

## Westsider & Ennui

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The whole self-published, photocopied ‘zine movement back in the ’80s-’90s was kind of like underground films. The end products were scrappy looking, hard to find, fiercely personal and had a specific awareness of their medium. While the internet killed most of the zines off, Charles Doran instead moved from the printed word to the moving image.

I only know this from chatting with Doran briefly over email. I wasn’t aware of his zine back in the day when I was buying them up — I mean, there were zillions of the damn things out there — but it was called [Glossolalia](#) and which he describes as an “L.A. Punk Zine.” If you click the title over there, you can see Doran’s brief tribute page to it. (P.S. The term “glossolalia” means “speaking in tongues.”)

But Doran is still very much involved in L.A. culture through his short films. The two of which he sent me, *Westsider* and *Ennui*, are both about very specific, but different L.A. types. However, this doesn't mean that they're inaccessible to audiences who don't live here. While there are some in-jokes to appease the folks "back home," the concept of geographical snobbery is totally universal. For example, when I lived in NYC it was Manhattan vs. Brooklyn. Now, in L.A. it's the Westside vs., well, just about every other neighborhood.

The "Westside" out here are the affluent beach communities, e.g. Venice, Santa Monica, Brentwood and Malibu, with Beverly Hills thrown in for good measure. The main character of *Westsider*, which is Doran's most recent film, is a young architect hoping to make his mark by designing awesome structures — but only on Los Angeles's Westside. Although he comes across as a junior Howard Roark wannabe with his single-minded determination, he's such a talentless hack he's probably never even read Ayn Rand's classic novel, *The Fountainhead*, or it's doubtful he even knows anything about Frank Lloyd Wright. (Actually, Wright's famous L.A. houses, *Hollyhock* and *Ennis*, are over here by me on the Eastside.) His idol then? *Frank Gehry*. Finally, punished for his sins, not of moral *objectivism*, but of selfish status-climbing, he's banished to the worst place on Earth for Westside-lovers: the San Fernando Valley, i.e. the land of tacky stucco structures and strip bars.

Unlike a cheap, photocopied zine, Doran has shot an absolutely beautiful film. Although 8mm film is a dying art, Doran and his cinematographer Laura Daroca use a saturated, vibrant color palette for a very rich, lush look. You can understand the main character's obsession with the Westside when it's as vivid looking as Daroca shoots it. But, at the same time, 8mm is a very grainy film, plus colors smartly change with each neighborhood profiled — the Valley is done up in ugly sepia tones — and there is no sync sound in the film. The story is told entirely through the main character's narration, so like in reading a zine you're aware of it's photocopied nature, when watching *Westsider*, you're still very aware of the celluloid medium even after it's transferred to DVD.

And, normally, while straight-up narration usually bugs the hell out of me (just a little pet peeve of mine), Doran, who also wrote the script, does a good job of setting up the visuals as a counterpoint to the words spoken. In the film's funniest scene, while the budding young architectural "genius" lays out his elaborate plan to become the king of the Westside to his firm and his delusional ranting gets more and more evangelical, we only see his superiors' puzzled reactions in pantomime as the devout Westsider digs his grave deeper and deeper. There's no one to save him from his own irrational stubbornness and his fate is his own to deal with.

*Ennui* is Doran's earlier, Eastside-centric short film. The format is much the same as *Westsider* with a single protagonist, this time a woman, with no dialogue except for her narration. This film is also shot on grainy 8mm, but if there were a film that looked like a zine, it's this. Instead of electrifying color, *Ennui* is shot in a muddy B&W, which greatly reflects the grittiness of L.A.'s urban Eastside. The main character is also a total artsy punk rock chick and the film is littered with, not zines, but crappy, photocopied concert notices, a kissing cousin of the zine movement.

The plot is basically an attack on the pretentious post-art-school crowd that's almost too easy a target. But I like really gritty looking films like this. It's an ugly, gray, depressing world that Doran, again working with cinematographer Daroca, envisions. A place the main character calls home in a fit of delusional superiority, again not unlike the star of *Westsider*. But somehow that dirty, crowded urbanscape is just as alive as the pop color infusion of Doran's more recent film, even if these two locations appear to be on opposite sides of the globe. They're not. They're just a couple of miles apart.

To find out more about these two films, please visit their official sites: [Westsider](#) and [Ennui](#).

Also, as final notes, *Ennui* was awarded Best Short Film at the 2005 [Boston Underground Film Festival](#) (before I started tracking these kinds of things on Bad Lit), while *Westsider* recently played at this year's [Portland Underground Film Festival](#).

Posted By: [Mike Everleth](#) @ 10:01 pm

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