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Is that what it Means? II: Metaphors, Our Most Fertile Power, Max Oppenheimer, KS Pub., 2007, 0975410989, 9780975410981, . .

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See whether you can spot the two Werner Herzog references in the picks (hint: only one of them is movie-related). Also at the movies, director Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine*; stars Cate Blanchett in what may be an Oscar-winning role. On the small screen, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*; is out on DVD.

The Act of Killing; one of the most remarkable, most talked about documentaries of the year, is expanding its Los Angeles-area run starting Friday. Director Joshua Oppenheimer accurately calls this *a documentary of the imagination*; and it takes more than a little getting used to. It's a mind-bending film, devastating and disorienting, that disturbs us in ways we are not used to being disturbed. It is so impressive and unsettling that documentary masters Errol Morris and Werner Herzog both signed on as executive producers. An examination of a massive anti-Communist slaughter in Indonesia, it raises questions about the nature of documentary, the persistence of evil, and the intertwined ways movies function in our culture and in our minds. (Kenneth Turan) [Read more](#)

Betsy Sharkey, film critic for the Los Angeles Times, is an award-winning entertainment journalist and bestselling author. Her books include collaborations with Oscar-winning actresses Faye Dunaway on *Looking for Gatsby*; and Marlee Matlin on *I'll Scream Later*; She is a contributing critic for Entertainment Weekly's *Critical Mass*, a frequent film festival jurist and has also written widely for such publications as the New York Times, TV Guide and GQ. With a degree in journalism and a masters in communications theory from Texas Christian University, she began her career in Texas but now calls California home.

It was a risk for director Richard Linklater to go so dark in *Before Midnight*, the latest round of the romantic musings he began with his stars, Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke, nearly 20 years ago. The illusions of a young couple's more pristine love so captivating in *Before Sunrise* have been shelved so that the tipping point in their relationship can be laid bare. A devastating fight is the centerpiece now, the teasing flirtations a distant memory. Though the gauzy beauty of the earlier films remain, as does a sun-drenched European setting, this time Greece, what you will remember, what you will feel compelled to talk about long after, is the fight. It sears with an intensity that rivals another classic battle between the sexes, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Betsy Sharkey) [Read more](#)

There is a kind of denial we cling to when it comes to wild creatures in captivity. As if the smiling, performing orcas of SeaWorld are content to trade freedom for fish and applause. *Blackfish*,

director Gabriela Cowperthwaite's excellent new documentary, should change that. The film's focus is on SeaWorld's Tilikum, whose attack on veteran trainer Dawn Brancheau led to her horrific death in front of a theme-park audience (most of that footage isn't shown). "Blackfish" puts forth a powerful case for leaving these amazingly intelligent mammals in the wild. SeaWorld, which declined to be interviewed, and slammed the film before its release, does not look good. The story is built out of extraordinary footage of orcas "in the wild and in captivity" experts and former SeaWorld trainers. (Betsy Sharkey) [Read more](#)

The pressures of being a single father. The realization that despite everything, your kids still long for a mom. The difficulties of getting a teenage daughter's attention between texting and a boy. The boy. The treacherous emotional terrain of middle-age dating. This is "Despicable Me 2"? It is. The softhearted villain Gru, so disarmingly voiced by Steve Carell, has gotten a lot more than he bargained for after 2010's "Despicable Me." Adopting three adorable orphans brought a slew of issues into his life and those modern problems frame the sequel. What a refreshing twist. Also a risk. But I think the filmmakers were smart to try turning the animated kid-flick formula on its head and go for the adults as much as the kids. (Betsy Sharkey) [Read more](#)

"Fill the Void" is a transfixing, emotionally complex Israeli drama about arranged marriage in the ultra-Orthodox community that won the Venice Film Festival's lead actress prize for star Hadas Yaron. Back home the film was nominated for 13 Ophirs, the Israeli Academy Awards, and won seven, including best picture and director. (Kenneth Turan) [Read more](#)

Effortless and effervescent, "Frances Ha" is a small miracle of a movie, honest and funny with an aim that's true. It's both a timeless story of the joys and sorrows of youth and a dead-on portrait of how things are right now for a New York woman who, try as she might, can't quite get her life together. That would be the Frances of the title (the Ha isn't explained until the film's charming final frame), a joint creation of and career high point for both star Greta Gerwig and director Noah Baumbach, who met on the director's "Greenberg" and co-wrote the script. Together they have created an American independent film that feels off the cuff but is in fact exactly made by a filmmaker in total control of his resources. (Kenneth Turan) [Read more](#)

"The Hunt" is a terrifying cautionary tale about the loss of innocence, sexual abuse and children. But in a chilling twist, the innocence lost is that of a single father, a respected member of the community, a beloved kindergarten teacher suddenly pegged as a pedophile by an angry child. Starring Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen, "The Hunt" follows the accused teacher through the destruction wrought by a single lie that sparks a wildfire of rumors and recriminations. It is a devastating film to watch and a tragic reminder that the mere whiff of such scandalous behavior is condemnation enough. (Betsy Sharkey) [Read more](#)

A plot of ferocious creatures called Kaiju facing off against massive robots called Jaegers, may not, frankly, sound all that appealing. But director Guillermo del Toro is more than a filmmaker, he's a fantasy visionary with an outsized imagination and a fanatical specificity, and the results are spectacular. (Kenneth Turan) [Read more](#)

There are underdogs. And there are underdogs. Then there is "Turbo," a garden snail who dreams of winning the Indy 500. The latest 3-D animation event movie has an all-star cast starting with the ever-charming Ryan Reynolds as Turbo and the often-irritating Paul Giamatti as older brother Chet. Its story is as much about how big brothers can squelch little brothers' dreams as speed. The animation is great. There are taco trucks and other bumps along the way. But honestly, they pretty much had me at racing snails. (Betsy Sharkey) [Read more](#)

This irresistible effort has just become this year's top-grossing documentary, and if you haven't seen it yet, this might be a good time to catch up before the deluge of fall films hits. Veteran director Morgan Neville has made a moving and joyous behind-the-scenes film about the world of rock 'n' roll backup singers. It's a universe filled with big, bold personalities and the music they make: When you say names like Darlene Love, Merry Clayton and Lisa Fischer, you are conjuring up entire universes of sound. These women sing in a way that is transformative for us, and, it turns out, for them as well.

Director Neville has made that rare endeavor that pretty much everyone is guaranteed to enjoy. (Kenneth Turan) [Read more](#)

Readers flooded me with emails over the weekend; they couldn't say enough about the new indie "The Way Way Back." So I couldn't resist saying a bit more too. Don't miss one of this summer's pure pleasures. Written and directed by Nat Faxon and Jim Rash, the film is full of fun, family insights and just enough of a burn to keep things interesting. Its terrific acting ensemble includes Steve Carell, Toni Collette and a deliciously naughty Allison Janney. But go for the heart " Sam Rockwell as Owen, the cool dude who runs the local kid-magnet, a water park. Imagine Peter Pan nearing 40, in board shorts, a day-old scruff and a wicked wit and you've got Owen to a T. He's particularly good with teen strays, and 14-year-old Duncan (Liam James) is the wounded cub who becomes his summer project. (Betsy Sharkey) [Read more](#)

Robert Lloyd is a television critic for the Los Angeles Times. He has written about TV for the Times since 2003, and from 1996 to 2001 for the L.A. Weekly, where he has also worked as an editor, columnist and critic. He was an editor and columnist for L.A. Style magazine, and wrote the popular Today column for the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner six days a week for four years. His piece on L.A. session men, "Time of the Sessions," won a Deems Taylor Award, and he has worked as a musician as well, with John Wesley Harding, Carlene Carter, Kelly Hogan, Neko Case, Victoria Williams and Syd Straw, among others.

The attack of the streaming networks continues, with two new Hulu series produced in-house: the animated superhero comedy "The Awesomes" and the semi-improvised Western comedy "Quick Draw." Starring and co-created by Seth Myers (with "Saturday Night Live"/"Jimmy Fallon" producer Michael Shoemaker), "The Awesomes" is a cartoon about a team of reject superheroes led by Myers' weak but smart Prock (for "professor doctor") in the wake of his famous superheroic father's leaving Earth to get some reading done. The marquee cast includes "SNL" personnel Taran Killam, Emily Spivey, Paula Pell, Kenan Thompson (as a hero who can embody his thoughts, but only in the form of his smothering mother) and Bill Hader as smooth, Montalbanesque supervillain Dr. Malocchio. As crush object Hotwire, Rashida Jones lights up the soundtrack, if such a synthetic figure may be allowed; that Ann Perkins sweetness comes through. Given the talent, the jokes can be surprisingly creaky, but it's amiable enough. It has an adult bent (bleeped expletives, sexual situations, a planet where everyone has breasts for eyes, some blood). With a little surgery, "The Awesomes" might be Fun for the Whole Family. And might be in any case, of course, depending on your family. (Robert Lloyd) (www.hulu.com)

To someone who spends his life watching television " professionally, friends, professionally " it seems self-evident that casting is, if not, everything, then ... nah, it's everything. No idea, no matter how clever, no script, no matter how well written or directed, can flourish when the actors are wrong for the parts, or even not sufficiently right. The great casting directors can look into the future; they see before a film or pilot is made what everyone else will see afterward. Tom Donahue's zesty, clip-filled, start-studded documentary focuses on casting genius Marion Dougherty, whose career began in the beginnings of television, when it was a New York enterprise that looked to the theater, and took her eventually to Hollywood and executive positions at Paramount and Warner Bros. She helped start the screen careers of James Dean, Robert Redford, Jack Lemmon, Robert Duvall, Glenn Close and Diane Lane; she suggested Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman for "Midnight Cowboy," sent Gene Wilder in for Willy Wonka and matched Danny Glover with Mel Gibson in "Lethal Weapon." (Robert Lloyd) (HBO, Monday) [Read more](#)

Premiering this week and already announced for an American remake. (This is the proverbial well enough that wants to be left alone.) A detective serial set on the dramatic Dorset coast, it stars David Tennant as a big-city cop in retreat from a previous public failure who winds up in the job Olivia Coleman had thought was hers. Immediately, there is a dead child at the bottom of a beachside cliff. There's much here that's standard for the genre: antagonistic partners learning to work together, ambitious journalists getting in their way, the dour mood that has become de rigueur for prestige crime series. And I have some thoughts about the ending we can discuss privately later. But the sense of place, quality of performance and natural dialog quash most qualms. (The seaside

small town setting and richly pictured locals make it kind of like downbeat "Doc Martin.") Tennant, bearded and dark and seemingly thinner and pointier than ever, keeps memories of his beloved Tenth Doctor at bay; Coleman, who has a long history in British comedy (you can watch her now on Hulu as the sparky wife of Tom Hiddleston's "Rev"), is wonderful as a policewoman, wife, mother and mourner torn this way and that. (BBC America, Wednesdays) [Read more](#)

Nashville singer-songwriter and accordionist LynnMarie Rink lays out her life lessons with abundant humor and heroic honesty, in a biographical account that is potently universal for being pointedly specific. Director Michael Kearns stewards this born storyteller with calm expertise. Prepare to laugh through your tears. Ends Sunday, Aug. 11. [Read more](#)

This sublimely raucous take on Alex Timbers and Michael Friedman's savage emo rock evisceration of American politics via the seventh president of the United States is an in-your-face triumph. Director Kari Hayter maintains a taut balance between satirical snark and sober intent, her fervent ensemble fronted by the revelatory Keaton Williams. Bloody bloody magnificent. (David C. Nichols) (Ends Sunday, Aug. 11) [Read more](#)

Christopher Shinn's psychologically acute drama, now having its Los Angeles premiere courtesy of Rogue Machine, offers an intriguing tussle between Kelly, a psychotherapist, and the memory of her husband, Craig, who was killed in the Iraq War under circumstances that leave open the possibility of suicide. This past is brought back in all its anguish and bitterness by the unexpected visit of Peter, Craig's identical twin brother. The acting is as meticulously observed as it is emotionally tense. And though confined to a cramped room, the staging fluidly handles the shifts of time and situation. (Charles McNulty) (Ends Monday, August 5) [Read more](#)

Prolifically produced for almost 40 years, this lunatic revue, set in a seedy cabaret somewhere south of the border and delivered mostly in gibberish Spanish, has been directed by Alan Shearman and stars Ron House, both of whom have been with the show, as writers and performers, since its inception. Formerly two acts, the play has been judiciously pared to a breezy 75 minutes — and the comic momentum never flags. Wearing a hairpiece that looks like a small animal in distress, House is the lynchpin of a superlative, marvelously agile cast. If you don't like broad slapstick, give "El Grande" a very wide berth. But if you're in the mood to get goofy and giggle, this could be your ticket. (F. Kathleen Foley) (Through November 23) [Read more](#)

Before gay marriage was fashionable — and long before it was legal — the comedian Judy Gold thought there should be a sitcom about her family: two moms raising two sons. Her one-woman show tells the history of her failed network pitches and riffs hilariously on her lifelong desire to be on TV, whether to escape a lonely childhood or to provide a "road map" to future lesbian parents. (Margaret Gray) (Ends Sunday, August 18) [Read more](#)

Although this well-appointed dramedy about what might have gone down in the Hampton House the night Cassius Clay became world heavyweight champion slightly overdoes the 20/20 hindsight, that doesn't stop it from grabbing our imaginations. Director Carl Cofield keeps the action tautly entertaining, and his actors, who express rather than mimic their real-life counterparts, are first-rate. (David C. Nichols) (Ends September 15) [Read more](#)

N. Richard Nash's 1950s-era chestnut about a — spinster — swept up in romance by a dazzling con man can be laughably archaic. However, director Jack Heller crafts a striking, specific portrait of a bygone time. As for the pitch-perfect performances, they should all be distilled, bottled and preserved for posterity. (F. Kathleen Foley) (Through December 22) [Read more](#)

This rip-roaring take on William Shakespeare's romantic comedy opens the 40th anniversary season at Theatricum Botanicum with marvelous forward momentum. Shrewdly trimming text without losing clarity or hilarity, director Ellen Geer achieves a gratifyingly straightforward triumph, and the fearless players embrace some merry passion at every turn, starting with inspired leads Willow Geer and Aaron Hendry. (David C. Nichols) (Ends Sept. 29) [Read more](#)

Arthur Miller's durable drama about an Italian American longshoreman's incestuous obsession with his orphaned niece is helmed by co-directors Marilyn Fox and Dana Jackson, whose wrenchingly truthful staging, while larger than life, never lapses into overstatement. As for the actors, from Vince Melocchi's towering Eddie, the ill-fated protagonist of the piece, right down to the non-speaking bystanders, you simply won't see any better. (F. Kathleen Foley) (Extended through December 1)
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Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted remark, "It is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz," raises questions about the ability of artists to represent the Holocaust. How can the cultural tools that were complicit in genocide comment on its barbarity? Jackie Sibblies Drury's spry metatheatrical play (with the full title of "We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South-West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915") grapples with just this type of knotty problem. The setting of her drama, ambitiously undertaken by the Matrix Theatre Company, is a rehearsal hall, in which a company of six actors sets out to create a theater piece on the African genocide that took place in Namibia at the beginning of the 20th century. Viewing political reality through the lens of theatrical collaboration is a time-tested dramatic formula. Drury is somewhat better at playfully setting up her conceit than in developing it, but this play (performed with vigorous commitment by a young cast) introduces a sharp sensibility to the American theater, one fearless enough to tackle geopolitical concerns in adventurous theatrical form. (Charles McNulty) (Ends Sunday, Aug. 11) Read more

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