

DAILYSERVING

AN INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

November 29, 2015 Written by Tanya Gayer

Bechdel Test Movie Night: Foxy Brown

Shotgun Reviews are an open forum where we invite the international art community to contribute timely, short-format responses to an exhibition or event. If you are interested in submitting a Shotgun Review, please click [this link](#) for more information. In this Shotgun Review, Tanya Gayer reviews Bechdel Test Movie Night: Foxy Brown at New Parkway Theater in Oakland.



Alison Bechdel. *Bechdel Test*, c. 1985; comic strip from *Dykes to Watch Out For*. Courtesy of the Artist.

Foxy Brown (1974) is widely described as a blaxploitation film—a genre that filmmaker and educator Cheryl Dunye asserts are films that profit from making a spectacle out of lead black characters, but at the same time promote the voice of the black community in pop culture. On November 8 the New Parkway Theater screened this film as part of a series hosted by Dunye. The series features films that pass the Bechdel test.^[1] This seemingly easy

requirement is surprisingly difficult for most films to achieve. Each of the films featured in the series are followed by an audience discussion moderated by Dunye.

The moment where *Foxy Brown* passes the Bechdel test is a scene that takes place in a lesbian bar. The main character, Foxy, rushes into the bar in search of her friend, Claudia, only to interrupt the advances of another woman. It is not surprising that Foxy and the woman do not talk about a man, given the venue; rather, they insult one another. The room erupts into motion as a fast-moving fight scene ensues. Bar stools fly, hair is pulled, and when one woman is tossed into the jukebox and electrocuted, the Motown music that plays in the background comes to an abrupt end.

The fact that this scene is where the film passes is telling of the questionable nature of empowerment seen in the film. Much of the post-film discussion grappled with the film's interest in shock value versus genuine black and/or female agency seen through the perspective of the white male film director Jack Hill.^[2] Audience response was overwhelming, and comments included: "Who, then, is empowered?"; "If the film passes the test, is it also seen as feminist?"; and, "Considering the amount of violence, why was it rated PG-13? Does this contribute to who this film was marketed [for]?"

These questions do not seem so far removed from the current concerns seen in the Black Lives Matter movement forty years after the release of *Foxy Brown*. In fact, the aims of this series at the New Parkway are advanced by such critical and respectful discussions about race and gender. There is no doubt that the film industry continues to perpetuate racial stereotypes and unbalanced gender roles, but communal conversations that concern these topics are far more prevalent than in the 1970s—and warrant praise when they take place so eloquently. *Foxy Brown* passed the Bechdel test satisfactorily, but what is, perhaps, more important is that it encouraged a much needed discussion in a cultural realm outside of academia. For this it truly receives the Bechdel stamp of approval.

Bechdel Test Movie Night: *Foxy Brown* was an event that took place on November 8, 2015, at the New Parkway Theater in Oakland.

[1] To pass the test, a film must feature at least two women who talk to one another about something other than a man.

[2] Foxy often defeats the villains of the film only after she is raped or degraded, and the dialogue is packed with offensive, derogatory slang.

Tanya Gayer is a curator and writer based in Oakland, CA. She is a dual degree masters candidate in Curatorial Practice + Visual and Critical Studies at California College of the Arts. Gayer has held professional positions at various arts institutions including Richmond Art Center (Richmond, CA), Pro Arts (Oakland, CA), Arlington Public Art (Arlington, VA), Gallery Hijinks (San Francisco, CA), and Espacio Minimo (Madrid, Spain).