

### **“The old highway’s a-callin’”: The Turbulent and Rebellious Roads of Pee Wee’s Big Films**

In 2016 Pee-wee Herman returned to the screen with the Netflix movie *Pee-wee’s Big Holiday*. The film features Joe Manganiello, an actor known for his hyper-masculine and muscular roles on *True Blood* and *Magic Mike*, who visits Pee-wee’s 1950s inspired town of Fairville. While an unlikely couple, the two become fast friends as they bond over root beer barrels, milkshakes, and miniature towns. Furthermore, Manganiello invites Pee-wee to his birthday party in New York with the caveat that Pee-wee must take a road trip to get there. As Manganiello explains, “If you’re really hungry, the open road is a smorgasbord of life experiences. A few days on the open road is worth a lifetime in Fairville.”

The road trip theme puts this contemporary film in conversation with the cult classic *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* (1985), in which Pee-wee goes on a road trip to find his stolen bicycle. In both films, Pee-wee encounters the turbulent lives of runaway criminals that positions him within their own rebellions. Additionally, lines such as “The old highway’s a-callin’” become replicated in the new film to indicate an ongoing preoccupation with the open road for Pee-wee’s big adventures.

In my presentation, I consider the way these films collectively challenge dominant road trip narratives of mobility and gender through Pee-wee’s juvenile masculinity and homosocial idolization of a masculine ideal he finds in Mickey Morelli, an escaped prisoner on the run, and Joe Manganiello. Drawing on Katie Mill’s *The Road Story and the Rebel* (2006), I argue that these road trip experiences provide Pee-wee a place to express the paradoxes he embodies as a child-adult and a “sissy boy”—as theorized by Bruce La Bruce and Alexander Doty—to counter prevailing notions of the road as a space for boys and men to fulfill traditional ideals of masculinity. Ultimately, my presentation provides a conversation about child-adult relationships and representations of masculinity on the road that indicates new models for boyhood and manhood while celebrating feminized masculinity through turbulent and rebellious road stories.