HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
J. Zimmerman, MA

Sexuality in Cinema

The Voyeurs (2021)

Michael Mohan (b. 1986)

OVERVIEW



Director Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1986, Michael Mohan is a bit more private about his life than some other directors in this series. His directorial debut came in 2003 with the short film *Trick*. Mohan has directed four feature films, writing three of them as well. He is also known for directing episodes of the streaming programs *Everything Sucks!* and *Ghostwriter*.



Film *The Voyeurs* is an erotic thriller set in Montreal, Quebec. Principal photography started October 29, 2019. Strangely, the film's main cast wouldn't join the production until partway through November of that year. Perhaps it is this lack of time with the script and the characters that lends many moments to fall flat and create a lack of chemistry between romantic and sexual encounters. Amazon Studios has been tight-lipped about the cost of production and other information about the film.

Background By and large, *The Voyeurs* is considered a poor rehashing of films like *Rear Window* or *Body Double*. Some people find the setting more perverse or titillating than others, but most viewers agree that the twists toward the end of the film lack impact and feel unreal. Critics overall return poor reviews for the film while viewers tend to be more neutral. The film review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes lists a 45% approval rating at the time of writing.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Pippa – A trainee optometrist living with her boyfriend, Thomas
Thomas – An advertising songwriter living with his girlfriend, Pippa
Sebastian – A famous fashion photographer living across the street from Pippa and Thomas
Julia – A former model married to Sebastian

SYNOPSIS

Pippa and Thomas solidify their relationship by moving into their first apartment together. While unpacking, they notice the couple across the street working on a photo shoot. Pippa chides Thomas for watching, but they're both enthralled as the couple across the street begins pealing off their clothes and having sex in full view of their neighbors. Over the next few days, they develop a habit of watching their neighbors, calling them "Margot" and "Brent." At her job at L'Optique, Pippa receives a bird feeder as a housewarming present from her boss, and on her way home, she picks up a pair of binoculars to get a better look at the neighbors. Thomas and Pippa are shocked by seeing "Brent" have sex with multiple models.

After mentioning that she'd love to know what they are saying in the apartment across the way, Thomas reveals that he once used a laser pointer and a computer program to spy on a college friend, so they crash the other couples' Halloween party and plant a mirror for the listening device. Now able to hear "Margot" and "Brent," they witness a huge fight between them. "Margot" is sure "Brent" is cheating, and he acts abusively toward her, knocking her down and breaking her glasses. Having seen "Brent" be unfaithful, Thomas and Pippa argue about whether or not to tell "Margot." They agree to stop watching,

but Pippa continues in secret, attracted to Brent.

The next day, “Margot” walks into Pippa’s place of work, looking for new glasses. Pippa does the exam herself and helps Julia—“Margot’s” real name—pick out new frames. Afterward, Julia invites Pippa out for a spa day. Thomas finds this strange, but Pippa wants to tell Julia about her husband’s infidelity, so she goes. During this spa visit, we learn “Brent’s” real name is Sebastian, or Seb. The next day, when Julia is out on business, Pippa watches Seb have a threesome and sees him stash the condom in the bottom of a trash can. Later that night, Julia has returned from work, and Pippa uses the wireless printer across the street to tell her about the condom. When Julia finds it, she reacts violently, nearly stabbing Seb with a knife from the kitchen. The next morning, Thomas and Pippa watch Seb finding Julia’s body. Thomas blames Pippa and storms out, saying their relationship is over.

Pippa keeps watching Seb, seeing him grieve for Julia. When he leaves and goes down to a nearby bar, Pippa follows. He strikes up a conversation with her there, and they go back to his place where she participates in a photoshoot before having sex with him. Across the street, Thomas returns with a bouquet, but he sees Pippa having sex with Seb. The next morning, Pippa finds Thomas hanging from a crossbeam in their apartment. Through a friend, Pippa learns that Seb is having an exhibition, so they attend only to learn that the whole situation was a bizarre art project: Seb and Julia knew they were being watched the whole time, and a series of mechanized cameras was photographing Pippa and Thomas, who unwittingly signed their image rights away when signing their lease.

Unable to live in the apartment any longer, Pippa moves out. When she retrieves the bird feeder, she notices a few dead birds beneath it and comes to a realization: Julia and Sebastian staged Thomas’ suicide. She begins to harass them, eventually leading them to her workplace. There, the couple passes out from the same drug they used on Thomas, Pippa having slipped some into a bottle of their favorite wine and left it by their door like other gifts from adoring fans. There, she blinds the two with a LASIK machine in revenge for Thomas’ death.

PLOT



Signing the lease – Through the display window of a lingerie store, we see a slit in the curtains of the dressing rooms. The camera pulls closer to the window, leering in at the young woman trying on a garment. Her face suddenly bears a shocked expression as she sees the gap in the curtains in the mirror. A bit later, we see this woman again, now entering an apartment building. Upstairs, a young man signs a series of documents, commenting that he feels like he’s “signing my life away.” The young woman enters, and he stops her, calling her Pippa, before asking the real estate agent to take their picture in their new apartment. In an awkwardly intimate way, they talk about the risk they’re taking moving in together. “This is our home,” Pippa says. The real estate agent interrupts her, saying she doesn’t until she signs the lease. Pippa rushes to sign, and we can clearly see the young man’s signature naming him as Thomas.



Across the street – A few boxes remain after a long day of unpacking. Pippa and Thomas playfully tease each other for their choice of alcohol while toasting their big life change. Pippa says she wants to take a chance to rebel after spending so many years in school, and Thomas supports her, saying she deserves it, toasting to “wonderful, terrible decisions.” They lean in to kiss when flashing lights outside distract them. The neighboring apartment contains a man leading a photoshoot. They watch for a moment, commenting on how easy it is to see the neighbors and mock speaking for the couple as they begin to kiss. The kissing quickly turns into oral sex on the kitchen counter, and Thomas jokes that it’s “good content.” Pippa insists that they stop, and they move into their bedroom to give the new neighbors some privacy. Later

that night, Pippa puts on her new lingerie and attempts to initiate sex with Thomas, but he's already asleep.



"**So long, creep"** – The next morning, Pippa makes her way to work, meeting a co-worker for coffee on the way. They talk about their weekends, Ari—the coworker—talking about how she and her partner agreed to a social media blackout to improve their relationship before congratulating Pippa on her successful move. Pippa then tells Ari about the neighbors. Ari asks if they watched, and Pippa says they didn't, specifying that it's wrong. "You're 1,000% wrong about that," Ari says as they step into their shared office space. "If they are exhibitionists, then watching them is like the polite thing to do, Pippa." Ari leaves with a cheery, "So long, creep!"



Housewarming gift – A person lies on a table, lasers bisecting their face and clamps holding their eye open. Pippa puts drops in the person's eyes and reminds them to lie still through the procedure. The optometrist Pippa is assisting jokes that she's done forty similar procedures a week for the past twenty years, "and well over half of them have gone right." This shocks Pippa, who mutters back, "Twenty years." "Yeah," says the optometrist, "and I'm still trying to figure out what I want to be when I grow up." While eating her lunch, Pippa makes phone calls to customers about their glasses awaiting pickup. She's interrupted by her boss, who brings in a big box, saying it's a housewarming gift. Inside is a bird feeder, leading the optometrist to speak at length about the visual acuity of birds. When their boss leaves, Ari jokingly complains, "I want a present."



Choking – Thomas draws something on the chalkboard wall of the apartment. "Hey, babe!" he says warmly when Pippa enters. "This is so cute!" she says, giving him a kiss and looking at the cartoon of them he drew. Pippa puts the bird feeder outside of their window, and Thomas wonders what the neighbors are doing. She chides him for being so obvious, and they take a more clandestine position to do their snooping. Thomas says they should try to become friends, Pippa pointing out how awkward it is to befriend the people you're basically stalking. While fantasizing about a future friendship, they name the woman "Margot" and the man "Brent." Suddenly, "Brent" begins choking in the kitchen, and "Margot" can't hear him through her headphones. Pippa tells Thomas to go across the street to help, but then "Margot" sees "Brent" and tries to help him. Pippa and Thomas stand at the window, miming the correct procedure when "Margot" fails to do anything more than pat "Brent" on the back. She seems to see them and helps "Brent" to spit up his meal, Pippa and Thomas celebrating.

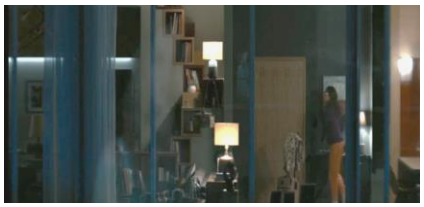


Late-night drink – Late that night, while Thomas sleeps, Pippa rises and walks to the kitchen for a glass of water. She stops to view the neighbor's house, watching "Brent" say goodbye to "Margot," who seems to be leaving on a business trip. He goes to the window to watch her walk away, and Pippa watches him, standing against the window in nothing but his underwear, sizing up his arms and legs and chest. She toys with the hem of her nightgown when, suddenly, "Brent's" gaze meets hers and she drops the glass.



Binoculars – The shattering glass becomes a cymbal crashing. Thomas plays an upbeat tune on several instruments, recording it on this computer. Distracted in the middle of his workday, he watches "Brent" run a photoshoot for a moment. Pippa walks down a busy street after nightfall, and she stops to look in a shop window.

The camera centers itself on an accordion as Pippa seems to recall a joke Thomas made about learning how to play, but her gaze and the camera's shift to a pair of binoculars sitting behind it. Suddenly, we see "Brent" from a pair of binoculars as Pippa explains how she came to own the binoculars to Thomas. A woman enters "Brent's" apartment, and Thomas asks for the binoculars to confirm her identity: he saw her in a photoshoot earlier that day. "Brent" pours the woman a glass of wine, and they begin another photoshoot. Thomas and Pippa add comic commentary until it becomes clear that "Brent" is trying to seduce the woman, and they begin having sex. Suddenly, Pippa pulls off Thomas' clothes and begins to give him a handjob before they change places, Pippa taking the binoculars to watch as Thomas has sex with her. Through her gaze, we can see her attraction to "Brent."



"**Margot" returns** – Late that night, Pippa gets up again to spy on the neighbors, and just when she's about to head back to bed, she sees "Margot" return home and surprise "Brent." Through the binoculars, Pippa watches "Margot" pretend to strangle "Brent," startling him awake, but they start kissing once he realizes what's happening. The next morning, at brunch with friends, Pippa and Thomas talk about the neighbors. Their friends think Brent is definitely cheating, but just like the couple, they're split about what to do: should "Margot" be told or not? As the food comes and the conversation dies down, Pippa wishes aloud that it would be nice to hear the neighbors. One of the group mentions that Thomas had set up a listening device before in college using a laser pointer.



Listening device – Back at their apartment, Thomas gives Pippa a crash course on how the listening device works. He explains that windows vibrate just like the membrane of a speaker, and they can pick up that motion by using a laser pointer, a mirror, and a bit of computer know-how. Pippa wants to set up such a device, but they'd have to set up a mirror in their neighbors' apartment to get a proper feed. This is on top of it being illegal. They watch "Brent" trying out a Halloween costume across the way and quickly hatch a plan, Pippa saying, "I have a bad idea."



Halloween party – "I cannot believe we're doing this right now," Thomas says as he and Pippa walk down the front steps of their building in matching Halloween costumes, unable to hide his excitement. "Future us is going to be so impressed!" Pippa says as they make their way to the party. When they enter, "Brent" dressed as a satyr, throws Pippa over his shoulder and carries her to a background, and Thomas follows shouting. "Brent" silently pushes Thomas into a chair and quickly positions Pippa before taking their picture, leaving the couple speechless. With the distracting ambiance of the party, Pippa is then able to place a mirror on an object that rests near the window. They run into "Margot," who is comically dressed as a movie character sharing her fake name, which Pippa comments on as Thomas carries her back home on his back.



Little green dot – Using a mic stand to steady the laser pointer, Thomas works with Pippa to position the laser, nearly alerting "Margot" to their actions when they first begin. They're able to quickly restart and move the point of light into position, bouncing off the mirror Pippa planted. The next step is finding where the laser bounces back, and to do this, Pippa erases Thomas' chalkboard art, using the dust from the erasers to find the beam. With a little fiddling and software, Thomas is able to transform the light into audible sound. Pippa comments that "they sound like the teachers from Charlie Brown" before Thomas finds the right filter frequency.

Argument – Thomas and Margot stop their celebration as soon as it begins, as the voices coming through clearly are those of a couple in crisis. “Margot” accuses “Brent” of having sex with a woman in the bathroom during the party. “Brent” behaves in an incredibly manipulative and abusive manner, refusing to answer “Margot’s” questions and eventually pushing her to the floor, causing her to break her glasses. Pippa watches it all from her binoculars.



Eye exam – At work, Pippa stares at her lunch with a strange expression. Her boss enters, asking if she’s okay. Pippa says she’s just “coming down with something,” and her boss jokes that “there’s a nasty hangover going through Montreal right now.” Moments later, “Margot” enters the optometrist’s office, and Ari calls for Pippa. “Margot” requests an eye exam, and Pippa takes her into a dark room to do it. There, she learns “Margot’s” real name is Julia. Strangely, Julia seems to hit it off with Pippa, inviting her on a spa date that weekend.



“**Get out of there, girl”** – At the apartment, Thomas is hard at work improving a bass line for the erectile dysfunction medicine jingle he’s composing. Across the way, he sees “Brent” going through another seduction routine with another model, and with a reluctant sigh, he sets up the listening device. He can hear the seduction routine now, how thick “Brent” lays it on, and even the model mentions that his sexual discussion is making her uncomfortable. Brent then moves in to kiss her, and Thomas says, “Get your big-ass necklace and get out of there, girl.” To Thomas’ surprise, “Brent” is able to talk his way into the model’s pants.



The right thing? – “What?” says Thomas. “Shut up!” He can’t believe what Pippa tells him about Julia showing up at the optometrist’s office and finds the spa invitation especially odd. He mentions that he saw “Brent” cheating on Julia again today and that he doesn’t feel comfortable spying on the neighbors. Pippa takes a slightly opposing view, saying it’s the right thing to tell Julia, but Thomas doesn’t agree. He senses another issue underlying this conflict and asks, “Am I not enough for you?” She goes on about what Julia needs, and he leaves to get a drink since she doesn’t want to connect with him. While he’s gone, Pippa listens in on the neighbors, seeing Julia try out some new lingerie on “Brent,” but failing to connect when he suddenly turns cold.



Spa day – The next morning, Pippa meets up with Julia outside the spa. They head in together, chatting mostly about Julia’s life. She tells Pippa about her husband, Sebastian, or 'Seb,' as he likes to be called. He’s a famous photographer who gave her a position at his publishing company, but Julia doesn’t know what she wants to do with her life. As they soak in one of the warm pools in the spa, Pippa can’t bring herself to tell Julia the truth about Seb. Toward the end of their stay, Pippa accidentally calls Julia “Margot” but laughs it off as forgetfulness.



Compulsion – Later that night, Pippa walks through her apartment. She kneels down to watch Thomas sleep for a moment before we see her spying on Seb and Julia during a birthday surprise. Thomas exits the bathroom in a towel, shocking Pippa, who pretends she was doing something else. Sometime later, Pippa watches Seb have a threesome with two models. Afterward, he removes a condom, which he places in the bottom of a bathroom trash can.



Printer – Late at night, Pippa turns on the listening device. Recalling something Julia said about setting up a new printer, Pippa begins trying printers in wi-fi range until one makes Julia stand up. Through the printer, Pippa tells Julia about Sebastian cheating, instructing her to find the used condom in the bottom of the bathroom trash can. Thomas interrupts Pippa, startling her, and they both watch as Julia has a visceral emotional reaction to finding the condom.



Murderous turn – Suddenly, Thomas asks for the binoculars. In the kitchen across the street, Julia selects a sharp knife before moving to the bedroom. Thomas begins to freak out, saying they need to call the police, but Pippa argues against that. Julia thrusts the knife toward Seb, but she stops short of stabbing him, walking back into the hallway and crying instead. Clearly upset about the whole situation and Pippa's inability to stop watching the neighbors, Thomas takes the binoculars and hurls them across the room, breaking one of the lenses. "I wish we had another room," he mutters as he shuts himself in the bedroom.



Unintended consequences – In the morning, birds sip water from the bird feeder outside the window. Thomas hands Pippa a cup of coffee, pouring cream for her as well. He sits down across from her on the coffee table, and they have a conversation about their feelings. "I want to know that I can trust you," he says. "I want to feel like I'm enough for you." Pippa swears to stop spying and to never see Julia again. They stand to hug when Pippa sees something across the street. Picking up the broken binoculars, she can see Julia covered in blood and Seb trying desperately to revive her. Thomas blames Pippa and storms out, saying their relationship is over. That night, Pippa's bed engulfs her without Thomas lying beside her. The next day, Pippa makes calls to patients whose glasses are ready, and she finds she has Julia's glasses on her list. She tries to leave the normal message, but she tears up and apologizes before hanging up.



Le Royal – After a bath, Pippa watches Seb mourning Julia. At a point, she thinks she sees her appear behind him, but it's just him. After throwing a glass in anger, Seb storms out to a nearby bar, Le Royal. Pippa dresses and heads out as well. Moody indie rock plays as Pippa finds an empty table. She starts making eyes at Seb across the room, and eventually, he crosses to join her.



Sex talk – "Do I know you?" Seb asks. "I-I don't think you do," Pippa lies. The waitress appears to take their orders, and Seb cancels Pippa's vodka tonic, chiding that this isn't "the place to order a vodka tonic." Abruptly, Seb asks if Julia watches porn. She tries to walk around the question, but Seb ignores her, going on a tirade about how everyone watches porn at some point. He then asks her if her boyfriend ever masturbated. "Probably," she responds. "He did," Seb corrects. "Did you?" "Maybe," Pippa says. "And did this simple act



change the love you had for him?" Pippa replies, "no," because masturbation is "meaningless." Seb posits that he's had sex more meaningless than masturbation and, therefore, cheating isn't real. Pippa says most people don't agree with him, and he agrees, obviously thinking about Julia. He apologizes for being so blunt, and Pippa forgives him. Pippa thinks of the fable "The Ass and his Masters," retelling it to Seb. When she's done, he informs her that Aesop wrote that fable to tell his slaves, bringing its true meaning into view. "Would it be strange to ask if I could take your picture?" Seb asks suddenly.



Photoshoot – A long, quiet elevator ride takes Seb and Pippa up to his apartment. He apologizes for the broken glass before pouring Pippa a glass of wine and leading her to the backdrop where he takes pictures. Setting up the first pose, he asks again if they've met before, and again Pippa denies it. She reacts self-consciously to the first photographs, but Seb insists that she'll be perfect so long as she does what he tells her. The same routine we've seen several times plays out again: Seb asks her to take off her shirt and pants, and she does so with just a bit of convincing. He then asks her to take off her bra, and when she hesitates, he strips before telling her, "Your turn." She strips too, and after a few pictures, they have sex on the couch and the kitchen bar. At about this time, Thomas comes home with a bouquet to apologize. Pulling one of his green drinks from the fridge and taking a drink, he reacts with disgust before using the remainder to fill the bird feeder. Thomas looks across the street to see Pippa and Seb having sex.



Thomas' Suicide – The next morning, Pippa wakes up in Sebastian's bed. She rises and moves into the living room to find her clothes, stepping on a piece of glass from the night before. Pippa limps home, surprised to find the door of her apartment ajar. She enters slowly, her eyes landing on the bouquet lying on the floor before they rise up to see Thomas hanging from a rafter. The next several days pass in a somber montage: Pippa jumps from the police report to the funeral, then back home and to her job, the camera centered on her melancholic expression. On the street she sees advertisements for Sebastian's upcoming exhibition.



Confession – Pippa dresses up and does her makeup before walking to a fancy restaurant. Inside she meets with Ari, her friend and co-worker, and to her she confesses what happened the night Thomas died. Ari looks shocked upon hearing the news. "I had to tell someone," Pippa says. "I understand if you never want to talk to me again." A confused expression crosses Ari's face: "Wait… Pippa, you think this is all your fault?" She defends Pippa to herself, saying there was no way to predict this outcome and that she can't control the actions of others. Pippa admits to wanting to see Seb again, and Ari remembers that he has a new exhibition in town.



Opening night – Loud pop music plays as Ari and Pippa enter the exhibition. Ari heads to the bar to get them drinks when Sebastian appears and takes Pippa's photo. "I didn't think you'd come," he says. Pippa tries to get closer and strike up a conversation, but Seb doesn't react, slinking away when the lights dim to take the stage. The crowd falls silent as Sebastian turns to face them, saying, "Now, before I begin, I should say that this particular project was a collaboration. My partner in crime on this—the love of my life—Julia Noatore…" Pippa whispers to Ari that she wants to go home when suddenly Sebastian invites Julia onto the stage where the two kiss. Julia takes the mic and begins discussing the story behind the exhibition. One by one, curtains fall to reveal pictures of Pippa and

Thomas spying on their neighbors. They signed away their image rights in their lease, allowing Sebastian and Julia to pull off their strange art project about voyeurism.



The truth – Pippa storms out, breathing heavily, clearly panicking. She runs away from Ari who tries to console her, finding her way into Sebastian's building and using the hidden key to get into the apartment. There, she pokes around until she finds a trapdoor to the room above where an array of cameras take photos of her apartment every several seconds. On tables and corkboards nearby are thousands of images of her and Thomas that Julia and Sebastian comb through for the best images for their project. Pippa shrieks and starts knocking things around, toppling a shelf filled with computer equipment and tearing up photos.



Moving – Pippa solemnly walks in front of a blue sheet. Before her, several moving men carry her furniture and boxes downstairs. Two stand to the side, pointing at images on a phone. "Yup," says Pippa, "those are my boobs. This is the place." Pulling down the sheets covering the windows, Pippa remembers the bird feeder. Leaning out to grab it, she catches a glimpse of Julia and Sebastian across the way, who acknowledge her presence. Pippa looks down and sees nearly a dozen dead birds lying on a grate below her window. She looks back up to see Julia waving dismissively.



Interview – Sebastian and Julia sit in front of a camera. Sebastian speaks at length about the way they managed to set up their art project and how Pippa and Thomas signed away their right to privacy without ever properly reading the contract, but that's not his or Julia's fault. The interviewer says something in Japanese, and someone begins to translate for her, but Julia interrupts, saying that they feel horrible about the "tragedy," but rather than moving away from the project, they hope it will be taken as a warning against stalking. While Julia keeps talking, we see Seb struggle to contain his emotions, clenching his jaw: It's obvious he feels some level of guilt about Thomas. He explodes on the interviewers for asking uninteresting questions before storming out to have a cigarette.



"**Your favorite"** – "How many times can someone be congratulated?" Julia wonders as she and Sebastian approach their apartment. A bottle of wine sits by the door with a gift tag. "Oh!" Julia exclaims, picking it up. "Your favorite." In the kitchen, she uncorks the bottle and serves up two glasses, Seb correcting her pronunciation of 'Scassari.' It's clear he's still feeling guilt and doesn't want to be congratulated, and Julia sees this, cooing, "Babe… You have to get over this." "Don't you ever feel guilty?" asks Sebastian. "No," says Julia, coldness in her eyes. As they drink, the printer whirs. "I know," the paper reads. Another sheet works through, this one reading, "Thomas didn't commit suicide." Sebastian picks up his telephoto lens and starts scanning the building next door as another sheet comes through the printer, this one lined with the repeated text, "YOU KILLED HIM." Julia spots Pippa on the roof. "She's lost it," says Seb. "What do you think you know, Pippa?" asks Julia as they leave to pursue her.



Chase – Breathing heavily, Sebastian calls out to Pippa, who runs down a nearby fire escape. She pauses for a moment but keeps running. Using the alleys, Pippa manages to keep ahead of Sebastian and Julia, but they keep right on her tail. Pippa runs into

l'Optique, making Seb and Julia pause for a moment before they follow her inside. Pippa tries to hold the door to the optometrist's office closed, but Sebastian tackles the door and knocks her down. "Is all this really necessary, Pippa?" asks Julia. "What is it that you think you know?" ask Sebastian, backing Pippa into a corner. They keep badgering her as she stammers, claiming to know nothing. We see a flashback: someone reaches into the fridge for one of Thomas' green drinks. It's Julia. She uses a dropper to put something into it that causes Thomas to pass out after drinking it. We then see her stage the hanging. Pippa finishes explaining what she thinks happened, and Julia demands proof, which Pippa doesn't have. Pippa demands to know how they could possibly justify what they've done.



Turnabout – Julia parrots back something Pippa said to her before about being too obsessed with something to realize something is wrong when she starts to sway on her feet and slur her words. After a few trembling breaths, she collapses. Calmly, Pippa wipes the tears from her eyes and straightens her hair as Seb tries to rouse Julia. "What did you do?" he demands. "You weigh a little bit more," Pippa chuckles, "so it might take a minute to kick in. That wine was a little gift from me." She advances on Sebastian, who begins to sway on his feet. "Take one final look," she says, holding his face toward her, "'cause it's the last thing that you're ever going to see."



Revenge – The screen is black for a moment before we see Pippa dragging Seb into the LASIK machine chair. Gingerly, professionally, she cleans Julia's eyelids before using a clamp to hold her eyes open. With tears dripping down her cheeks, Pippa primes the machine and presses the green button, the laser sizzling away at Julia's retina. The scene cuts to an egg frying in a pan, easy side up. In French, two men speak about their new apartment, standing where Thomas and Pippa once stood. They look out the window, commenting on the view when one notices how easily they can see into the apartment across the street. Seb and Julia move around their apartment, blinded by Pippa. She watches them through the broken binoculars from the rooftop. She looks at the device for a moment before placing it on the wall and walking away. The camera zooms in to follow her, looking at her through the binocular's eyepiece as she turns to look in our direction one last time before the credits roll.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Pippa Pippa is the character with the clearest backstory and the person we learn the most about in the film. She has been working all through her 20s in the hopes of becoming an optometrist, and because of that she feels like a goody-two-shoes. In order to break out of this funk, she begins spying on the neighbors with her boyfriend, Thomas.

Curious We see Pippa's curious nature come up in several ways through the film. Though at first she's a bit grossed out at the idea of watching the neighbors, she quickly succumbs to the curiosity inherent in the situation: she wants to know what the neighbors are up to. It's her curious nature that leads her to 'investigate' Julia and Seb in the hopes of informing Julia that Sebastian is being unfaithful. Even in some of her last spoken lines, Pippa betrays the curiosity at the center of her personality when she demands to know why Seb and Julia would kill for the sake of an art project.

Unstable Pippa is prone to anxiety and snap judgments. This makes her a perfect mark for Seb and Julia, who weaponize her desire to help even though she's doing something bizarre and taboo. We see her break down after small conflicts and find herself completely unable to react like she needs to in many situations. We also see this in how quickly she moves on from Thomas' death, at least with her friend Ari: Even though she found her boyfriend hanging from a rafter in their apartment just days before, she says she wants to see Sebastian again and tries to flirt with him at his exhibition. It's this internal instability that allows Pippa to enact her final revenge on Seb and Julia.

Thomas We don't learn a lot about Thomas' life. He used to be a drug-addled punk, but he's cleaned up his act and now works composing advertising music. He is the first to suggest voyeurism and the first to realize how problematic the behavior is.

Cooperative In spite of frequently not approving of Pippa's schemes, Thomas is always helping her. In moving in together, he takes a more submissive role, trying to make sure Pippa is comfortable, as seen when he makes her coffee after she angers him and how he returns home to make up after their breakup. He wants people to help each other and enacts this belief as best as he can in his life. Even though it's illegal, he helps Pippa set up a listening device to aid in their voyeurism, happily teaching her how to set it up and use it even though he is clearly reticent to go through with the plan.

Dissatisfied As in the cases of many people who went from punk to normie, Thomas is unhappy with the trajectory of his life. He wants the freedom his younger life granted him, but he also wants to live a happy life with Pippa. He is quick to come around to frustration, as shown in his conflicts with Pippa, likely already fighting the internal conflict between rocking out and selling out.

Seb Sebastian can't stop being Sebastian, so instead of playing a different person as his partner Julia does, he plays up the playboy stereotype that follows him as a famous photographer. With Julia's help, he enacts a cruel hoax on his neighbors for the sake of an art project. Unlike Julia, he feels some guilt about how things unfolded, but he's able to come around after the attention and money his exhibition brings him.

Dominant This trait is so key to Sebastian's that he can't even try to hide it when he's playacting for Pippa and Thomas. He acts without asking, demands with the expectation of submission, and never really apologizes for anything he does or anyone he hurts. It's this domineering attitude that first sparks Pippa's obsession with him, and it allows him to easily seduce her after her breakup with Thomas. Even when he feels deep guilt after his exhibition's success, he channels his rage into his dominant behavior, scolding the interviewers for wasting his time. In one of his final scenes, he looms over Pippa, physically stronger and willing to use that strength to intimidate.

Julia We don't actually learn all that much about Julia. She claims to be a model who married Sebastian, but at the film's end, we see they are partners in their convoluted art project. Unlike Seb, Julia does a good job of becoming another person to trick Pippa and Thomas.

Cruel Most of what we see from Julia is an act, but in the few moments we hear her speaking truthfully, we see a pattern crop up: she is completely shameless. This comes out as casual cruelty. We see this trait most clearly when Seb is struggling with guilt, and he asks how she deals with the feelings. With stony eyes, she simply says she doesn't feel anything. We quickly learn that she is talking about having killed Thomas herself. Just before Pippa gets her revenge, Julia gloats to her, trying to use Pippa's own words as a weapon against her.

THEMES

<u>Relationship</u>

Betrayal For how important this theme is, it's frustratingly underdeveloped in *The Voyeurs*. Especially because the form the betrayal takes is that of abusive manipulation by outright, uncaring strangers, it has the wind knocked out of its literary value. The betrayal is totally one-sided, affecting Pippa the most, especially when the repercussions of the bizarre art project ruin her life and kill her boyfriend. It's this sense of betrayal that drives Pippa to take revenge at the end of the film. While we see a couple moments of Pippa going back on her promise to stop peeping on the neighbors, they exist almost entirely in montages.



Illustrative moment The only noteworthy moment of betrayal happens during Sebastian's art exhibition. Here, Pippa attends expecting to reconnect with Sebastian and perhaps bond over the loss of Julia. She finds out, however, that Julia is alive and well and was a major part in the art project that was Pippa and Thomas' life.

Psychology

Grief Grief is a surprisingly deep theme throughout the film. We see it come up at first with Pippa wishing she had been more wild in her youth: she feels a deep grief for t he life she could have lived. This comes up again for both her and Thomas when they think Julia has killed herself. Their grief makes them both act out, Pippa claiming complete innocence in the situation and Thomas lashing out at Pippa for making the suicide happen. We see grief again most clearly when Pippa finds Thomas hanging in their apartment.



Illustrative moment As stated above, the clearest moment of grief in *The Voyeurs* happens just after Pippa finds Thomas' body. In the moments after, time seems to slow and jump erratically. Pippa faces toward and away from the camera as she is escorted downstairs by the police. Tears stream down her face as she dresses for a funeral. The camera spins around her grief-stricken face as she attends Thomas' funeral. This moment clearly portrays and examines how events like the death of a loved one can affect people's sense of time.

Guilt/Regret Pippa is a person haunted by regret. Her regret for her lack of youthful oats-sowing has become grief over her nearly decade of tertiary education. Thomas understands, having been a self-proclaimed punk himself, and supports her desire to "do something stupid." Her regrets lead her to desire a relationship with Sebastian and Julia even though she's too anxious to approach them conventionally, in part leading to Pippa's stalking behavior. Thomas begins to regret introducing Pippa to voyeurism and helping to set up the listening device, which causes massive conflict between them. We see Sebastian struggle with guilt toward the end of the film. He asks Julia if she ever struggles with regret, and she simply says no.



Illustrative moment One of the more interesting moments focused on this theme happens toward the end of the film. After an interview about the success of their art project, Seb and Julia find a bottle of wine left by an admirer outside of their apartment. As Julia happily uncorks the bottle and pours the glasses, Sebastian obviously struggles with his guilt and the constant attention. Coldly, Julia simply says she never feels guilty about anything.

Sexuality



Voyeurism One would think voyeurism would come up often in a film titled *The Voyeurs*, and this film does deliver on that unspoken promise. Thomas is the first to bring up voyeurism, joyfully gawking at Sebastian and Julia across the street as they make out and then have sex in full view of their neighbors. While he's the first to broach the concept, it's Pippa who falls into addictive patterns. The ultimate voyeurism of the film comes from an unexpected source: Sebastian and Julia. They've rigged everything from the start as a macabre art project about the nature of voyeurism, voyeuring the voyeur without their knowledge. Whereas many films about voyeurism remove it from its immediate sexual connotations, *The Voyeurs* keeps it in the forefront, showing Pippa and Thomas engage in sex while peeping on their neighbors for a different form of sexual pleasure.

Illustrative moment This theme comes completely into play shortly after Pippa purchases a pair of binoculars to aid in spying on the neighbors. Before this moment, there was a playful curiosity in just looking across the street to see what was going on in the neighbor's house. This moment clues us into the growing obsession Pippa has with Sebastian, whom she clearly begins to lust after, frequently watching him seduce and have sex with models.

Exhibitionism Going hand-in-hand with voyeurism, we see a theme of exhibitionism running through this movie. It is strongest at the beginning of the film when Seb and Julia are literally performing to get and keep Pippa and Thomas' attention. While this extends to repeated sexual encounters, it's also the way Julia responds to the printer messages from Pippa and then her staged suicide. Whereas exhibitionist tendencies in real life tend to be far less public and entirely for sexual thrills, Seb and Julia use a weaponized form to create their art project.



Illustrative moment The clearest moment of this theme happens early in the film but takes on an exhibitionist context only after the reveal of Sebastian and Julia's plot. After signing their lease, Pippa and Thomas begin looking at the neighbors. Thomas jokes as Sebastian and Julia begin to make out, laughing and wishing the man good luck. After we learn about the art project, it's clear that this was Sebastian and Julia's first action of explicit exhibitionism in order to attract their neighbor's attention.

Vicarious Experience: *Excitement / Desire / Lust* Pippa and Thomas get excited from watching secretly the nakedness / the sexual acts / excitement / pleasure of Sebastian and Julia through "vicarious experience." However, their voyeuristic activities are also being watched secretly by Sebastian and Julia at the same time. In other words, both couples Pippa-Thomas and Julia-Sebastian are watching / being watched each other secretly.

Illustrative moment One of the most illustrative moments of this complex dual theme comes early in the film. After Pippa brings home the binoculars, she and Thomas see Sebastian and Julia having sex. Pippa—seeking to spice up their sex life—begins to kiss and fondle Thomas as he watches, and then they switch, Thomas having sex with Pippa as she watches. Through the binoculars, she focuses on Sebastian, asking Thomas to keep pace with their neighbor as she imagines having sex with him.

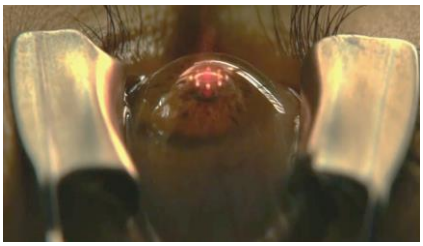
Sexual Affair This is a main dramatic theme for the first half of the film. Thomas sees Sebastian have sex with a model, and soon thereafter he and Pippa see Sebastian do it again just after acting abusively toward Julia. Thomas and Pippa are at odds about what to do about it, Thomas wanting to simply stop paying attention and Pippa wanting to tell Julia. Pippa acting on this urge causes a split between her and Thomas, and he storms out, saying their relationship is over. While the narrative and Seb's art project frame Pippa's activities with Sebastian as a form of cheating, Thomas' statement shows us the complexity of this reality: is it cheating just because Thomas changed his mind about breaking up? Ari supports Pippa when she admits this to her after Thomas' death, saying the best cure for a broken heart is doing something thoughtless with someone attractive.



Illustrative moment One of the more obvious moments of sexual affair happens at nearly the halfway point of the film. As Pippa falls deeper into her spying obsession, she watches Sebastian having sex with two other women. In her mind, she appears in the same room, watching him closely as he moves to the bathroom and disposes of a used condom in the bottom of the garbage bin within.

Justice

Revenge Revenge only emerges as a theme toward the film's end. After learning the truth about the art project, Pippa is resigned to move and begin her life anew. She discovers the dead birds, however, and connects the dots, theorizing that her less-than-friendly neighbors staged Thomas' suicide, knocking him out. This pushes her into a risky plan for revenge, leading Seb and Julia to L'Optique after secretly drugging them with the same chemical Julia used on Thomas. After they pass out, Pippa places them in the LASIK machine and burns away their retinas.



Illustrative moment The film ends with Pippa's revenge. She skillfully manipulates her manipulators into following her to her place of work. There, a drug Pippa gave them through the bottle of wine kicks in, allowing Pippa to do whatever she wants without resistance. She takes her time, following proper procedures before using the laser eye surgery machine to permanently damage their eyes. We see the effects of this at the film's end before Pippa walks away to begin another chapter of her life, giving us an oddly supportive and positive portrayal of revenge.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does this film misunderstand or sensationalize the desires and compulsions of the typical voyeur?

2. Discuss the ways this film represents the conflicts that can arise between sexual partners because of mismatched sexual proclivities.

3. In what ways does race create tension in this narrative? Does the narrative address these issues?

4. What does this film say about privacy in the digital age?