***Ma Vie En Rose (My Life in Pink)* (1997)**

**Film Background:** *Ma Vie En Rose* was directed by Alain Berliner. It won Best Foreign Language Film at the 1998 Golden Globe Awards. Berliner is Belgian, and the film was primarily shot in France. The film was given an R rating by the MPAA despite the fact that it has virtually no violent or sexual content; some have argued this rating is due to the transphobia inherent in the MPAA rating system.

**Plot summary:** At the start of the film, the Fabre family--Hanna (Michèle Laroque), Pierre (Jean-Philippe Écoffey), and their four children have just moved to a new house in a suburban neighborhood, where Pierre is starting a new job. The neighborhood is close-knit and some of the neighbors work together. As the film opens, the Fabre family hosts a housewarming party, and their youngest child, Ludovic, (Georges Du Fresne) who was assigned male at birth, appears in a dress. Ludo's parents encourage her to stop dressing in feminine clothing, but her grandmother, Elisabeth (Hélène Vincent), is more understanding. Ludovic escapes from the transphobic pressures at school and home by imagining a fantastical world she shares with her favorite television character (Delphine Cadet), Pam, who is a Barbie-like figure. As pressure mounts from the neighbors, Ludo's parents take her to therapy to try to encourage her to conform to a masculine identity. During a school play, Ludo barricades the girl who is assigned to the role of Snow White in the bathroom and takes the role for herself. This leads the school to expel Ludo, and Pierre loses his job. Faced with mounting pressure, Pierre and Hanna begin to express rage and act violently towards Ludo, resenting her for their family's challenges. Ludo briefly goes to stay with Elisabeth to escape the family's resentment. Eventually, the Fabre family moves to a new neighborhood, where Ludo befriends Chris (Raphaelle Santini), who was assigned female at birth, and who presents as masculine. After a conflict at Chris's party in which Hanna attacks Ludo for switching costumes with Chris, Ludo's parents tell her she can wear what she likes and that she will always be their child; however, the ending is abrupt and therefore somewhat ambiguous.

**Content warnings:** *Ma Vie En Rose* contains physically and emotionally abusive behavior towards a young child, as well as a suicide attempt by a young child (sitting in an icebox).

**Running time:**89 min

**Note:**Day 1 of this week includes a scene analysis alongside another brief excerpt from *Cruising Utopia.* You could assign this excerpt for students to read alongside their screening of *Ma Vie en Rose*, prior to this week's class, or you could have students read it together during the Day 1 class period. Alternatively, you could skip this text excerpt and close-read the scene without it!

**Materials for this week:**

* Lesson plans
* Screening quiz
* Secondary texts:
  + Day 1: Esteban Muñoz, Jose. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity.* NYU UP, 2009. (Excerpt provided: selection from pp. 172-177)
  + Day 2: Schiavi, Michael R. "A 'Girlboy's Own Story: Non-Masculinie Narrativity in *Ma Vie En Rose."* *College Literature* vol. 31, no. 3, 2004, pp. 1-26.
  + Day 3: Serano, Julia. *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity.* Seal Press, 2007.

**Note:** Scholarship on *Ma Vie en Rose* uses various pronouns to refer to Ludovic. Throughout these lesson plans, I will use “she/her” pronouns to refer to Ludo, due to Ludo’s explanations throughout the film that she is a girl. Quotes from Schiavi include “he/him” pronouns. One could argue it would be more appropriate to use “they/them” pronouns or simply refer to Ludo as “Ludo.” You could discuss with your class the challenges of speaking and writing about a character who is given few opportunities to explain herself.

**Lesson 1 – Close Reading Key Scene – Snow White:**

1. (7 min) Screening quiz.
2. (10-15 min) Student-led scene close-reading and analysis.
3. (3 min) Begin teacher-led close-reading and analysis. Re-watch today’s clip, of Ludo stealing Sophie’s part in *Snow White*. (46:06-48:46)
4. (10 min) [This prep time is a bit longer since students may need to read or review the short excerpt from Muñoz’s text.] Discussion prep. If time, have students share their responses with a partner before whole class discussion.
   1. What formal elements of this scene stand out to you? How do they underscore the themes present in this moment?

* *Sound: When the curtain rises, the audience eagerly cheers, laughs and applauds. However, their enthusiasm turns to pin-drop silence upon realizing that Ludo, not Sophie, is acting as Snow White. The sound effects of Sophie, Ludo and Jerome’s parents all standing up from their chairs is particularly evident because of the silence in the scene. The silence of the crowd also pervades the scene when the Fabre family steps outside and cuts through the crowd. Somber music emphasizes their new status as social outcasts because of Ludo’s actions.*
* *Editing:* *A series of shots of the various couples in the audience captures their joy and excitement as they prepare to see Jerome kiss Sophie. The parents of these children seem excited by the performance of heteronormativity embodied by this play. Similarly, a series of shots highlight Jerome, Sophie, and Ludo’s parents express surprise and horror when they see that it is Ludo, not Sophie beneath the veil, disrupting the heteronormative script the children were performing.*
* *Color:* *This scene is a critical moment in the film because it is the moment when the color grading of the film changes from one that is filled with warm colors like red and pink to one that is primarily blue and grey, as do many of the costumes. This is a dramatic shift that is intended to be noticeable to the audience and signal that the community sees the Fabre family differently. The stage is filled with pinks and reds – a pink blanket sits atop the horse Jerome rides, Jerome wears a red vest, Ludo’s bed is covered in pink material, and Ludo’s costume includes a red headband and dress. But the moment that the Fabre family steps outside, most people are dressed in cold greys and blues, and the Fabre family wears exclusively these colors.*
* *Framing: The long shot as the Fabre family hurries to their car shows the mass of people, almost appearing as if they will chase them out like an angry mob. As the family approaches the street, most of the shot is taken up by the empty expanse of the lot that separates them from the community.*
  1. Consider Muñoz’s analysis of queer failure on p. 172-177.What elements of this scene speak to Muñoz’s ideas?
* *Ludo’s stealing of Sophie’s role, and her performance of Snow White, can be considered an example of a performance of queer failure: “It is a going off script, and the script in this instance is the mandate that makes queer and other minoritarian cultural perforners work not for themselves but for distorted cultural hierarchy” (177). In this moment, Ludo refuses to play the male, supporting role that she has been cast in by her teacher, and instead demands the lead of feminine princess being awoken by a spell by her prince and carried off on a white horse. She chooses to “work for [herself]” in this performance, perhaps uncaring that there will be consequences for the action of locking Sophie away and stealing her part.*
* *As Muñoz explains, “utopia…is always destined to fail. Despite this seeming negativity, a generative politics can be potentially distilled from the aesthetics of queer failure. Within failure we can locate a kernel of potentiality. I align queer failure with a certain mode of virtuosity that helps the spectator exit from the stale and static lifeworld dominated by the alienation, exploitation and drudgery associated with capitalism or landlordism” (173). This scene is an illustration of a utopia that is destined to fail – Ludo demands to play Snow White, regardless of what may occur after the scene has played out. This moment provides her—and perhaps Jerome—with a “kernel of potentiality” that helps both children “exit from the stale and static lifeworld” of heteronormativity, exemplified by one of the most well-known heteronormative fairytales. When Ludo sits up, everyone seems to awaken to her performance, even though it can only be cast as a failure by this audience.*
* *Muñoz explains: “Within straight time, the queer can only fail; thus, an aesthetic of failure can be productively occupied by the queer artist for the purpose of delineating the bias that underlies straight time’s measure. The politics of failure are about doing something else, that is, doing something else in relation to a something that is missing in straight time’s always already flawed temporal mapping practice” (Muñoz 174). In “straight time’s…temporal mapping practice,” Ludo “can only fail;” she is given a part that does not fit her identity and the role she truly wants is unavailable to her. By locking Sophie in the closet and running this performance off the track of straight time, rendering the entire school play a “failure,” she points out what is “missing” in the “bias that underlies straight time’s measure,” a bias that does not allow her full subjectivity. To render herself visible in a utopian performance, she must actually remove a subject who is more valued than herself—Sophie, whose absence they notice and attend to.*

1. (25 min) Whole class discussion.
   1. What formal elements of this scene stand out to you? How do they underscore the themes present in this moment?
   2. Consider Muñoz’s analysis of queer failure on p. 172-177.What elements of this scene speak to Muñoz’s ideas?
   3. **Extension question:** Have you ever seen an intentional performance of failure as Muñoz describes it, queer or otherwise? What was it? How did this performance illustrate Muñoz’s ideas?

**Lesson 2: Examining *Ma Vie En Rose* Alongside Michael Schiavi’s**

1. (5 min) Personal reflection. Choose one of the following questions to answer:
   1. Did you enjoy watching *Ma Vie en Rose?* Why or why not?
   2. What did you think of the ending of the film? Did you find it to be a satisfying conclusion? Why or why not?
   3. This film was made in 1997. Do you think a gender nonconforming child like Ludo would be treated similarly today in your family, school or community? Why or why not?
2. (7 min) Discuss.
3. (4 min) Re-watch today’s clips
4. Discussion prep.
5. Whole class discussion.

**Lesson 3: Examining *Ma Vie En Rose* Alongside *Whipping Girl***

1. (5 min) Compare/contrast:
2. Compare *Ma Vie en Rose* to *Pose.* Consider the narrative, characters, mise-en-scene, themes, etc. What similarities or differences do you notice?
3. (5 min) Discuss.
4. (4 min) Re-watch today’s clip
5. (15 min) Study groups. Groups will work on the following questions.
6. What key points does Serano make? What terms does she use to make her claims?
7. How do these key points relate to the scene we just watched, or to other scenes in this episode? Reference specific details from the scene and specific lines from the text in your response.
8. (20 min) Whole group discussion.