

Achieving The Essence: A Sartrean Analysis of The Bad Faith in Soul (2020) Film

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*"Can any one of you by worrying add
a single hour to your life?"*

Matthew 6:27 (NIV)

ABSTRACT

This study aims to address the quarter-life crisis issue among the youth, which is found in the film *Soul* (2020), through the lens of Sartrean existentialism. This analysis involves a qualitative method, cinematography, and semiotics approach. A qualitative method and semiotics approach is used to examine symbolic meanings in the film from the dialogues, the body language, and facial expressions. Whilst the cinematography is used to examine the film deeper by analyzing the camera works, background, lighting, and color scheme. As a result: **1)** Joe's beliefs in a predetermined purpose and 22's obsession in quest instead of making their own meaning and purpose serves as a symbolic representation of bad faith. **2)** Joe and 22 believed that the "spark," which every soul receives before they can go to earth, is a soul's purpose. But one of the Jerry's later explains that the "spark," is not a soul's purpose but rather the willingness to live. This reflects Sartre's idea that humans do not inherit a predetermined purpose. **3)** Existing and truly experiencing life helped Joe and 22 realize that human beings do not have a predetermined purpose, instead they have the freedom to create their own meaning and purpose. At its core, this paper argues that the film *Soul* (2020) has successfully portrayed the existential anxiety that emerges among the youth, while also providing an awareness and suggestion for them to find their own purpose in life instead of waiting for it. The significance of this paper is to spread awareness, especially among the youth, on how waiting until the purpose in life comes by itself plays a crucial role in experiencing an unstable mental health.

Keywords: *Sartrean Existentialism, Existential Crisis, Life Purpose, Soul (2020), Essence*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is defined as a form of artistic expression that utilizes language and words in order to express emotions, ideas, and imagination in a way that can touch the hearts of the readers. These works enlighten readers regarding human emotions and actions, while also allowing readers to view the world through different perspectives. Through this process, readers are able to develop a more deepened understanding of social issues, cultural values, human relationships, and many more. In

addition, literature often addresses real life problems that are relevant to everyday life. And by presenting these issues through stories and characters, readers are able to gain numerous valuable life lessons that they may apply in their everyday life.

A study by Hasyim et al. (2024) on the quarter-life crisis reveals that a significant number of individuals in their early adulthood experience profound anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion regarding their sense of purpose and future. The study reveals that a significant proportion of individuals frequently experience a sense of aimlessness and struggle to define their identity in the midst of high societal expectations and personal goals. Consequently, individuals may begin to question the meaning of their existence. As a result, this can lead to negative impacts on their mental wellbeing. This study suggests that the process of identity formation is a complex and essential developmental stage that has a profound influence on an individual's overall sense of completeness.

The film *Soul* (2020), was released directly to streaming on the Disney Plus platform on 25 December, 2020. This marked the first ever Pixar Film to debut directly on Disney Plus. *Soul* is an animated film that was produced by Pixar Animation Studios and published by Walt Disney Pictures. The film was directed by Pete Docter, who co-wrote the screenplay with Kemp Powers and Mike Jones. The film *Soul* (2020) won several major awards, including the *Academy Award for Best Animated Feature* and *Best Original Score*. While the film is a “dramedy” with fantasy elements and stunning visuals, it is rated PG (Parental Guidance Suggested) due to its themes and language. The film itself is considered best suited to viewers that are aged 8 and older, with the latter who are most likely to grasp the deeper themes and message of the film. This animated film explores several significant real life issues that remain relevant to this day. Ultimately, it gives a reflection that life’s true meaning is about appreciating every small moment, rather than achieving big dreams or success.

The film takes place in New York City, specifically Manhattan and Queens. The film “*Soul*” tells the story of a young man named Joe Gardner, a middle school music teacher, who has an immense love for jazz and aspires to become a renowned pianist. Following the opportunity to play with a well known jazz band, an incident occurs, which causes his soul to get separated from his body and transported to a place called the “*Great Beyond*.” The term “*Great Beyond*” represents the afterlife to which souls go after death. Joe then sets out on a quest to reunite his soul and body. This process leads him to encounter a soul named 22, who is uncertain about experiencing life as a human being on Earth. Through this adventure, the film explores themes such as the search of identity and the search of life’s true purpose and meaning. The film was created with the aim to teach the audience that “*the life of an individual is much more than just reaching a single dream or success, rather it is about appreciating every small moment in life that makes it meaningful.*” This film is

created with the very purpose of understanding oneself and recognizing what it truly means to live a full life.

The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in Sartre's Ontological Existentialism, as articulated in his book, *"Existentialism is a Humanism"* (1946) alongside *"Being and Nothingness"* (1943). Sartre's theory was shaped during the World War II crisis, a period where the chaos of the war forces individuals to be responsible for their own choices, without anyone guiding them. By studying and using phenomenology to describe human consciousness as "nothingness," Sartre rejected determinism, which he argues that humans are not a static biological being which was created with a fixed purpose, but rather as a being who lives in "nothingness" which allows themselves to continuously self-create and define who and what they are. In this view, *"Existence precedes essence."* (Sartre, 1946, p. 22), which means a human first exists then later defines who and what they are through their actions and choices.

Based on the issue above, this paper will utilize the theoretical framework of Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism in order to break down and analyze the actions and thoughts of the characters in the film. Existentialism according to Sartre is a philosophical theory that primarily focuses on human freedom, personal responsibility, and the meaning of life. The central principle of Sartre's Existentialism is that *"Existence precedes essence."* (Sartre, 1946, p. 22). That is because he believes that *"Man is condemned to be free; condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does."* (Sartre, 1946, p. 29). This is the concept that human beings exist first, encounter the world, and that their identity will be formed subsequently in order to define who they are.

Unlike objects, which have a predetermined purpose before they exist, human beings are given the freedom to determine their own purpose through the choices they make in life. Subsequently, this freedom comes with responsibility. Sartre further develops the concept of freedom by arguing that human beings are not only free, but are inescapably bound to that freedom. Although human beings are born with the ability to choose and define their own identity, they can never be free from the consequences that come with making those choices. According to Sartre, human beings are *"condemned to be free."* Sartre believes that these responsibilities extend beyond oneself, and it extends beyond humanity. This is the fact that when an individual makes a decision, they are setting an example for the rest of humanity, implicitly suggesting how one should act. As a result, freedom is perceived not as a privilege but as a responsibility and a condition that cannot be evaded, as individuals are constantly aware of every decision they make and how their decisions reflect their own identity.

A recent study by Agwu et al. (2024) analyzes the personal experience of the characters from *No Exit* (1944), a play by Sartre. They did not just analyze the words spoken by the characters, but also their body language and silence. They found that “The Look”, which is the feeling of being judged and turned into an object when other people see us, affects the relationship between the characters. Agwu et al. (2024) mainly focuses on identifying how nonverbal communication in the play *No Exit* (1944) reinforced and articulated Sartre’s idea of “The Look” and affected behavior among characters. While the two studies use a qualitative method and a semiotic approach, this study will also use cinematography to analyze the object of analysis unlike the previous study. This study will mainly focus on identifying how *Soul* (2020) represented Sartre’s concept of “Bad Faith” through the characters’ life.

In conclusion, based on the issue above, Sartre’s idea of existentialism is studied. By using Sartre’s concept that existence precedes essence, this paper proves that humans do not need to reach a specific goal to start life. This idea focuses on human freedom, personal responsibility, and the meaning of life. Throughout the whole film, it is concluded that the “spark” in life is not determined by one goal, but rather focuses on life itself. Joe Gardner is more than just a “jazz musician,” he is a consciousness that is free to find meaning in the simplest thing possible, like a falling maple seed just as much as in a piano performance. The film sees the transformation of Joe’s perspective of himself, he once saw himself as a fixed object with a single purpose but later sees himself as a free subject capable of anything. This study highlights that Sartre’s philosophy remains relevant to young people, who often have an excessive obsession with success, a fear of failure, and pressures that undermine their sense of self-confidence. A human is not a fixed object with a set definition. Even if someone is currently a “teacher,” that label is not permanent because there can always be a change of path. A person is a long project shaped by future possibilities. The purpose of this research is to examine how human beings are not predetermined beings, but rather they continuously shape their identity and meaning through everyday choices, ultimately highlighting that life’s true value lies in appreciating everyday moments.

Binary Opposition

Existence	Essence
Existence refers to the idea that human beings are not born with a predetermined purpose, rather they create their own meaning and identity through their everyday actions and decisions. This is shown through a soul called	In contrast, essence refers to the belief that human beings are born with a predetermined purpose. This is illustrated through Gardner’s initial mindset, where he is convinced that his life has no meaning without his “destiny”,

22, where their definition of living does not rely on achieving a single goal, rather it focuses on life itself. It implies that the significance of life is found in the simple things that happen in life, rather than just waiting for “fate.” <i>“Man is, before all else, something that projects itself into a future, and is conscious of doing so.”</i> (Sartre, 1946, p. 23).	which is to be a jazz musician and play jazz. He was so caught up with it that he got disconnected with his surroundings. <i>“The phenomenal being manifests itself; it manifests its essence as well its existence, and it is nothing but the well connected series of its manifestations”</i> (Sartre, 1943, p. 5).
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METHOD

This research was conducted using the qualitative descriptive method and was executed through the theoretical framework of Existentialism, primarily utilizing Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory, with the objective of further analyzing and understanding the concept of existence, essence, freedom, and responsibility in *Soul*. Particularly focusing on the character’s journey to self-discovery and understanding of life’s true purpose. The data for this research consisted of both video and audio components. The collection of data was achieved through meticulous analysis in order to analyze the dialogues, scenes, themes in the film, character behaviours, and interactions. The primary focus being the interactions between living with a predetermined purpose, and finding joys in simple things without living with a predetermined purpose, as experienced by the main character in the film. In addition, this research utilized cinematic techniques such as lighting, colour, camera work, and background music as analytical tools that contribute to the making of this paper. The theoretical framework utilized in this research is Existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre, particularly his works titled *“Existentialism is a Humanism”* (1946) and *“Being and Nothingness”* (1943). These works provided the philosophical framework in order to interpret the characters’ decisions, and how the characters’ perception of purpose evolves throughout the film. The methodology draws upon various literary works and film analysis to ensure a clear, structured, and unbiased analysis and remains focused on unveiling the deeper meaning and messages of the film.

DISCUSSION

1. The Illusion That Life Has Only One Purpose

The film *Soul* first begins with the introduction of the main character, Joe Gardner, who is a middle school band teacher who has an immense passion for jazz. The scene starts with Joe teaching his students music in a classroom. The room is filled with a range of sounds, originating from a variety of musical instruments, as the students perform a song that has been taught to them by Joe. The setting appears to be modest, with muted colours and soft natural lighting. The atmosphere lacks

excitement and the students give the impression of being disinterested. In one moment, he encourages his students to feel music rather than to simply play the notes. Contrary to his obvious passion for music, his facial expressions display obvious displeasure as he does not regard teaching as a meaningful role. Rather, he perceives it as something that is temporary that prevents him from reaching his true ambition.



Joe's belief in a fixed purpose is first revealed when one of his students got lost in the music. This experience serves as a trigger that leads him to recall a childhood experience with music. As he recalls this memory, he says, "*That's when I knew... I was born to play.*" [02:31]. The phrase "born to play" suggests that he is a being with a fixed purpose. This implies that Joe does not perceive being a musician as a choice that is shaped from experience, rather it is a destiny that he is born with. This belief is further emphasized when Joe is informed by his friend that he has been given the opportunity to partake in a professional jazz performance with the famous Dorothea Williams. The



scene uses brighter lighting and warmer colors compared to earlier in the film. The camera angle gradually shifts to get a close up of Joe, as the camera follows Joe as he walks down the street. Joe's face shows excitement as he smiles while he talks on the phone saying, "*I did it. I got the gig!*" [08:54]. The sunlight that illuminates the streets creates an energetic

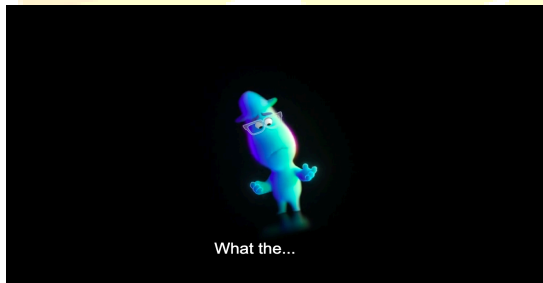
and vibrant atmosphere that mirrors Joe's current feelings and beliefs. In which he believes that his life is finally gaining meaning. This line demonstrates how Joe views the jazz performance as the ultimate achievement of his existence.

This mindset contradicts with Sartre's statement that, "*Existence precedes essence.*" (Sartre, 1946, p. 22). Sartre believes in the idea that individuals are not born with a predetermined purpose or meaning, rather individuals continuously shape their identity through everyday actions and decisions. However, Joe believes that his identity as a musician has already been established and this leads him to perceive that the purpose of his life is nothing more than merely to realize it and fulfill it. Furthermore, Joe's mindset reflects Sartre's concept of bad faith where he states that, "*Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of falsehood.*" (Sartre, 1943, p. 89). Bad faith is defined as the act of denying the truth where one denies one's own freedom, in order to avoid accepting the reality of

one's existence. Joe convinces himself that the sole purpose of his existence is to simply become a jazz musician, as he reduces his life to one singular purpose. Joe treats his existence as fixed and predetermined, when in reality life's purpose or meaning is found through many different everyday decisions and experiences.

2. The Absurdity of Life and The Bad Faith

Upon receiving the good news, performing a gig with Dorothea Williams, Joe happily walked home whilst calling his friend to tell them that he got the gig he has been dreaming of. As Joe walks further, the lighting in the film progressively gets darker as he reaches his final destination, the sewer where he clumsily died. The change in the lighting represents a happy, hopeful, and excited atmosphere which suddenly turns into a serious atmosphere. Joe's sudden death shows how absurd the world is. Camus (1942) explains that absurdity can "strike" anyone in the face. This means, a life changing event could happen to anyone at any time and any place for no reason, representing the absurdity of life. Furthermore, "*Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance.*" (Sartre, 1938/1964, p. 180), which shows how everything, even deaths, can happen instantly, just like how Joe dies instantly "by chance." In the



next scene, Joe fell into this empty dark void which left him in confusion. In the scene, the camera zoomed out to show the emptiness and hollowness of the "void," which is later zoomed in to show Joe's emotions. His confusion is shown through his facial expressions and when he says, "*What the...*" [09:30].

Joe's confusion towards his own death shows how anything and everything can happen so suddenly that humans itself cannot even predict when it will happen and why it happened.

In the next scene, Joe found himself standing in the middle of a "road" which leads to a mysterious place. When he asked people around him where the road leading them was, they answered "*The Great Beyond*" which is human's final destination. Upon hearing this, Joe refused to move forward, he said



"This can't happen today. I'm not dyin' today. Not when my life just started." [10:54]. Joe's statement contradicts Sartre's idea where life does not start when humans finally achieve their essences, but rather life starts the moment a human exists first. Joe acts like he achieved his essences during his existence, but according to Sartre essence is finally achieved by the time a human faces death, *"Obviously, your action will be limited by your death;"* (Sartre, 1946, p. 35). When a human being exists they should not wait for their essence to come on its own, instead humans must create their own essence throughout their existence and wait until death sets their true essence.

3. The Great Before

When Joe is panicking he finds himself falling again, this time breaking through barriers and eventually falling into the *"Great Before."* The scene suddenly becomes bright compared to the previous place which was gloomy and dark, while showing the surroundings of Joe from his current position. The Great Before is visually created with soft pastel colors that is soothing to the eye, with minimalistic surroundings that creates a peaceful surrounding. In this place, he gets surrounded by little creatures which he later discovered were new souls.



Within this realm, souls are prepared before being sent to Earth, where each and one of them are assigned their own traits and are expected to discover their "spark" as a condition for living on Earth. Joe meets the Jerrys who sensed his confusion and later asks questions about the current location and how to get back to Earth. One of the Jerrys explains that the new souls will enter the Earth *"Once they get a complete personality."* [15:26]. The system in the Great Before states that the souls must find their "spark" before entering earth, which contradicts with Sartre's view.



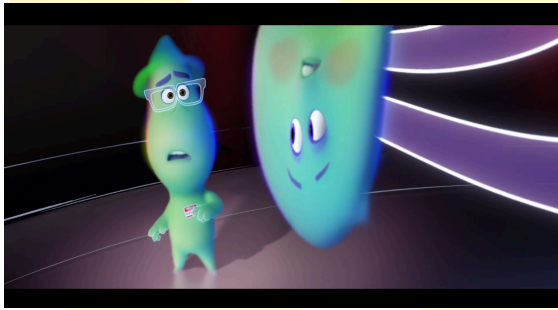
The contradiction between Sartre's philosophy and the system of the Great Before reflects Existentialism vs. Essentialism. Sartre's side is in existentialism and the Great Before supports essentialism. According to existentialism, humans first exist, encounter the world, and then shape their identity and meaning of life through everyday decisions. However the Great Before reverses this process, by saying that souls must find their meaning first, which is the "spark" before they are

allowed to live on Earth. Sartre believes that there is no such thing as a predetermined future, because humans are “condemned to be free” and must create their own future through their decisions. Nothing can exist in a soul before it physically enters the world. *“He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions, nothing more than his life.”* (Sartre, 1946, p. 37). The counselors treat the “spark” as something the new souls must search to have their passport to earth. According to Sartre, human potential, talents, and passions do not exist in undone souls. But rather exists when a human makes their choices. Joe’s obsession with becoming a successful jazz musician mirrors the system in the Great Before, which is where one’s existence only gains value after fulfilling a specific role. Instead of realizing that he is a free being who chooses to love music, Joe treats his talent as his calling. He believes that he is born for jazz and that his life is a failure without being a musician, this shows that Joe sees his musical ability as something fixed in his soul.

4. The Forming of Existential Anxiety Through 22

Joe first meets 22 in the Great Before after mistakenly being assigned as her mentor, where he is officially assigned to guide 22 toward finding her “spark.” The scene then introduces a character called Soul 22, a soul that has been in the Great Before for a while due to her inability to find her “spark.” In contrast to the other souls who appear to be gleaming and eager to discover their spark, 22 appears to be uninterested and even openly rejects existence itself. The scene uses bright colors and smooth shapes to further emphasize the surreal atmosphere. The perspective of the camera reveals the disconnection of 22 and the other souls, emphasizing the contrast between 22 and the other souls’ excitement and optimism.

The next scene transitions to a setting that narrates about Borgensson’s life, the true mentor and the individual whose identity is being borrowed by Joe. The environment appears dark yet illuminated with bright colors such as yellow and golden lights, accompanied with sounds of cheers to pinpoint every single moment of Borgensson’s life. When the space switches from Borgensson’s life to Joe’s life, the camera switches to a wide angle once more in order to capture every single detail of Joe’s life. The bright lively atmosphere quickly switches to



a dark, dull, and quiet atmosphere, despite the lighting that illuminates the figures in that space. This scene demonstrates how Joe's current life is dull because he has yet to understand the meaning of life and to enjoy life to the fullest. These scenes serve to emphasize how the life of an individual consists of numerous experiences, rather than just a sole defining purpose. Joe experiences frustration, driven by the urge to get back to Earth, achieve his goal, and resume living a "happy" and "content" life. He believes that his life holds no meaning and is dull due to his inability to achieve his goal before he "died." Because of that, Joe enthusiastically attempts to convince 22 that life is worth living, in order to find her "spark." But 22 further emphasizes her rejection of existence itself when she says, "*You can't crush a soul here. That's what life on Earth is for.*" [26:33]. This line demonstrates her pessimistic perspective of existence, implying that she views life as meaningless and filled with suffering and disappointment as opposed to meaning and fulfillment. Her perspective of existence reveals how detached she has become from the concept of living itself.

In the Great Before, it is stated that every soul must first discover their "spark" before they are allowed to go to Earth. 22's way of speaking and thinking is not merely a form of negativity, rather it reflects existential fear. She lacks interest in existence itself, because she could not find her "spark." Because she believes and is convinced that without that "spark", she is fundamentally incomplete. She refuses to exist and live on Earth because she was convinced that without a predetermined purpose, her life would have no meaning. While Sartre states that, "*Reality exists only in action.*" (Sartre, 1946, p. 37). Sartre believes that human beings are not born with a predetermined purpose. Instead, meaning is created through active engagement with existence. Without active engagement with existence, meaning cannot be created. 22 is always searching for the meaning of life because she believes that it will be discovered prior to existence, before she goes to Earth. She spends centuries avoiding life because she feels unworthy of living, all because she has never found her "spark." She has yet to understand that only through existence, will then meaning be found and created.

5. Experiencing Life Through Everyday Moments

22 and Joe finally land on Earth, although a mix up occurs. 22 accidentally inhabits Joe's



body, while Joe inhabits a therapy cat's body. The camera shifts to a close up shot in order to show both Joe and 22's facial expressions and body movements. When Joe gains consciousness, he quickly realizes that he is not in his own body, and that 22 is the one in his body. "*You're in my body!*" [36:30] Joe says with

confusion and frustration. Joe's tone of voice and expression implies that he is experiencing frustration, all because he thought that his soul has finally merged back with his body, only to discover that his soul was in fact in a therapy cat's body instead of his own. As 22 gains consciousness as well, she panics when she discovers that she is in fact living in a body and says, "I'm in a body? No!" [36:34]. 22 who is now inside of Joe's body panics, because she did not originally plan to go to Earth. Nor did she have any interest in living, yet she is currently living on Earth at this exact moment.

The scene then changes from the quiet and calming atmosphere of the hospital, into the bright and busy atmosphere of the streets in New York. 22 is new to all of this which leaves her anxious and overwhelmed. The camera moves to shoot 22's expression inside Joe's body which reveals how she is currently feeling. Simple experiences such as breathing and walking, and interacting with people is completely new to her. Due to the unfamiliarity, 22 drops Joe and runs away to a secluded spot. When Joe finds 22 in a moment of distress, Joe quickly gets a pizza for 22 to eat, which is something she has never tasted before. The camera moves to get a close up shot of 22 to focus on the texture of the pizza as well as 22's reaction. Warm lighting is used to create a comforting atmosphere, as well as background music that expresses how 22 feels when she tastes the pizza. Her inner self expresses this joy and satisfaction as she says, "It's so good!" [41:31]. 22 is starting to discover the joy of existence through ordinary moments.



As the film goes on, 22's perspective of existence starts to change through living out ordinary moments such as feeling the breeze, walking down the bustling streets, getting a haircut, and engaging in social activities. "We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself." (Sartre, 1946, p. 22). Sartre explains that humans first exist, encounter the world, and only then are they able to define themselves. Through these new experiences, 22 is forming an understanding that the meaning of life is not confined to a single fixed purpose. During these scenes, softer lighting and colors are used as the atmosphere appears to be more calm and comforting with soft background music playing and slower pacing. This shift reflects another one of Sartre's statements which states, "Man is nothing other than what he makes of himself." (Sartre, 1946, p. 22). One is what one makes oneself to be. A person is not defined by what society expects them to become, nor what they wish to become. Instead, a person is defined through their actions and how they choose to live their life. Only through existence can one create the

meaning of life. 22 has spent centuries rejecting existence because she could not find her “spark”, therefore believing she is unworthy of living because she holds no meaning. Only after engaging with existence, did she gradually form an understanding of life and be able to create meaning in life.

6. Breaking Away From Bad Faith and The True Meaning of “Spark”

After 22 had finally experienced life on Earth, both Joe and 22 returned to the Great Before. Just as he was about to get back to his own body, Terry took him to the Great Before as he was supposed to die. Having been forced to get back to the Great Before, Joe crashes out in frustration



saying, *“I was gonna play with Dorothea Williams!”*

[01:09:24]. Joe’s facial expressions and tone of voice indicates that he is frustrated, angry, and that could not play with Dorothea Williams yet again. The scene is bright and surreal compared to Earth. Yet the atmosphere is slightly tense due to Joe and 22 having a small fight. Joe then vents out his frustration on 22

saying, *“I lost everything because of you!”* [01:09:31]. Joe is still too focused on achieving a single goal. Just as Joe and 22 finish yelling at each other, one of the Jerry’s says, *“22 got her pass?”* [01:09:50]. Unknowingly, 22 had got her pass after experiencing living on Earth. Throughout the film, both Joe and 22 misunderstand the “spark” as life purpose or predetermined destiny. However, one of the Jerrys explains that the “spark” is not a life purpose. *“A spark isn’t a soul’s purpose. Oh you mentors and your passions. Your purposes. Your meanings of life. So basic.”* [01:11:55]. Through this, it is understood that a “spark” is not a soul’s purpose, rather it is the willingness to live. Just as Sartre states, *“Existence precedes essence”* (Sartre, 1946, p. 22). Human beings are not born with a predetermined purpose. Rather an individual first exists, and only then will they gain meaning by creating it through lived experience.

In the next scene, Joe returns to Earth by using 22’s Earth pass. Where he then performs with Dorothea Williams and achieves his true ambition. But to his surprise, instead of feeling complete and satisfied, he feels empty and dull inside. *“It’s just I’ve been waiting on this day for my entire life. I thought I’d feel different.”* [01:16:04]. The scene is dark yet illuminated with the yellow golden lights from behind, and the camera moves to a close up shot of Joe and Dorothea Williams. Joe has come to a realization that



life is not just about chasing a single grand goal. Being a jazz musician is only a small part of his life, and it does not define his whole life. Through this realization, Joe is beginning to break away from bad faith. *“Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences.”* (Sartre, 1943, p. 98). Bad faith means trying to convince oneself that one’s identity is fixed, despite the reality that one is capable of change. Throughout most of the film, Joe treats his identity as fixed, and he believes that his sole purpose of living is to become a jazz musician. He ignores the bigger picture; life is all about appreciating every single moment and that one gains meaning through everyday decisions. This moment becomes the huge turning point for Joe because he is finally breaking away from bad faith.

In the end of the film, Joe is given a second chance by the Jerrys to live once more as a token of appreciation. And when one of the Jerry’s asked him, *“So what do you think you’ll do? How are you gonna spend your life?”* [01:29:50]. Here Joe has already come to a realization that he should not reduce his whole life to a singular purpose. The scene is accompanied with the soft sounds of the piano, as the scene changes from the empty black and white scenery of the Great Beyond, to the



bright warm lively scenery of Earth. The pacing is slower as it reveals Joe’s realization of what life actually means. *“I’m going to live every minute of it.”* [01:30:05]. Joe comes to an understanding that *“Man is nothing other than what he makes of himself.”* (Sartre, 1946, p. 22). This is the realization that him being a jazz musician is only a small part of his life. His life means

so much more than just playing jazz. Meaning can be created through ordinary life itself. Human beings have freedom, which is the ability to choose what one decides to do. And by Joe choosing to appreciate everyday moments instead of focusing on achieving a single goal, his life gains meaning by creating it and he is no longer empty. Because one is nothing other than what one makes oneself to be.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this analysis, it is revealed that this research paper uses Sartre’s framework to reveal Joe’s journey of quarter-life crisis and the transformation of his psyche after suddenly being moved to a new place. The film begins with Joe’s passion in music, where he believes that he is born to play music which shows that Joe believes in predetermined purpose. His belief in predetermined purpose later gets more evidence when Jerry tells Joe that souls can enter earth once they get a personality. He is also in the state of “bad faith”, in which Joe rejects the idea that he is a free

consciousness whose life is not predetermined, and that he must find his own meaning through appreciating every moment of life. Instead, he cages himself to the belief that jazz is his so-called destiny. Later Joe finds out that being a jazz musician is only a small part of his life, which means that life is more than chasing goals. Joe later frees himself and recognizes the meaning of life through simple things and breaks out of his “bad faith.” In the end, he comes to a realization that he is not a fixed object who believes in predetermined purpose, but rather a being who has the freedom of making its own choices in life.

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