



You can be at any stage of personal development and watch the film *Bugs*. I play Baby Shay in the movie so naturally I watched the movie from a baby's perspective. While writing this I realized that I have played a baby or a child in most productions I have been in. As a child I played a "peasant child" in one play. In a high school production, I played a child doing a dance.

Bugs is a fun, very funny yet somehow also depressing and angry art film written, directed, produced and edited by Life of a Craphead (Amy Lam and Jon McCurley). It uses stylized visual effects such as a strange department store "The Bay" sign:



Real sign



Bugs sign

as well as other branded signs. The animations in the movie feel simultaneously 90's and modern and there's characters who talk like cartoon baby birds or chipmunks in a bus advertisement for cellphones. The movie centers around a bug family, the other bugs in the garden, and birds.

Watching it, I don't let any of it process on an intellectual level. There is no plot in baby life – only bodily sensation, mood, scent, visuals, and sound. Baby state: no responsibilities, don't see the big picture, at the mercy of others' kindnesses or lack thereof, no self-awareness or self-consciousness, a selfish "me" state that we hopefully incorporate and keep evolving to a state that, if the conditions are correct, may include interdependent societal living later in life.

On set, one of the directors, Jon McCurley, would give me direction to go to imaginary realms and situations. Eg. Jon: “the baby sees a monster and is riding on a rollercoaster.” This direction elicited a standout performance on my part.

Here is a poem I wrote about being young:

HAPPENPLAY

You knew it from the start, when they dropped you off at that place, and you saw all colours of blocks and you tried to build something and make sense of patterns and you felt intuitively the colours but you couldn't explain it and the other children were there on their mats with their snacks and you didn't know why things happened and you didn't know that you were sensitive until 30 plus years later and people called you gentle and quiet but inside you knew you were an aggressive, aspirational person. Sitting at home, just you and your essential oils, hoping to god that your limbic system will respond when the time is right, firing up the correct emotion or drive



As I let the experience of watching *Bugs* wash over me, I thought it was like the Maya Angelou quote turned Facebook meme: **“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”**

To help me grow up I interviewed Amy Lam of *Life of a Craphead*. She tells me that the movie is about success and failure. She says, “Everything circles around awards and degrees and political positions.” In response to my question of “What inspires you to make art” she refers to a poem by Langston Hughes called “Evil” and a quote from Mike Kelley about “making art to give other people my problems.”

Funny on-set story: One of the hardest things that happened to me on set was when the catering person got me a gluten-free pastry for a special dessert but I couldn't eat it because I knew it had sugar in it. I felt so bad about it, all my guilt, shame, and entitlement colliding in a single moment. I smuggled it out of the building and gave it away to a friend.



The bugs seemed to be unhappy and conflicted. I can relate to this (see above). They reminded me of Harmony Korine's *Gummo* characters or *Peanuts*. Like when there are no adults around in a scary post-apocalyptic society or purgatory or some place or time when love doesn't exist anymore.

The movie evokes stucco, broke-assedness, cockroaches, non-filtered tap water in marginally dirty glasses, sunshine exposing a flat of very dusty soft plastic Nestle water bottles on a Sunday, and small-mindedness. One of my favorite lines is a bug saying "I'm getting an honorary degree from a bird." This line is delivered in an computer-animated beach scene, set in a busy intersection of Toronto, Canada where two characters argue about which of their life events are more important and which one treats the other with more negligence.



I was glad to see Toronto's corporate garden signs make an appearance as a location in the Bug Garden. Finally someone has given those corporate garden signs their just due. Whenever I pass these real signs entering and exiting the city of Toronto I am in disbelief that someone thinks they are a good idea -- the hilarious crassness of using plants in service of corporate branding.



In contrast to the janky-looking and -acting bugs, I am seduced by the birds' currency of cool. I see them as more composed than the bugs and functioning from a more evolved and organized

operating system. There is a standout scene of the uber-macho and together birds trying to start a generator to power their 'rock-music' protest while hanging out in a parkade which is the University and revving the engines and hanging out of the windows of their painted Autoshare cars. There is a smoothie bar in Bird Country with sexy-cool rollerblading birds and the visiting bug accidentally/on purpose childishly scribbles with Sharpie on a wall.



When one of the birds travels to Bird Country to give a presentation at Bird University, a bird says to him, “You know what, one of these days someone is going to stop you, you know maybe not me, maybe not today but someone a little more brave or charismatic than me is going to stop you.” This echoes a previous line in the movie when the visiting bird in the Bug Garden says to a bug, “One of these days someone is going to beat you up, not me but someone who’s more confrontational than me, this whole bug garden is messed up, we’re never coming back, do you want to go get some food before we get out of here?” These lines speak to the idea that we as a culture or maybe as humans believe that there is always someone out there that is more qualified than us to act.



Nutritional supplement pairing recommendation for movie viewing: E3 Live BrainON, to counteract brain fog.



It is as if in life no feeling comes to fruition. The *Bugs* viewer's only job may be to feel their feeling and watch as it passes.

Lisa Smolkin
2016