



EXPLAINERS

What Is Camp? The Met Gala 2019 Theme, Explained

This year's Costume Institute exhibition has us wondering about things we treasure.

Introduction by **Bonnie Wertheim** Text by **The Styles Desk**

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In 1964, Susan Sontag defined camp as an aesthetic “sensibility” that is plain to see but hard for most of us to explain: an intentional over-the-top-ness, a slightly (or extremely) “off” quality, bad taste as a vehicle for good art.

“Notes on ‘Camp,’” her 58-point ur-listicle, builds on that inherent sense of something being “too much,” and also fences it in. Camp is artificial, passionate, serious, Sontag writes. Camp is Art Nouveau objects, Greta Garbo, Warner Brothers musicals and Mae West. It is not premeditated — except when it is *extremely* premeditated.

Her list of camp dos and don'ts has grown since it was first published. Some, including the filmmaker Bruce LaBruce, have updated and expanded it to include references as categorically specific as “Twilight” (bad straight camp) and Sarah Palin (conservative camp). Still, Sontag's treatise remains the top-cited attempt to define a slippery concept.

The essay is also the founding document of this year's Met Costume Institute exhibit and its attendant gala. On Monday, when Anna Wintour's campers ascend the Met's steps for a first look at “Camp: Notes on Fashion,” few of us will be among them. But that doesn't mean we can't camp on our own terms. What, among a random sampling of our exciting and tacky enthusiasms and passions, is — and what is not — camp?

Dog shows

Is it camp? Yes.



Woof. Jonno Rattman for The New York Times

Dog shows began alongside county fair-type events: cow and poultry shows and the like. Today, they show no trace of the messier side of animal behavior. Perfect doggy specimens are pampered and fawned over like models, but tragically the dogs themselves never know exactly what's going on, or realize how hot they are. Personalities and desires are projected wildly onto the furry celebrities by owners, announcers and spectators with pure and unbridled enthusiasm.

For every Westminster Dog Show brought to you by Purina Puppy Chow, there are thousands (more than 22,000, actually, according to the American Kennel Club) of smaller events happening across the country where you can find handlers trotting around bright green synthetic show rings wearing every shade of pastel suit jacket and A-line skirt you can imagine. It's a world of caricatures, of fans who identify with a breed as strongly as a religion. The dog show ring is also the only place where one can win the coveted title of Select Bitch. *EDEN WEINGART*

Cher

Is it camp? Yes.



Peak Cher. Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Cher was the picture of camp long before she discovered plastic surgery. Rhinestones, bugle beads and feathered headdresses — furnished by her partner in kitsch, Bob Mackie — helped build her outside persona in the '70s. Over time, Cher developed a reputation for humor and almost self-consciously terrible taste.

For every movie in which Cher wowed critics, there were half a dozen songs establishing her as the sultan of schlock. The one she's most proud of is "Believe," a trifle of pop music that sounds like Everything but the Girl's "Missing" as reimagined by Nancy Meyers. But even Cher can't take Cher seriously. "I've made millions of albums,

and most of them are absolutely no good,” she told The New York Times in 2018. Of course, that’s what made them good. It wasn’t an accident that she became the first bona fide A-list diva to razzle-dazzle audiences for years at a time with residencies in Las Vegas. Or that a show of her life ultimately made its way to Broadway. Sontag asks, “When does travesty, impersonation, theatricality acquire the special flavor of camp?” The answer is: whenever Cher appears. *JACOB BERNSTEIN*

Donatella Versace

Is it camp? Yes.



Donatella herself. Andreas Solaro/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

She is hair (blonde), she is tan (tan), she is jewelry (gold), she is gloss, she is heels, heels, heels. She is Versace, both literally and proverbially, and yet she is so much Versace, so impossibly anything *but* Versace, that she is never called Versace. She is Donatella or, to her staff, DV. The Versace, like a radiant halo, announces itself.

If Donald Trump is a poor person’s idea of a rich person, Donatella is a fashion victim’s idea of a fashion idol: everything skintight, everything *bellissima*, the jets, the parties, the famous friends, the Milan mansion, the gesticulating cigarette (she quit, but a cigarette, like a phantom limb, will always trail DV). This idea, which in lesser hands could be gaudy or merely glitzy, is sewn into each of her garments; once, at a private showroom appointment in Milan, a designer at Versace described to me in utter seriousness the “important shoulder” that distinguished a jacket.

Improbably, all of it works. Fashion critics, even the harrumphing ones, love her, love it. The people love her. Versace is one of the few places where they agree. She has the operatic grandeur of public tragedy (she took over Versace after the murder of her brother, Gianni) and personal struggles (the drugs, the rehab). And so she has been taken up, by drag queens and YouTubers, Penélope Cruz (who didn’t do her justice) and Maya Rudolph (who did). A benevolent queen, DV proved herself in on the joke and joined faux-Donatella onstage, shoulder to important shoulder. *Bellissima*. *MATTHEW SCHNEIER*

Kathie Lee Gifford

Is it camp? Daytime television camp.



Hoda Kotb and Kathie Lee Gifford on the set of “Today,” which they co-hosted.
Nathan Congleton/NBC, via Associated Press

Morning show anchors are inherently campy, having dedicated their lives to sprucing up *news* — information that is by nature alarming or, on a good day, banal. Among such campers, Kathie Lee Gifford is a counselor. Her sentences are delivered as smoothly as if they were lines she memorized years ago for her starring role in a play about herself, a role she is perpetually reprising for one night only as a treat for fans. Take her final (ever) seconds on “Today.” “Am I supposed to say something?” she wondered. “Might as well!” said Hoda Kotb. In an instant, Ms. Gifford, champagne in hand, was delivering a voluminous bible quotation directly into the camera (Jeremiah 29) while, beneath her, a cartoon Kathie Lee toasted a credit reading “PROMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FURNISHED BY CARNIVAL CRUISE LINE.” She closed the program by singing a composition written by herself. Cheers. CAITY WEAVER

Villanelle

Is it camp? Hot assassins are always campy.



She loves to kill. BBC America

From the instant Villanelle, the lightly self-mocking assassin of “Killing Eve” played by Jodie Comer, dispatches a Mafia don by plunging a hairpin into his eye, her predilection for theatrical extremes is plain. In fact, you can’t really miss it. After all, for Villanelle, murder is nothing more or less than a high-style form of playacting.

Watch with a mixture of horror and mirth as this wily assassin, dressed in a pervy variation on a milkmaid costume, eviscerates her victim in the window of a brothel. Could you be faulted for taking her performance as a brazen joke? Even Villanelle doesn’t seem to be taking it too seriously — her approach to the kill is so comically efficient, so artfully contrived, that it rises to the level of self-parody.

That archness extends to her wardrobe. Villanelle dresses for excess, effusively wicked in pink tulle or satin, a high-collar Edwardian shirt, or a regal negligee worn by day with gilded chandelier earrings. She represents the essence of extravagance, the hallmark of an aesthetic that Sontag likened to “a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers.” *RUTH LA FERLA*

John Waters

Is it camp? He is the king of camp.



Cat McCarthy, center, dressed as Divine, the muse of the director John Waters, at right.
Andrew White for The New York Times

No one channeled the joy of bad taste as efficiently as the director John Waters. His muse was Divine, a 6-foot-2 drag queen who, in the director's self-described "trash trilogy" — "Pink Flamingos," "Mondo Trasho" and "Female Trouble" — treated sexual assault, foot fetishism, coprophilia, incest, baby kidnappings and murder as big jokes. While Divine's bouffants reached to the heavens, her outfits barely covered her crotch. She did not so much act as perform onscreen karaoke. Her gestures and facial expressions were almost as big as her appetite. Only rarely did Divine play characters who could easily be described as likable. But empathy was not Mr. Waters's top objective. "If someone vomits watching one of my films, it's like getting a standing ovation," he wrote in the opening of his autobiography. *JACOB BERNSTEIN*

[Read about the king of camp's sleep-away camp for adults.]

Russ Meyer

Is it camp? Thoroughly, albeit a straight-male subset.

Before there was John Waters, there was Russ Meyer. The grindhouse king of the 1960s made low-budget sexploitation films with titles like "Vixen!" and "Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!" that contained a Pride Parade float's worth of campy costumes, not to mention campy dialogue by campy female characters whose over-the-top vampiness was so broad that they might as well have been played by Divine. Never mind that Mr. Meyer's soft-core sex films were targeted to straight men looking for any opportunity to gaze at large, bare breasts in the days before pornography became widely accessible. Eventually, the dirty-raincoat crowd abandoned this auteur, known as King Leer, for more explicit, and boringly literal, films starring Linda Lovelace and Marilyn Chambers. Mr. Meyer's legacy was left to those who could most appreciate him. John Waters said that "Pussycat!" was "possibly better than any film that will be made in the future." If he was kidding, that makes it even more camp. *ALEX WILLIAMS*

Internet Astrology

Is it camp? It is artifice, but not camp.



Susan Miller, astrology's reigning queen. Sasha Arutyunova for The New York Times

If calamity defines this moment, internet astrology is a potent antidote. It's a pseudoscience exaggerated with a wink through memes, an everything-in-quotation-marks lens for culture. Photos of Rihanna with a wine glass, Lady Gaga posing with her Golden Globe in a periwinkle Valentino gown, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nancy Pelosi with the cast of "Queer Eye" become a way of understanding — with questionable specificity — the habits of the signs. Do Leos "despise taking orders"? Are Geminis people who "aren't easily offended by jokes"? Are Sagittariuses merely defined by the concept of "athleisure"? It doesn't matter. In a world fated with no future (see: threats of authoritarianism, climate change and the impending artificial intelligence takeover), astrology's assured predictions ease collective anxiety while allowing us to indulge in a shared identity, however absurd. *LOVIA GYARKYE*

[Also: Astrology may be fake, but the math behind it is hard.]

Mae West

Is it camp? Per Sontag and us.



The New York Times

In 1933, Mae West cemented her status as Hollywood's original queen of camp in the vaudeville-esque film "She Done Him Wrong." The story takes place in a boozy saloon, where West's character Lady Lou rules the roost, chewing up and spitting out every scoundrel who's "warm for" her. Back then, female sexuality onscreen was largely synonymous with vulnerability. West changed that. She makes her cinematic entrance in a carriage, wearing a giant feathered hat and holding a parasol. Hands on hips, eyebrows raised, the term "woman" doesn't begin to describe her; she's a broad. Her dresses have almost as much sparkle as her jewelry. Her greatest distaste is seriousness. Not even a visit to a boyfriend in the clink rattles her. When one of her many suitors tells her that her life is in danger, Lou says, "You're going to protect me? From what?" Then she adds: "When I need protection I'll write you a letter." *JACOB BERNSTEIN*

'Strangers With Candy'

Is it camp? Yes.



Stephen Colbert and Amy Sedaris in "Strangers With Candy." ThinkFilm

"Strangers With Candy" stars Amy Sedaris in half a fat suit as Jerri Blank, a 40-something dropout who returns to high school after years as a junkie, prostitute and eventual inmate. In a format modeled (loosely) after the "ABC Afterschool Special," our heroine encounters hardships both universal and specific: impressing the popular kids, resisting the temptation of drugs, finding out she's Native American, getting lured into a cult. Each episode ends with Jerri breaking the fourth wall to tell the viewer what she has learned, which is usually nothing. But there are some take-aways. Having someone to make out with supersedes self-respect; violence doesn't resolve conflicts, but it wins them; being a single mother is easiest when one is neither single nor a mother. It's a highly aestheticized work of absurdist comedy. Jerri's makeup is thick. Her overbite is pronounced. Her hygiene is questioned. So if these parables leave you scratching your head, do as Jerri says: "Think about it — I haven't." *THOMAS LOTITO*

Supreme

Is it camp? Not exactly, but it's definitely "too much."



When The New York Post, for a long time the most camp of the city's daily papers, placed an ad for Supreme on its front page, the brand's acolytes rushed to pay \$20 for a paper that usually goes for \$1.50. This kind of excess is wrapped up in the fact that the people who want to own Supreme far outnumber the people who can actually buy it. Every time the brand has a "drop," hundreds of people swarm its stores just to wait in line to spend hundreds on a pair of boxer shorts. In a Supreme devotee, we see how one can be "serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious," as Sontag puts it, to the point where even the founder James Jebbia is dumbfounded. In a phone interview with GQ, when asked if he ever thought Supreme would become as globally recognized as it is today, he compared the unlikely outcome to the election of Donald J. Trump. *ASTHA RAJVANSHI*

President Trump

Is it camp? Much political theater is camp, but he's upped the ante.



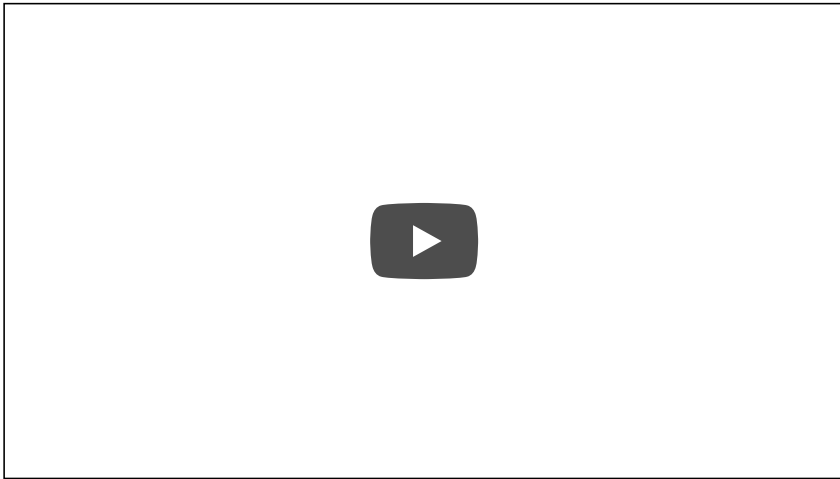
President Trump at a rally in Green Bay, Wis. Erin Schaff/The New York Times

Camp "can be actually a very sophisticated and powerful political tool, especially for marginalized cultures," Andrew Bolton, the curator of the Met's Costume Institute, told The New York Times when that show's theme was announced. We tend to associate "marginalized cultures" with underrepresented minorities, but if you think about it, the frustrated white men who make up Donald J. Trump's base would certainly describe themselves that way, and he has been their blunt-edged weapon. An orange-hued one, with tanning-bed-goggle eyes, an elaborate blonde pompadour and extra-long ties — because, well, you know what they say about ties: long ties, long ... What? What's that you say? They don't say that about ties? Well, in the alternative universe of Trumpland, they do.

Born from the camp crucible of reality TV, President Trump has become synonymous with behavior that elicits exactly the kind of reactions Sontag deems key to camp: "It's too much" and "not to be believed." Superlatives rule the president's speech — his crowds are the biggest ever, his memory the best — and his aversion to political correctness is practically a signifier. He's a Louis XIV for our times. That he has his finger on the button just makes it more jaw-dropping. *VANESSA FRIEDMAN*

'Riverdale'

Is it camp? Like many other programs on the CW, it's intentional camp.



“Riverdale” is the love child of every teen soap in history and “Twin Peaks.” Accordingly, it makes no sense. Are the characters living (and dying, once by crucifixion) in the present, or in 1960, as the anachronistic décor suggests? Is Riverdale an hour outside of New York City, or somewhere near the Canadian border? How are the parents so evil, and their children so hot? The flimsy dramatic arc, conflicting details and distractingly attractive cast serve to foreground the show’s look and feel. There are foggy drives down forest roads, after-school milkshakes in a retro diner, cult initiations with all-white dress codes, practically unwatchable musical episodes. That’s fine. “Riverdale” isn’t here to make its viewers more intelligent; it’s visual candy, a comedy dressed up as horror. *BONNIE WERTHEIM*

Queen Elizabeth II

Is it camp? The British monarch is the *most* camp at Buckingham Palace.



All hail the queen of camp. Toby Melville/Getty Images

The hair. The hats. The handbags. The extreme matchy-matchiness of it all. Queen Elizabeth II doesn't just rule over Britain and the Commonwealth — the world's longest-serving female head of state also does head-to-toe monochrome more thoroughly, and multi-dimensionally, than anyone else. She has inspired legions with her signature rainbow shades (the better to stand out in a crowd) and her favored off-duty tweed, silk scarf and pearl get-ups.

One of her more outspoken style admirers is Alessandro Michele, Gucci's creative director and a co-chair of this year's Met Gala, who in 2016 told *The New Yorker*: "The Queen is one of the most quirky people in the world. She is very inspiring. It is clear that she loves color." Insofar as camp is about extravagance, her preference for unmissable outfits, along with the vast palaces, ornate state banquets, glittering horse-drawn carriages and decades of polished public performance, surely fits the bill. *ELIZABETH PATON*

Jim Steinman

Is it camp? His songs are pure schlock.

Bonnie Tyler - Total Eclipse of the Heart (Video)



The producer Jim Steinman specializes in excess. He helped bring us Bonnie Tyler’s “Total Eclipse of the Heart” and “Holding Out for a Hero,” Celine Dion’s “It’s All Coming Back to Me Now,” plus every song on Meat Loaf’s albums “Bat Out of Hell” and “Bat Out of Hell II.” He is implicated in the Barry Manilow catalog and the Air Supply discography. He is in the Long Island Music Hall of Fame.

A murder of academics have nearly defined camp out of existence. But schlock, Mr. Steinman’s specialty, has less nuance. Camp’s shuffle-footed, irony-free cousins, *objets d’schlock* are in such poor taste that they repel even regular viewers of the television network CBS. Even for those who love them (me), Mr. Steinman’s miniature operas of heartbreak and desperation are critically irredeemable — too solemn and silly to even pretend to sophistication. But when “so bad it’s good” is a commonplace, maybe the irredeemable is the only refuge left. *JONAH ENGEL BROMWICH*

‘Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?’

Is it camp? Decidedly.

Nothing says camp like getting to watch two aging divas go to war with one another. That’s what happened in “Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?,” wherein Bette Davis plays a drunk, deranged and delusional former child star who seems to have caused the car crash that cripples her prettier, kinder, and more successful sister (Joan Crawford), whom she holds captive in the once-glamorous house they share. For more than two hours, Davis wears jealousy on her frayed chiffon sleeves, turning away her sister’s visitors, plotting against nosy neighbors, even murdering her sister’s pet bird. “I’ll clean the cage,” she says before literally cooking it up as a meal that she serves to her sister. *JACOB BERNSTEIN*

Ed Wood

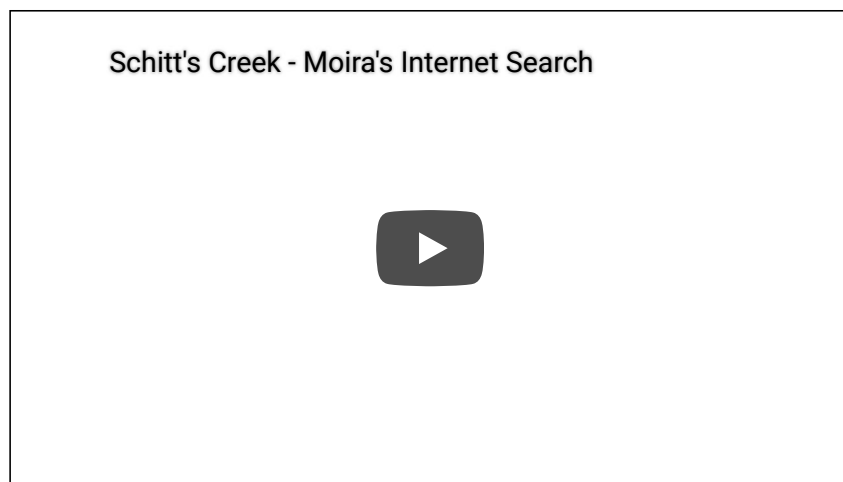
Is it camp? Maybe too campy to be camp.

He used hubcaps for flying saucers, cardboard for sets, and had a bad habit of leaving the boom microphone in the shot. He's been called the worst director of all time. Ed Wood's Z-movie science-fiction project from 1959, "Plan 9 from Outer Space," is often called the worst movie of all time, although his 1953 ode to cross-dressing, "Glen or Glenda," starring Mr. Wood himself in resplendent angora, gets votes too. But maybe he was better than we think.

Since Tim Burton's affectionate 1994 biopic, "Ed Wood," starring Johnny Depp, Mr. Wood has been the subject of a critical reappraisal of sorts, with defenders casting the director's crude productions as a kind of outsider art. "What comes over isn't directorial competence," the writer Johnny Mains told *The Independent* in 2017, "but exuberance in abundance, enthusiasm and I would take that any day over a film that's technically brilliant but lacks any soul." "Plan 9" manages a not-terrible 67 percent on Rotten Tomatoes, where it's described as the "epitome of so-bad-it's-good cinema." And some have lauded the sympathetic portrayal of gender nonconformity in "Glen or Glenda" as decades ahead of its time. At the end of the day, the film is 60 years old and we're still talking about it. Maybe sometimes bad is actually not bad enough. *ALEX WILLIAMS*

Moira Rose

Is it camp? Yes.



"Schitt's Creek" follows a family of uber-rich narcissists who've fallen on hard times. Moira Rose, played by Catherine O'Hara clad in reflective fabrics, is the show's matriarch and chief brat. As is typical of "artistes" who compulsively seek the spotlight, Moira has many secrets. Why does she have a North American accent with scattered Shakespearean and French vowel sounds? What's going on underneath her elaborate wigs? What combination of pills is she on, and can I have some? Why does she wear waistcoats and brooches to bed? In her bombastic totality, she embodies the grotesque effects of extreme wealth. Moira Rose makes me want to burn the rich to a soundtrack of her saying "bebe" on repeat. *ELEANOR STANFORD*

Liberace

Is it camp? Yes.



He wore that. Monica Almeida/The New York Times

If the center of American culture has historically been New York, Las Vegas is its capital of camp. It's where Siegfried and Roy made magic macabre. It's Cher's spirit city, home this summer to yet another of her concert spectacles. It was also once home to Liberace, the piano peacock known less for the music he made than for his \$300,000, 16-foot, 175-pound sequined capes and giant bed underneath a \$50,000 replica of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling. Liberace never had any doubt who he was. He is also remembered for his aphorisms, including: "Nakedness makes us Democratic, adornment makes us individuals." "When the reviews are bad, I tell my staff they can join me as I cry all the way to the bank." And, of course, "Don't wear one ring, wear five or six. People ask how I can play with all those rings, and I say, very well, thank you." *JACOB BERNSTEIN*

Professional Wrestling

Is it camp? That is the only explanation.

Imagine Liberace on steroids, donning his most Vegas-ready sequined ensemble to pantomime a parody of a professional athletic event. Or, you could just check out any old WrestleMania video on YouTube. ("Macho King" Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan are good entry points.) To fans of regular sports, World Wrestling Entertainment and its ilk have always been a mystery. The costumes? Ridiculous. The action? Ludicrous. The emotions? As artificially stylized as the masks of comedy and tragedy.

Pro wrestling makes perfect sense if you accept an Urban Dictionary definition of camp as "something that provides sophisticated, knowing amusement, as by virtue of its being artlessly mannered or stylized, self-consciously artificial and extravagant." Oddly, however, there is no clear evidence that anyone involved with the sport has ever made the connection. Google "professional wrestling" and "camp," and you find numerous sleep-away options for Junior to practice his or her back breakers and power slams. The sport — spectacle? — seems to have escaped critical study since 1972, when the French literary theorist Roland Barthes called wrestlers "the key which opens nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil." Academia, it turns out, can be camp too. *ALEX WILLIAMS*

'Clue'

Is it camp? Maybe not, but it's good.

A dinner party coalesces inside an old mansion on a stormy night in 1954 New England. All of the usual suspects are present: Mrs. Peacock with feathers in her hair and cat-eye glasses; Miss Scarlet in her off-the-shoulder satin dress, chiffon shawl and oversize rhinestone necklace; Professor Plum, dapper in a bow tie and pocket square, smoking a pipe. All are from the D.C. area. Each one has a secret. And they're being blackmailed because they are, in their extortionist's estimation, "thoroughly un-American." As the night progresses, characters are mysteriously murdered by violent means: In the kitchen with the knife! In the study with the wrench! In the library with the pipe! Everyone is a suspect.

"Clue" the film was a box-office flop but ultimately rose to cult-classic status. Initially it was perceived as a gimmick. Perhaps rightly so — it's based on a board game, after all. It evokes its precursor in every scene: The narrative is full of misdirection, secret passageways and a complex array of outcomes. The movie has three different endings. Which did you see? If the answer is none, you're in for a treat. *KAREN HANLEY*

'Coronation Street'

Is it camp? This show should get its own Costume Institute exhibit.

"Coronation Street" is the world's longest-running soap opera. Set in a fictional neighborhood of Manchester, it's a celebration of Northern British working-class culture. The enduring popularity of "Corrie" (as the show is affectionately known) seems to rely most on its feisty, gossipy female characters: Elsie Tanner, Bet Lynch and Liz McDonald. Strong women who got by on their wits, sassy one-liners and style. There's huge bouffant hair after a day spent at the pub in rollers; fake eyelashes and long red talons; nosebleed high heels, leopard print and shoulder pads. Queens of shade with hearts of gold, these women have captured the imagination of the British fashion world for decades (and our drag scene too). If you get on their bad side, though, they'll happily smash your front windows with their handbags. *ELIZABETH PATON*

Paul Verhoeven

Is it camp? Yes.

Sharon Stone's star turn as an ice pick wielding serial killer who revealed her nether regions to police officers in "Basic Instinct" had nothing on the performance Elizabeth Berkley gave in Mr. Verhoeven's next film, "Showgirls."

Her alter ego, Nomi Malone, hits Vegas with dreams of making it big and ends up removing her clothing with great frequency. Critics reached a near-consensus of disapproval, drag queens lampooned it and world-class film professors such as Wesleyan University's Jeanine Basinger placed it in their syllabuses.

Mr. Verhoeven's next brilliantly terrible (or just plain brilliant) social satire, "Starship Troopers," also bombed in theaters but was later critically reassessed. The premise: A testosterone-fueled military unit is assigned to save the world from insect-like aliens who basically bomb earthlings by farting asteroids. Over the course of the movie, the costumes worn by the leaders of the "federation" become increasingly S.S.-like. The war is sold by a nationalistic, Fox News-like network (that also broadcasts criminal executions live). The film stars Denise Richards, whose subsequent marriage to and divorce from Charlie Sheen led perfectly to her turn on reality TV's biggest camp franchise, "The Real Housewives."

The negative reviews perplexed Mr. Verhoeven. "'Starship Troopers' was at least a reflection of elements in American society that were visible at the time, a kind of neoconservative thinking that became dominant in the Bush administration," he said in a 2007 interview. "Showgirls," he added, was meant as a "hyperbolic" commentary on the "absurdity of a certain American reality." *JACOB BERNSTEIN*

'Wet Hot American Summer'

Is it camp? It takes place at camp, but no, it's not camp.

A day at camp can crawl along like beads of sweat under the summer sun, or unravel in a frenzy of hormones and expectations. At Camp Firewood, in the summer of '81, time mutates and age is a costume — a young camper counsels a 30-something arts-and-crafts instructor through her divorce, while an associate professor makes a machine to shift the course of space debris using doughnuts and cans of Spam. In the space of a day, multiple romances are destroyed and resurrected, rescue operations are undertaken, and one person learns to control the elements. Halfway through the film, several campers and the director head to town, where they smoke weed, drink beer, steal money, buy cocaine and go on a heroin binge. When they return to camp, looking no worse for the wear, one character says: "It's always fun to get away from camp, even for an hour." *VALERIYA SAFRONOVA*

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