy

This essay considers the midnight movie cult phenomenon The Room and its iconic in-theater audiencing ritual as an anecdotal representation of a community employing cultural performance to enter into dialogue with a text producer (here, The Room auteur Tommy Wiseau) and engage in struggle over the meaning of a contested cultural text. Through the lens of Victor Turner’s model of social drama, the author considers discourses surrounding the controversial history of The Room (which represents the breach and crisis of Turner’s model) and demonstrates ways in which the discourses and gestures performed by audience members during the ritual constitute redressive action and should be understood as symbolic rejection of Wiseau’s public assertions of modernist authorial control.

In *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke (1937) observed that human actors respond to adverse conditions by adapting our worldviews to better comprehend, cope with, and confront challenges we encounter in our everyday lives:

In the face of anguish, injustice, disease, and death one adopts policies. One constructs his [or her] notion of the universe of history, and shapes attitudes in keeping. Be [s/]he poet or scientist, one defines the “human situation” as amply as his [or her] imagination permits; then, with this ample definition in mind, [s/]he singles out certain functions or relationships as either friendly or unfriendly. (p. 2)

When Burke wrote *Attitudes Toward History*, it was still relatively early in Hollywood’s Golden Age; the commercial motion picture was a burgeoning medium. Today, cinema has continued to grow and has become so ingrained in the minds and identities of filmgoers of the United States that film connoisseurs and fan communities, too, adopt policies with which to make sense of and, when necessary, enter into struggle over the meaning of beloved films. Such policies empower interested parties to unite in collective action to engage in shared symbolic struggle to claim a particular film for their desires.

Films are challenging texts for even fluent audiences to fully decode and interpret. Films appeal to audiences as not-not-real rhetorical texts that obscure the complexity of their arrangement and are loaded with ideologies that “impose on the audience a certain position or point of view, and the formal conventions occlude this positioning by erasing the signs of cinematic artificiality” (Ryan & Kellner 1998, p. 1). But as critics, we should not underestimate audiences’ capacities not only to untangle films’ sophisticated webs of meaning but also to, in Burke’s vocabulary, develop and deploy attitudes with which they actively, collectively struggle over texts in crisis.

Fan communities of cult texts (e.g., *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Twin Peaks*) have demonstrated notable degrees of creative activity formerly reserved for text producers and have employed their labors to assert stakes in control over the cultural significance of their beloved texts. A rich scholarly tradition of critical, cultural, and fan culture studies reminds us that films are serious business to U.S. audiences; despite their sanctioning as mere entertainment and escapism from “real life,” films mean something very real and very worth struggling over to those who emotionally invest in them. When creative fans form communities and individually or collectively manipulate artistic conventions in an effort to privilege a particular artistic interpretation of a text over competing discourses—for example, using creative practices such as creative writing, visual art, or cosplay to tinker with characters’ gender or sexual orientation, or to draw focus to ancillary characters with whom they identify—they are employing cultural performance as “a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests... to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 40).

One undertheorized genre of creative fan activity is *ritual embodied audiencing*: participatory events characterized by audience members responding to or interacting with a mediated text through conspicuous comments or gestures, often humorous, sarcastic, or informative. Audiencing rituals that feature embodied

performance—spoken commentary, chanting, dancing, costumes, props, etc.—constitute rich sites of everyday creative activity and at times flash the tactical capacity to animate and talk back to mediated texts in discursively significant ways. From the decades-long cultural institution *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* to the interactive movie riffing ethic of today's boom of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*-inspired performance art in which performers ridicule (usually) so-called cheesy movies, audience members and fan communities are provocatively and persuasively employing embodied performance to coordinate mind, body, and text in ways that challenge outdated assumptions that commercial film is a medium too overwhelming to risk interaction.

Discovering just how audience members undertake the substantial work of making sense of mediated texts is no simple task. As Park-Fuller (2003) observed of audiencing staged performance, “we lack a simple but sophisticated language through which to interact with audience members about *their* unique and varied performances in relation to any given performance” (p. 290). The challenge of understanding film audiences is also daunting. Our challenge as critics includes not only accessing the complex, fragmented processes of intersubjective sense-making we associate with postmodern media consumption but also translating those processes in ways that honor their complexities, all while remaining reflexive to the ways our own positionalities inform our interpretations of others' interpretations.

Embodied audiencing rituals constitute special conditions in which audiences embrace conspicuous cultural performance in ways that instructively make explicit their struggles over their beloved texts. Audiencing rituals constitute a fascinating site of cultural production in part because they bring the typically opaque meaning-making process of postmodern text-reading—decoding, fragment-gathering, assembly, articulation—into the open, where signification can be both shared with fellow audience members and studied by critics. By studying ritual audiencing as a mode of creative activity that produces discourses that are meaningful, political and attitude-laden, critics may access the meaning created in the interplay between text, reader, and countless other texts which may be idiosyncratically assembled by readers. And a film need not be an action-packed spectacle, box office giant, or critical darling to evoke informatively passionate audience responses. Consider the film at the center of this essay (and near the top of many Worst Film Ever lists): *The Room* (Wiseau, 2003).

By conventional critical standards, *The Room* is historically inept and should be doomed to obscurity. Independently produced on a budget of six million dollars raised outside the Hollywood system by writer-director-actor Tommy Wiseau (Sestero & Bissell, 2013), *The Room* flopped when first released in theaters and was savaged by the few mainstream critics who deigned to acknowledge its existence. As if left for dead in the woods but determined to survive on the land, *The Room* staved off the death of obscurity by eeking out what was first a meager existence as a midnight movie curiosity in West Hollywood before its reputation of incompetence spread virally and helped Wiseau and his film gain exposure to a national, and eventually international, audience (Collis, 2008).

The public debate on the nature of *The Room* endures, with opinions ranging from appreciation for its flawed uniqueness—film professor Ross Morin called it “the Citizen Kane of bad movies” (Collis, 2008, para. 5)—to revulsion and scorn—a review on PopMatters concluded, “*The Room* may be only slightly better than a sharp stick in the eye, but the damage is equally irreparable” (Gibron, 2010, para. 8). With its sublime combination of baffling plot, awkward dialogue, daffy characters, and an earnest (though misguided) effort to be the Great American Movie, *The Room* enjoys cult status and is still screened in theaters, primarily small and/or independent theaters at midnight, year round.

What about *The Room* has kept it thriving when so many other independent films—good, bad, and everywhere in between on the subjective continuum of artistic or aesthetic value—have seen their capacity to draw live audiences expire? The lifeblood of *The Room*'s second life is audience appropriation and in-theater ritual performance. In the tradition of participation-centered audiencing of cult films such as *Rocky Horror*, seeing *The Room* in theaters is a raucous full-body experience filled with chanting, shouting, vulgarity, thinly veiled misogynistic taunts, jogging in the aisles, playing catch with a football, cosplay, and hurling plastic spoons with impunity. The ritual of audiencing *The Room* evokes the mythical communal energy of Shakespeare's groundlings or Vaudeville peanut gallery audiences of the past while interweaving humorously critical comments in the *MST3K* movie riffing tradition of audience members “who refuse a passive model of viewership, opting instead to take ownership of the programming they consume and to adapt it to their needs on the fly” (Condis, 2011, p. 76). When Schechner (1992) wrote, “American society is a riot of performances” (p. 10), he could very well have punctuated that statement by launching a fistful of plastic spoons into the air.

Yet, dismissing the appeal of *The Room's* audiencing ritual as the simple promise of in-theater mayhem, the opportunity to act out in an environment typically characterized by enforced stillness and silence, is not enough to adequately understand the unique cultural work the ritual does. We must ask, on the level of discourse and performance, *what does the ritual say?* To whom or what does the audience respond through performance of the ritual? Though the superficial answer is the film itself, I suggest instead that the discourses typically produced during *The Room's* audiencing ritual constitute an important dialogue between fans of *The Room* and its auteur, Wiseau. At stake in this dialogue between film, audience, and auteur is the ability to control the meaning of *The Room* and who decides its cultural and aesthetic value.

As I intend to demonstrate, the performances and utterances produced during participatory screenings of *The Room* reflect attitudes from the film's cult audience that are in opposition to Wiseau's public claims of authority over the meaning of *The Room*. The audiencing ritual of *The Room* significantly frames the film as a failed text in need of resurrection through derisive performance rather than a successful, intentional black comedy, which Wiseau has publicly asserted (e.g., Collis, 2008; Johnston, 2011; Shatkin, 2007). I argue that this attitudinal disagreement between Wiseau and the cult audience of *The Room* situates the two parties in dramatic conflict, with the acts produced during the ritual constituting the audience's collective symbolic struggle over the meaning of the film.

To structure my discussion of the interpretive significance of *The Room's* audiencing ritual, I examine this phenomenon through Turner's (1987) theoretical model of *social drama*, which unfolds in four stages: *breach*, *crisis*, *redressive action*, and either *reintegration* or *schism*. Through an examination of existing popular discourse on *The Room*, I will demonstrate the ways in which *The Room's* unusual path to relevancy (*breach*) and Wiseau's contrarian assertions of modernist authorship (*crisis*) represent a dramatic exigency to *The Room's* community of fans. I will then discuss several significant activities common to participation-centered screenings of the film to demonstrate the ways in which the audiencing ritual functions as a venue for oppositional performance (*redressive action*) that empowers fans of *The Room* to (temporarily) re-seize control of the meaning of the film.

Breach and Crisis: *The Room* Bombs, Fans Pick Up the Pieces

"If you've passed through Hollywood enough times, you can't have failed to notice the bizarre billboard on the West side of Highland just North of Fountain. And if you're like me, every time you pass by, you idly wonder about the man whose leonine countenance gazes benignly on weary travellers. What is that guy staring at so intently? Why have I never heard of his movie? And how the hell can he afford to keep that billboard up so freaking long?" (Shatkin, 2007, para. 1)

Turner's (1987) social drama model begins with a *breach* of "regular norm-governed social relations," (p. 4), a public infraction of a rule ordinarily held to be binding. For *The Room*, it can be said that its unorthodox emergence in the public consciousness constitutes a resonant breach of the norms of how feature films are produced and the terms on which audiences are invited to engage them. Like many independently produced films, *The Room* generated early awareness via guerilla marketing, or rather, *anti-guerrilla* in its low-tech, antiquated simplicity: a conspicuous lone billboard in West Hollywood containing little information but the film's title and website, an RSVP phone number, and the vacant stare of a man then unknown in the world of film. The billboard would remain from 2003 to 2008, well after the film's reputation had spread nationwide (Collis, 2008). Given the cost of billboards in such prime location—*Entertainment Weekly* cited an industry insider who estimated its monthly cost at around 5,000 dollars (Collis, 2008)—an unheralded independent film by a Hollywood outsider was a precocious, if not defiant, gesture. Wiseau effectively erected an idol to himself and his film near the epicenter of the U.S. film universe. In the land of countless independent filmmakers gyrating for exposure, *The Room* had forced its way into the public consciousness. We were listening, but to whom?

The Room is rarely discussed without focusing on Wiseau. Like a bizzarro Hawks, Hitchcock or Coppola, the auteur and his film are discursively inextricable. A towering man with long black hair and a thick, oft-parodied

European accent,¹ the mysterious Wiseau's persona is that of a bold Hollywood outsider: self-taught in the art of film and operating outside the Hollywood money machine. And there he was, glowering down on Hollywood traffic from above and demanding attention before anyone had seen his film.

And what a film it is. On paper, *The Room* is an archetypical love triangle melodrama: Wiseau stars as Johnny, a generous and kind-hearted banker who is devoted to his young fiancée Lisa (played by Juliette Danielle). Lisa has grown tired of living with Johnny and begins a covert romance with Johnny's best friend Mark (Greg Sestero). Johnny ultimately learns of Lisa and Mark's relationship, culminating in a heated exchange at Johnny's climactic surprise birthday party, which results in Lisa leaving Johnny for Mark and Johnny committing suicide via gunshot.

But *The Room*'s infamy is derived from that which occurs *between* the introduction and resolution of this simple plot. Roughly 70 minutes of the film's 90-minute runtime is devoted to a parade of plot cul-de-sacs, repetitive and often nonsensical exposition between underdeveloped characters, excessive establishing shots of sites not otherwise featured, and four gratuitous softcore sex scenes. Many of these already confounding scenes are plagued further by continuity issues, cheap blue screen effects, and out-of-focus camerawork.

The road to cult immortality is rarely linear. On June 27, 2003, *The Room* debuted in a handful of California theaters, drawing little attention and grossing a scant \$1,800 at the box office (Sestero & Bissell, 2013). Critiquing *The Room* as a conventional drama—the film was promoted as “A film with the passion of Tennessee Williams”—*Variety*'s review (Foundas, 2003) blasted Wiseau as a “narcissist nonpareil” and characterized his film as one of “extreme unpleasantness” and “overall ludicrousness” (para. 1) that had audience members demanding their money back within 30 minutes. For most independent films, this combination of financial failure and critical venom would be a swift and brutal *coup de grace* to the story of yet another Hollywood wannabe and a film that never had a chance. The film's epitaph might have been, as journalist and author Bissell told *The Atlantic* (Rosen, 2013): “Movie studios don't let people like Tommy Wiseau make them.... Someone should have just pulled the plug on it at some point, and no one did” (para. 4). Improbably, *The Room* survived.

Thanks in part to regular midnight screenings at Laemmle's Sunset 5 in West Hollywood and Wiseau's sustained promotion—he frequently attended screenings to answer questions and sign autographs, as he still does today on a national scale—*The Room* developed a cult following of fans who flocked to it *because* of its well-documented quirks and flaws (Shatkin, 2007). The film's reputation continued to spread virally through fan testimony, celebrity endorsement—e.g., Kristen Bell, David Cross, Patton Oswald, Paul Rudd (Collis, 2008)—and a recurring spot on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim as an April Fool's Day gag.

The billboard is gone but *The Room* endures. The film now enjoys nationwide distribution and is often hailed as a 21st century predecessor to *Rocky Horror* (e.g., Allen, 2009; Christopher, 2009; Johnston, n.d.; Patel, 2006; Refer, 2010; Vance, 2011). Wiseau is regularly in demand for media interviews, virtually all of which foreground the movie's flaws and demonstrative fanbase and present Wiseau's spoken English so as to portray him as being as incoherent as the tragic Johnny. Though Wiseau takes substantial abuse from critics, his willingness to represent his film directly, to serve as its avatar and discuss it both seriously and playfully but always treating it as a significant work, is vital to its delayed but sustained success. In sum, the fact that *The Room* remains in discussion today is a product of both Wiseau and a passionate cult audience.

The second stage of Turner's (1987) social drama model is *crisis*, during which the initial breach widens and concerned parties take sides and enter into struggle. This stage is characterized by what Turner calls *liminality*: “it is a threshold (*limen*) between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not usually a sacred limen, hedged around by taboos and thrust away from centers of public life” (p. 4). As it gained cultural visibility and ascended as a destination event for devotees of so-called “so bad, it's good” fare, *The Room* emerged as a contested text when public comments by Wiseau challenged prevailing assumptions about his artistic intentions and the intended aesthetic quality of the film, thereby perhaps unwittingly challenging the ways supporters had come to

¹ Wiseau is frequently asked to disclose his birthplace but always refuses; he is often assumed of Eastern European descent. One IFC.com article (Singer, 2009) cruelly describes Wiseau's voice as “Borat trying to do an impression of Christopher Walken playing a mental patient” (para. 2). Online film critic Allison Pregler, aka Obscurus Lupa, defined Wiseau's voice as “The French Borat, if he didn't know he was the French Borat” in a 2004 review. Wiseau's voice, hair (frequently described as “stringy”), and command of spoken English are frequent sources of ridicule and parody for fans and critics alike.

understand and engage with the film. *The Room* had secured a spot in the pantheon of cult cinema, but who deserved credit became a point of contention.

From the beginning, whether they loved it or hated it, critics and fans generally framed *The Room* as an aesthetically incompetent melodrama, a failed attempt at classic Hollywood drama. Mohan (2009) observed, "Tommy Wiseau's film oozes sincerity, which is then slathered in a thick coating of oblivious narcissism.... It's the emotional earnestness that places "The Room" squarely within Susan Sontag's famous definition of pure camp" (para. 1-2). Fox (2015) asserted, "By any normal measure, *The Room* is an abject failure. Amateurish direction, sluggish pacing, paper-thin plot, wooden acting and clunky dialogue" (para. 1) ... "It aims for Shakespearean tragic drama and lands squarely in unintentional comedy" (para. 3). Klein, a professor of film studies at East Carolina University, told to *The Atlantic* (Rosen, 2013), "Tommy Wiseau doesn't just make some mistakes; he makes every mistake.... If he had just made some mistakes it'd just be an average movie, an annoying movie" (para. 1).

Among the underlying subjective assumptions of fans' and critics' terms of engagement with *The Room*: Wiseau is an incompetent filmmaker; he and his cast are undertalented, overmatched thespians; the film's oft-noted incoherent dialogue and meandering plot are unintended results of Wiseau's poor scripting and direction. We laugh *at* the film and Wiseau, not *with* them as we would intentional, well-crafted comedies. Due to the film's inability to succeed on its own hyper-earnest terms, audiences performed scorn and derision to reframe the film in ways unintended by its producers, and thus audiences' capacity to derive pleasure from audiencing *The Room* is a product of interpretive ingenuity (as well as an ample dose of schadenfreude). Creative reframing of beloved but imperfect pop culture is a hallmark of participatory fan culture, which is "more open-ended, less under the control of media producers and more under the control of media consumers" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 137).

The significant role of creativity on the audience's part in reframing a contested text must be foregrounded. On an interpretive-critical level, the act of audiencing any mediated text is always "a form of work" and "is not a parasitical act, the reactive complement of a writing which we endow with all the glamour of creation and anteriority" (Barthes, 1974, p. 10). As cultural studies scholars such as Hall and Fiske have noted, oppositional reading, when the reader understands both the denotation and connotation of the discourse but rejects the latter, requires more work because readers must re-historicize and denaturalize the dominant discourses embedded in the text while supplying their own counter-discourses for points of identification and refutation, to "retotalize the message within some alternate framework or references" (Hall, 1980, p. 173). Members of the cult of *The Room* have entered into an extant relationship with the text, with Wiseau and his fellow actors and crew members, and with a constellation of faces, symbols, and discourses they store in their own intertextual tackle boxes. Audience members employ these fragments of meaning out of necessity to make sense of the experience of the text. Unique elements of this fluid equation cannot change without changing how we make sense of the other elements.

What happens when this vital interpretive work is marginalized? The relationship between *The Room* and its cult audience was symbolically breached when, in promotional activity, Wiseau began marketing *The Room* as "an electrifying black comedy." The film's 2005 DVD release includes a full-length trailer which, after 100 seconds of dire, humorless voiceover and footage arranged in a manner that reinforces the idea that the film was intended as a serious drama, the narration tone (possibly the narrator himself) suddenly shifts, enthusiastically urging fans to: "See the best movie of the year! Experience this quirky new black comedy! It's a riot!" (Wiseau, 2005). It was obvious the film had been retroactively framed as purposefully amusing, and the implication was that Wiseau now seemed to be commandeering credit for the film's capacity for making audiences laugh.

Wiseau made his gambit more explicit in a series of interviews in which he overtly suggested his intention all along was not only to make audiences laugh but in fact to provoke them to ritualistic performance. In an *Entertainment Weekly* article that helped the film gain national exposure (Collis, 2008), Wiseau asserted the film's comedy was intentional, a claim that was in turn refuted by an anonymous cast member:

Wiseau insists he always intended *The Room* [*sic*] to be partly comedic, and that the movie's perceived faults — including the out-of-focus scenes — are deliberate. "Let's assume we did everything perfect way," he hypothesizes. "You will be asking this question? No, no." However, another anonymous cast member has no doubt that Wiseau is merely making the best of an extremely bad job: "I don't have anything to say about Tommy as a person. He is a nice guy. But he is full of s---. He was trying to put together a drama. It was basically his stage to show off his acting ability. (p. 2)

Patel (2006) of National Public Radio observed that Wiseau “insists that the whole humor-from-melodrama theme was his intent — that he wanted to provoke the audience into interacting with the movie” (para. 6). Wiseau told QuickDFW.com (Johnston, 2011), “*The Room* is done in certain style [*sic*] intentionally. You have a lot of subliminal messages. It isn’t pretty, et cetera” (para. 10). Wiseau’s evocation of subliminal messages is telling, as his argument denies the very possibility of audience agency or creativity.

In an interview with the *LAist* (Shatkin, 2007), Wiseau blamed critics (and, perhaps even directly, the cult of *The Room*) for not understanding *his* film as they should:

This is the thing that people don’t grasp. If they don’t see something, and then they criticize.... They don’t understand *The Room* was done intentionally to provoke the audience. I spent hours, 24/7, not just this year, but even before I started production. They don’t realize that, because they did not do their homework. It’s nonsense as far as I’m concerned. (para. 29)

Wiseau’s attempts to reassert modernist authorship over *The Room*—not only the film but the phenomenon that sustains its prosperity—did not kill audiences’ love of seeing *The Room* in theaters. As Patel (2006) mused:

Is [Wiseau] deluded, or just trying to recast *The Room* as comedy and not drama? That’s not really the point. In Los Angeles, a city filled with screenwriters sitting in cafes typing away at laptops, he has stumbled upon what everyone is searching for: a genuine crowd-pleaser. (para. 7)

But in claiming *The Room*’s appeal is solely the product of his authorial talents, Wiseau commandeers sole credit for its cult status.

As an audience member who invested time, money, and love in the film and the ritual, if I defer to Wiseau’s authorship, I resign myself to a passive role that has been pre-scripted for me right down to when I laugh and when I reach in my pocket for a plastic spoon to throw. The audience’ role in the ritual is recast as no longer *kinetic*, performance as dynamic creative action, but *mimetic*, performance as imitation of creative action (Conquergood, 1998). In-theater *action*, human symbolic exchange with purpose and motive, is reduced to *motion*, a simple reaction without motive or creativity (Burke, 1945). The creative, critical appropriation that I believed helped breathe life into *The Room* is nullified, commodified, and cashed in on by a shrewd entrepreneur with svengali-esque talents for manipulating others’ bodies. Though audienceing scripts for seeing *The Room* do exist (e.g. House of Qwesi, 2009; Johnston, n.d.; Singer, 2009; “The Room: Audience Participation Guide,” 2015), it is significant that its beats are gathered through observations of the ritual as it has been devised by fans, not generated top-down by a single cultural producer.

Such distinctions may seem petty or even pedantic—if people embrace and enjoy a cultural text, what does it matter if its salient features are intentional or not?—but the ways we make sense of our relationship to a text matter in terms of how we engage that text and the discourses surrounding it. That relationship is untenable if solely rendered by any party to it. Rather, such relationships and attitudes exist in a *liminal* state, ever-changing as the product of continued interaction and negotiation, “between more or less stable phases of the social process ... ‘between and between,’ and, as such, furnishes a distanced replication and critique of the events leading up to and composing the ‘crisis’” (Turner, 1987, p. 4).

Wiseau’s dismissal of his audience’s role in contributing to the meaning of *The Room*’s cultural significance constitutes a substantial faux pas in the producer-audience relationship, a relationship that cannot be overstated in the realm of cult audiences and their texts. Wiseau’s relationship to his audience was thrown into crisis, his attitude toward us problematic. Producers who subjugate their audience into submissiveness will find themselves in conflict with that audience; George Lucas and his lawyers’ contentious relationship with the creative cult of *Star Wars* is well noted in this regard, as explored in the documentary *The People Vs. George Lucas* (Philippe, 2010). Fiske (1989) reminds us that pop culture cannot be forced upon an audience from above. Wiseau’s public grab for sole custody of *The Room* is another example of such an impasse between text producers and text readers.

The cult needed to collectively adopt an attitude, an “organized system of meanings” with which to gauge the historical situation and adopt a role with relation to it” (Burke, 1937, pp. 3-4), toward Wiseau’s denial of its complicity in the unorthodox success of *The Room* as a cult phenomenon. We may conclude that Wiseau did the

same in the face of negative reactions to *The Room*. Even though *The Room* is not what Barthes (1974) would deem a *readerly* text: a classic, sovereign text that “can be read, but not written” (p. 4), Wiseau benefits from wider access to the commercial news media than the individual members of the cult of *The Room*. Even a widely ridiculed author such as Wiseau is afforded the cultural capital to speak publicly on record via mass-mediated interviews and to set the terms of the conversation.

These unbalanced terms of engagement required that the cult of *The Room* utilize alternate methods with which to render its response, one which can be understood as *redressive action* (Turner 1987, p. 4) to Wiseau’s offensive pursuit of regaining modernist authorship. The third stage of Turner’s model, redressive action consists of action “ranging from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and, to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to *the performance of public ritual*” [emphasis added] (p. 4). Like crisis, redress unfolds in a liminal space, be-twixt and between stable outcomes.

To Turner, the redressive phase is a prime “generative source of cultural performances” (28). Fortunately for the cult of *The Room*, utilizing pop culture in the form of popular ritual performance is powerful and conducive for such a response, for the communal nature and visible repetition of the ritual’s performance rendered an otherwise ephemeral response material by way of cultural visibility and commercial media attention. Though Wiseau’s power as an author lingers, the cult gains power. In the words of Fiske (1989), “Using *their* products for *our* purposes is the art of being in between production and consumption, speaking is the art of being in between *their* language system and *our* material experience” (p. 36).

It is in this liminal space, with the meaning of *The Room* in flux and Wiseau’s campaign for re-claiming the meaning of his film challenging fans’ roles in keeping it alive, that the cult of *The Room* utilizes embodied audiencing as a communal method of oppositional performance. In doing so, even if many members of the cult likely do not consciously recognize the text-based implications of the ritual, I suggest that *The Room*’s in-theater performance ritual produces discourses which ought to be understood as framing the text as one of incompetence through the weaving of bodily mayhem and rhetorical snark that reframes *The Room* as a failed melodrama. Read through an interpretive lens, the ritual effectively asserts that the pleasure of audiencing *The Room* is rooted in Wiseau’s shortcomings as a text producer, not his talents.

Redressive Action: The Cult of *The Room* Responds to Wiseau

The audiencing ritual of *The Room* is composed of a flurry of chants and gestures that cumulatively work to mark awkward dialogue, reduce characters to their most banal, and emphasize problematic aspects of the plot in ways that portray Wiseau not as a savvy auteur interpreting a cruel universe but as a buffoon who undercuts his artistic intentions through incompetence. The following descriptions illustrate ways in which acts and discourses of the ritual can be understood as rhetorically framing *The Room* as an incompetent melodrama, discrediting Wiseau’s assertions that the film is meant to be an intentional black comedy.

Denzin (2003) champions “an ethnographer, performer and social researcher who is part of, and a spokesperson for, a local moral community, a community with its own symbolism, mythology, and storytelling traditions” (p. 257). In this tradition, I claim insider status within the fan community of *The Room*, having attended five participatory midnight screenings for pleasure as well as for gathering data from 2011-2014. The descriptions of specific elements of the audiencing ritual that follow are my own observations from these screenings. The purpose of their inclusion is not to pass value judgments on the attitudes and ideologies they communicate¹ but rather to demonstrate the ways they contribute to an assertive reduction of the value of the text itself in the overall cultural significance of *The Room*.

We begin with the ritual’s most iconic act: throwing plastic spoons at the screen or in the air (or other audience members or with no clear signification), which occurs at least a dozen times during the ritual. The primary textual significance of the plastic spoon stems from framed pictures of spoons in Johnny and Lisa’s living room; they appear in the background in no less than nine shots but are never elaborated upon and are never the focus of

¹ For an article-length description and interpretation of the myriad of specific acts that take place during *The Room*’s audiencing ritual, see Foy (2012).

character dialogue. When the photo is visible in the background, performers cry out “spoon!” and throw handfuls of plastic spoons in the air or at the screen. Could this have been Wiseau’s intentional masterstroke to ignite a participatory element for his audience, with unsuspecting audience members unwittingly falling in line?

To initially grant Wiseau the benefit of the doubt, there is precedence of cult audiences co-opting seemingly insignificant objects from the film and rendering them iconic through ritual performance. For example, one of the most iconic props in the *Rocky Horror* audiencing ritual is the newspaper, which audience members have used for decades to mimic the character Janet as she covers her head with a newspaper in a rainstorm (Austin, 1981); like Wiseau’s framed spoon pictures, the newspaper in the film is never made significant through dialogue or action. This is to charitably allow it at least within the realm of possibility that Wiseau could have sought to subliminally encourage audiences to engage with his film on such a micro level.¹

Even allowing the extremely unlikely possibility that Wiseau could foresee that audiences would mimic small pictures in the background across multiple scenes, audience members have creatively divorced the spoons from any one signification and employ them as all-purpose bodily extensions, frequently in ways that distract attention from the film’s plot. Often, freestyle spoonplay serves to draw the audience’s attention from on-screen points of dramatic tension or to signify rejection of the story’s principle characters (namely protagonist Johnny). For example, spoons are often thrown at the screen during the sex scenes featuring Wiseau in ways that signify disgust, often accompanied by cries of “no!”, anguished cries, or ridiculing of Wiseau’s naked body. One performance script calls for “graphically describing the act and hurling the crudest jokes about the actors’ bodies/movements that one can conceive” (House of Qwesi, 2009, para. 23). In doing so, audiences reject the implied scopophilic pleasure of watching sex while rejecting the call to identify with Johnny as an object of desire or beacon of generous romance.

When audience members call out “You’re doing it wrong, Tommy” as he acts during a sex scene—during his first sex scene with co-star Danielle, Wiseau has been noted as being ill-positioned for missionary sex and “appears to hump Danielle’s navel” (Van Luling, 2016, para. 3)—they are simultaneously rejecting Johnny as a character and Tommy as an actor, writer, and director. This gesture is noteworthy for its creativity within the context of the ritual because the text provides no ready ammunition with which to reject identification with Johnny, as his every word and gesture is framed to signify his kindness and generosity. When a spoon photo is onscreen, the audience’s enthusiasm for marking it frequently supersedes Johnny’s most earnest, emotional dialogue. By crying “spoon!” and hurling plastic cutlery as Johnny tearfully pleads with Lisa to be honest and faithful to him, the audience engages in subversive retextualization by embracing something ostensibly trivial and ushering it to the fore of meaning in a way that resists Wiseau’s depiction of Johnny’s innocence, earnestness, and moral purity. Hitchcock was wise to get his on-screen cameo out of the way “in the first five minutes so as to let the people look at the rest of the movie with no further distraction” (Truffaut, 1967, p. 35). The audience’s embrace of the spoon as symbol of the film’s incompetence implies that in his most urgent scenes Wiseau cannot outshine stock pictures of cutlery. The audience goes out of its way to distract itself from the film’s plot and characters.

Another informative, though more incendiary, motif from the ritual involves the repeated misogynistic taunting of the film’s women characters. Performers’ most vitriolic hatred is directed at Lisa and, to a lesser extent at her mother, Claudette (Carolyn Minnott), and Lisa’s friend Michelle (Robyn Paris). Performers repeatedly call out the scripted response “because you’re a woman” in response to unflattering dialogue between *The Room*’s women: for example, when Claudette urges Lisa to stay with Johnny because she cannot support herself (despite having an undefined job in “the computer business”), performers explicitly fill in the missing premise of Claudette’s sexist enthymeme with “because you’re a woman.” One infamous scene features Claudette disclosing to Lisa that she “definitely has breast cancer,” a revelation that is never revisited and never factors into the plot. Audience members, however, repeatedly taunt Claudette for her affliction. Through taunting, Claudette is reduced to nothing

¹ Sestero discredits this scant possibility in his award-winning 2013 book on the film’s production *The Disaster Artist* (Sestero & Bissell, 2013), writing that the spoons were stock photos in hastily purchased frames that Wiseau refused to replace so as not to interrupt filming: “I don’t think the most gifted prognosticator could have predicted the fateful impact of this impatience-born split-second decision” (p. 137).

but a husk of sexism and cancer. Cruel as this may be, the audience is also foregrounding that which Wiseau seems to have forgotten or refused to develop through narrative.

The anti-women vitriol implicitly present in the plot and dialogue is explicitly escalated through audience improvisation. At a screening I attended in Illinois, I witnessed several members of the primarily college-age, masculine, and white audience mercilessly slut-shame Lisa, who is castigated as a “whore” for “opening her beef curtains” for her desire for (and intercourse with) Mark; similar themes were present in every screening I attended. Performers stray from the film’s supplied iconography to ridicule Lisa for her weight, though weight is never broached in the film and actress Juliette Danielle appears to be of commonly accepted size and the notion that Lisa has a weight problem, within even the absurd fictional universe of *The Room*, would be far-fetched. The *carnavalesque* in-theater environment, in which hierarchy and normalcy are suspended and relations are festive and ambivalent (Bakhtin, 1968), empowers audience members to openly communicate misogynistic speech in ways that are largely forbidden in everyday social settings. Though social restraints on speech are loosened during the ritual, the frame of the ritual cannot mitigate the products of speech acts produced, for as Scott (1990) observes in a critique of Bakhtin, “So long as speech occurs in any social situation it is saturated with power relations” (p. 176). Such internal and external power dynamics are salient factors to consider when interpreting audiencing rituals.

Such hatred for *The Room*’s women characters veers the ritual into dangerous ground, and out of context, such comments call into question whether the destructive rhetoric it produces deserves to be celebrated. But it is important to consider the discourses of the ritual in context of the text and the audiencing exigency, and if the audience’s collective evocation of Claudette’s breast cancer is frivolous and hateful, it also highlights Wiseau’s flippancy and inability to develop nuanced characters through dialogue and narrative. What filmmaker, the ritual seems to demand, would be so oblivious and cruel to inflict a principal character with terminal breast cancer for 30 seconds of “black comedy”? Performers punish Wiseau for introducing an offensively underutilized plot device by magnifying it to the point it dwarfs any of the several scenes in which Claudette appears, swallowing any dialogue and potential plot or character development along the way. To suggest Wiseau intended one throwaway line to smother multiple dialogue-packed scenes stretches the boundaries of credulity. The implication: because Wiseau failed to recognize the magnitude of such an apocalyptic development in the life of one of his featured characters, the audience will do it for him, only without the grace or compassion the presence of deadly cancer ought to deserve.

As Johnston (n.d.) summarized, “The way the female characters speak and behave in the film suggests that Wiseau’s understanding of the gender is, shall we say, less than progressive” (para. 7). Even a generous critique of *The Room* as a text reveals that its tone is palpably misogynistic, and these problematic elements of the ritual rhetorically magnifies Wiseau’s apparently flawed ideology in a way that recalls Burke’s (1937) discussion of *perspective by incongruity*: “it cherishes the lore of so-called ‘error’ as a *genuine aspect of the truth*, with emphases valuable for the correcting of present emphases” (p. 172). Demo (2000) suggests perspective by incongruity can be used as a tactic by which comedy can be employed for political action, noting the “highly charged nature of the symbolic alchemy produced when differing rhetorical/ideological orientations mix” (p. 139). Perspective by incongruity is contingent on the subjective positionality of the reader: what constitutes humorous political critique to one may be destructive and vulgar to another. To some observers, the hyperbolic ridicule of Lisa’s sexual activity could function as “a constant juxtaposition of incongruous words, attaching to some name a qualifying epithet which had heretofore gone with a different order of names” (Burke, 1935, p. 90). Though responding to misogyny with hyper-misogyny does not contradict the film, it can be read as an oppositional response to the film’s insistence that Lisa’s physical beauty mobilizes her potential for evil. The film crudely and repeatedly emphasizes that Lisa is “beautiful” by having multiple characters explicitly stress that fact, including but not limited to an anonymous character who spends his only line of dialogue to tell the audience that “Lisa looks hot tonight.” Through the lens of perspective by incongruity, one can read the audience’s rhetoric not as earnest hatred but rather as rejection of Wiseau’s sledgehammer-subtle demand that audiences frame Lisa as beautiful, which in the film’s worldview justifies Johnny’s devotion to her even as she abuses his love. Though the audience’s performed hatred of Lisa, Claudette, and the film’s women characters is offensive in isolation, it also inflates Wiseau’s own screenwritten misogyny to the point where it reduces all characters involved, even those who are ostensibly our protagonists, to wreckage.

Much of the ritual’s remaining activity works to mark and emphasize the film’s inanities and idiosyncrasies: for example, greeting Johnny and Lisa’s ever-meandering neighbor Denny (Philip Haldiman) when he enters a

scene (“hi, Denny!”) and bidding him farewell when he leaves (“bye, Denny!”), which is curiously frequent and often without service to the plot. Such instances are better understood as “participatory homage rather than critique” (Dean, 2011, p. 122). So are in-theater games of football soft-toss, which begin when Johnny, Mark, and friends take a break from the plot to toss a football back and forth while standing a few feet away from one another. So are tallying aloud the times someone refers to Mark and Johnny being best friends (six, seven, or eight, depending on strictness of interpretation). Though not as pointed as overtly cursing the film’s characters for their gender, sexuality, or disability via life-threatening illness, such acts challenge the film in their own ways. They draw attention to the mundane rather than presumably intended plot points or invitations for identification. They point to the script’s inanity and unabashed repetition in ways that suggest Wiseau almost certainly did not intend us to laugh with him—unless Wiseau improbably intended to make himself (not Johnny but Tommy) an object of ridicule by suggesting he does not understand how playing catch works or that characters usually enter scenes for a purpose. This is more circumstantial evidence that undermines the notion that Wiseau was striving for intentional black comedy. The ritualistic acts discussed above strike back at the notion that Wiseau intended audiences to understand *The Room* as an intentional comedy. These acts of creative audiencing, from the light-hearted to the vitriolic, cumulatively enforce the idea that Wiseau’s comedic chops are as real as Russell’s teapot: technically unfalsifiable but little more than a thought exercise.

Conclusion: Unity Through Schism

In the wake of redressive action, Turner (1987) notes two possible outcomes: *reintegration*, “a reestablishment of viable relations between the contending parties”; or a public recognition of irreparable schism” (p. 26). In her analysis of *Weight Watchers* and its ritual performances, Lockford (1996) troubles the notion that social drama necessarily ends with one of the two by arguing that the drama of *Weight Watchers* membership ends with “either the recognition of a *schism* or the perennial reversion to *breach* and *crisis*. Reintegration is largely an illusion” (p. 310). Not unlike Lockford’s reading of *Weight Watchers*, the struggle for the meaning of *The Room* is unlikely to reach reintegration. Wiseau has not publicly admitted he failed at making an artistically successful film (which would effectively concede victory to the cult of *The Room*), and fans and critics of *The Room*’s continue to guffaw at Wiseau’s version of the truth. As Bailey (2014) explained, “The fact that he’s somehow convinced himself of his retroactive goal speaks even more to the deep delusion at this film’s center” (para. 10).

But unlike the anguish and anxiety the false promise of reintegration creates for *Weight Watchers* patrons, indefinite schism exists in productive paradox for both Wiseau and *The Room* fans because their playful antagonism is at the core of what keeps one party invested in the other. Permanent resolution of the dramatic conflict would be unbeneficial to both parties, as the struggle for *The Room*’s meaning can play out night after night in theaters across the country and remain contextually productive for all parties involved.

In this case, reintegration would likely reduce the appeal the audiencing ritual, as evidence suggests the cult of *The Room* is attracted to Wiseau specifically because of the passionate earnestness he publicly denies. MacDowell (2010) argued:

We certainly need to assume that Wiseau was not intending to make a self-parodic comedy in order to laugh at *The Room* [*sic*] in the way that we do, but appreciating the film for reasons other than those intended does not necessarily mean that we should automatically call Wiseau a ‘bad’ artist. (para. 15)

Meanwhile, though Wiseau’s career as a director has veered off-course after a series of projects (a documentary, a short film, a web series, a sitcom) that failed to capture the cultural zeitgeist as *The Room* has, he remains a popular public figure regardless, parlaying his celebrity into a line of underwear bearing his name and *The Room* clothing and memorabilia such as a talking Johnny bobblehead (all available at theroommovie.com). The fascinating story of *The Room* is scheduled to take its next form in 2017 in the form of the Hollywood biographical film *The Masterpiece*, directed by James Franco, starring Franco as Wiseau, and featuring an ensemble cast including Seth Rogen, Zac Efron, Alison Brie, Sharon Stone, Bryan Cranston, and Judd Apatow—and, reportedly, a cameo from Wiseau himself (Raup, 2016). Though a career as “a beloved midnight-movie staple, a carnival barker who plays up his ‘mysterious weirdo’ persona for monetary gain and fan service” (McCown, 2015, para. 1) is not likely the

career Wiseau or anyone could envision in 2003 when *The Room* debuted, it is a role that Wiseau continues to play with gusto and for profit.

The Room's ritual phenomenon and other audiencing practices are salient reminders that audiences are willing and eager to passionately and creatively struggle over what a cultural text means. In spaces of embodied audiencing, the cultural significance of a text is neither fixed at first construction nor dictated top-down; the locus of meaning is with neither the text nor the reader but is situated between the two in potential conflict. Though *The Room* audiencing ritual is a celebration, it is also a rhetorical reassertion of precisely what the cult of *The Room* thinks of the film and Wiseau, what it *needs* it to be and to do for its members. While audiences are co-performing with *The Room*, it would not be accurate to say the cult is working democratically or even rationally with Wiseau. Just as Wiseau would reserve discursive power for himself by claiming modernist authorship over both *The Room* and its performance ritual, the cult's performance is a tactical strike against Wiseau's authorship. Cult members riff on the film's quirks and flaws, putting their bodies in motion in ways that warp or even reject that which the film offers on its own terms. In doing so, audience members grab hold of the film through performance and reframe it in a form that is tenable within the limits of the resources its members collectively possess, Wiseau's post hoc containment be damned.

References

- Allen N. (2009, November 1). *The Room: The Citizen Kane of bad films*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/6479392/The-Room-the-Citizen-Kane-of-bad-films.html>
- Austin, B. A. (1981). Portrait of a cult film audience: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. *Journal of Communication*, 31(2): 43-54.
- Bailey, J. (2014, September 16). So bad it's good: The transcendent peculiarity of 'The Room.' Retrieved from <http://flavorwire.com/477390/so-bad-its-good-the-transcendant-peculiarity-of-the-room>
- Bakhtin, M. (1968). *Rabelais and his world*. (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.
- Barthes, R. (1974). *S/Z*. (R. Miller, Trans.). New York, NY: Hill and Wang.
- Burke, K. (1935). *Permanence and change: An anatomy of purpose*. New York, NY: New Republic.
- Burke, K. (1937). *Attitudes toward history*. New York, NY: New Republic.
- Burke, K. (1945). *A grammar of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Christopher, R. (2009, June 22). Move over *Rocky Horror*, here comes *The Room*. Retrieved from http://chicagoist.com/2009/06/22/move_over_rocky_horror_here_comes_t.php
- Collis, C. (2008, December 12). The crazy cult of "*The Room*." Retrieved from <http://www.ew.com/article/2008/12/12/crazy-cult-room>
- Condis, M. (2011). Converging fan cultures and the labors of fandom. In R. G. Weiner & S. E. Barba (Eds.), *In the peanut gallery with Mystery Science Theater 3000: Essays on film, fandom, technology, and the culture of riffing* (pp. 76-87). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Conquergood, D. (1998). Beyond the text: Toward a performative cultural politics. In S.J. Dailey (Ed.), *The future of performance: Visions and revisions* (pp. 25-36.) New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Dean, M. (2011). Frame work, resistance, and co-optation: How *Mystery Science Theater 3000* positions us both in and against hegemonic culture. In R. G. Weiner & S. E. Barba (Eds.), *In the peanut gallery with Mystery Science Theater 3000: Essays on film, fandom, technology, and the culture of riffing* (pp. 120-126). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Demo, A.T. (2000). The Guerrilla Girls' comic politics of subversion. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 23(2), 133-156.
- Denzin, N. K. (2003). Reading and writing performance. *Qualitative Research* 3(2), 243-268.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Understanding popular culture*. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.
- Foundas, S. (2003, July 17). *The Room*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2003/film/reviews/the-room-1117921325/>
- Fox, D. (2015, October 8). *The Room: A look at what makes this the best bad movie of all time!* Retrieved from <http://moviepilot.com/posts/3577726>
- Foy, M. M. (2012). The performance cult of *The Room*: Embodied audiencing and movie riffing as shared sense-making. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*, 11, 1-16.
- Gibron, B. (2010, June 8). "I Don't Want to Talk About It": *The Room* (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.popmatters.com/post/126664-i-dont-want-to-talk-about-it-the-room-2003/>
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128-138). London: Hutchinson.
- House of Qwesi. (2009, March 11). A viewers guide to *The Room*. Retrieved from <http://www.avclub.com/article/a-viewers-guide-to-the-room-25721>
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Johnston, G. (n.d.). An audience primer for "*The Room*." *QuickDFW.com*. [URL no longer active.]
- Johnston, G. (2011, March 11). "*The Room*" with a view. *QuickDFW.com*. [URL no longer active.]
- Lockford, L. (1996). Social drama in the spectacle of femininity: The performance of weight loss in the Weight Watchers' program. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 19: 291-312.

- MacDowell, J. (2010, August 17). On the greatness of Tommy Wiseau's *The Room*. Retrieved from <http://thelesserfeat.blogspot.com/2010/08/on-greatness-of-tommy-wiseaus-room.html>
- McCown, A. (2015, March 16). Tommy Wiseau's *Neighbors* immediately overstay their welcome. Retrieved from <http://www.avclub.com/review/tommy-wiseaus-neighbors-immediately-overstay-their-216581>
- Mohan, M. (2003, December 18). Beyond the multiplex, Aug. 28 – Sept. 3. Retrieved from http://www.oregonlive.com/movies/2009/08/beyond_the_multiplex_aug_28_se.html
- Park-Fuller, L. M. (2003). Audiencing the audience: Playback theatre, performative writing, and social activism. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 23, 288-310.
- Patel, N. (2006, May 5). "*The Room*": A cult hit so bad, it's good. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5384997>
- Philippe, A. O. (Director). (2010). *The people vs. George Lucas* [Motion picture]. United States: Lions Gate.
- Pregler, A. (2004, July 15). Obscurus Lupa presents: *The Room*. YouTube video, reposted by "Le Baron Spireal" [original link unavailable]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhHgfzbnC4I>
- Raup, J. (2016, April 18). First look at James Franco's 'The Masterpiece,' about the making of Tommy Wiseau's 'The Room.' Retrieved from <https://thefilmstage.com/news/first-look-at-james-francos-the-masterpiece-about-the-making-of-tommy-wiseaus-the-room/>
- Refer, R. N. (2010, January 19). Tommy Wiseau's *The Room*: The art of making a bad movie. Retrieved from <http://www.cltampa.com/arts-entertainment/film-tv/article/20732183/tommy-wiseaus-the-room-the-art-of-making-a-bad-movie>
- The Room*: Audience participation guide. (2015, August 21). Retrieved from <http://www.the-losthighway.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/The-Room-Audience-Participation.pdf>
- Rosen, A. (2013, October 8). Should gloriously terrible movies like *The Room* be considered 'outsider art'? Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/10/should-gloriously-terrible-movies-like-em-the-room-em-be-considered-outsider-art/280393/>
- Ryan, M., & Kellner, D. (1998). *Camera politica*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Schechner, R. (1992). A new paradigm for theatre in the academy. *The Drama Review*, 36, 7-10.
- Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sestero, G., & Bissell, T. (2013). *The disaster artist: My life inside The Room, the greatest bad movie ever made*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Shatkin, E. (2007, April 27). LAist interviews Tommy Wiseau, the face behind *The Room*. Retrieved from http://laist.com/2007/04/27/laist_interviews_tommy_wiseau_the_face_behind_the_billboard.php
- Singer, M. (2009, March 24). Everyone betray me!: A primer on "The Room." Retrieved from <http://www.ifc.com/fix/2009/03/a-primer-on-the-room>
- Truffaut, F. (1967). *Hitchcock*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Turner, V. (1987). The anthropology of performance. In V. Turner (Ed.), *The anthropology of performance* (pp. 1-36). New York, NY: PAJ.
- Vance, K. (2011, October 12). *The Room*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/the-room/Content?oid=3012941>
- Van Luling, T. (2016, January 29). The irresistible mystery of Tommy Wiseau. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/tommy-wiseau-origin_us_56a11990e4b0d8cc1098fdb8
- Wiseau, T. (Director). (2003). *The Room* [motion picture]. United States: Wiseau Films.
- Wiseau, T. (Director). (2005). *The Room* [trailer]. United States: Wiseau Films.