

*Co-Sides*



coldbacon

/csides.html





The sage embraces things. Ordinary men discriminate among them and parade their discriminations before others. So I say, those who discriminate fail to see.

– *The Chuang Tzu*



**Whatever.**



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1:47:02 She counts for nothing | in my intellectual life.

1:47:07 And don't think it was a bolt | from the blue, a bewilderment!

1:47:13 You're surprised?

1:47:16 No

1:47:18 But in your place,

1:47:20 if I'd broken my ordination promises,

1:47:23 I'd rather it had been | for love of a woman,

1:47:29 than for what you call | your intellectual life.

November 10, 2003

Dear Ms. Fleming,

I am writing in regard to your recent NewsHour essay contrasting *Kill Bill* (I don't remember which one) with Sofia Coppola's new ennui-thriller *Lost In Translation*. First, I fully sympathize with your sentiment that Tarantino is not the bold filmmaker he was once thought to be, although he might be. And I agree with you a bold filmmaker could be someone who reaches deep into the common human experience, and pulls out something meaningful, which needn't have to do with swords, decapitations or even glowing bottles of elixir. But alas, Sofia Coppola is not the answer you seek. *Lost In Translation* has all the trappings of a great movie. It has great sights and sounds and solid acting by at least some of the cast. But it's not a great movie. And if its immediate "art house" acceptance is any clue, nor is it bold. (bold: see *Lynne Ramsay*.)

You suggest that by not relying on mega-violence and sex, Coppola is somehow bold? What was bold about having the two protagonists not have sex given that half of America would have thrown up on themselves if they had (and that some of that vomit might have reached the tender ankle of Mrs. Coppola?) Wong Kar-Wai's *In The Mood For Love* focused on the longing of two people who are ultimately unable to connect (at least outside of the deleted scenes). Now that *was* bold since *we* wanted them to get together as much, apparently more than they did. And what was bold about having such a huge age difference between Bob and Charlotte? *Harold and Maude* (Hal Ashby, anyone?) had an even bigger one, and they sure enough *did* have sex. And I almost vomited, but I didn't. Now *that* was bold film watching.

You say that *Kill Bill* is shallow, but when it comes to superficiality, it is Coppola who is the hostess with the mostest. First, we have the shameless exoticization of the Japanese, which should bother you. Coppologists will say it's okay because it's only the perspective of Bob and Charlotte. But where is the evidence that Coppola's own is any different? Consider the "lip my stocking" scene. First we have the Jerry Lewis-inspired physical comedy of Murray and prostitute rolling around hotel room. Unassailable, hmmph. But then Coppola

decides now would be a good time to also ridicule the Japanese-English accent. (Piling on: fifteen yards or half the distance to the goal.) By humiliating her so, Coppola turns prostitute from prop into a sympathetic character. We can no longer enjoy the joke guilt-free, which is, I fear, what we are suppose to do.

There is a different way to handle the accent thing. Take the scene in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* when the motorcycle pimp brings the Vietnamese prostitute to the young GI's. They all make fun of his accent. "Do you wan number wan fuckie?" "Yes, we wan, we wan." But when the prostitute refuses to do it with a black man, note how the pimp shows respect by faithfully translating her objection. "Too beaucoup. Too beaucoup." Then when the penis in question *is* taken out, the pimp preserves his own dignity by looking away. In like fashion, Kubrick shows deference and sympathy to the characters he has brought forth for *our* consumption. True we laugh, but not unproved.

But Saturday Night Live does this—don't they?—with Steve Martin and Dan Akroyd as two "wild and crazy" Czech brothers who swing for American foxes? Sure, they make fun of the accents, the attitudes, the power-vac all the way from Bratislava. But in the end, low and behold, they sure enough *do* get the foxes. Again, it's not whether you make fun of someone. It's why. Coppola is perfectly welcome to do some stupid physical comedy, but then just do the physical comedy. Don't make me feel all bad.

And when Coppola *does* try to prop up Japanese culture, it seems forced—because it is. We watch young Japanese kids being cool in an arcade. Yes, they are. But this has no bearing on the are-they-or-aren't-they of Bob and Charlotte, which is where the film is headed if it's headed anywhere. Charlotte seems to occasionally notice this other world, but remember, this is someone who listens to self-help tapes and goes through religions like they were going out of style. One gets the sense one could pick up that temple and replace it with a big blue chipmunk and Charlotte would still be standing there smiling. Bob, on the other hand, is smart enough to get it, but too jaded/tired to care.

And so the formula is make fun of 'em with Murray, then counterbalance it by having Johansson walk past something ancient. The problem, however, is that any

scene with only Scarlett Johansson in it is boring. Partly because she just is boring, and partly because Coppola's hand becomes so visible during these scenes that it hurts (me). The definition of forced is if you watch a scene and the main thing you take from it is that the director was trying to make some point (i.e. "Isn't this Japanese tradition cool?" "Don't I like Coldplay?" etc). In *Best In Show* we get to laugh ourselves silly over crazy-obsessed dog people, but we're also made to love them-through the same scenes. But Coppola doesn't have the skill of a Christopher Guest. With *Lost* she expects us to laugh at Japanese culture, but care about Bob and Charlotte—oh wait, maybe Japanese culture is cool—yeah—okay now stare at this screen a little.

For our pleasure, we're also given an entirely oversimplified, one-dimensional caricature of a nagging wife back home (reverse exoticization?) who does nothing to further the complexity of any internal struggle we might want to project onto Bob. And as for Charlotte's husband, are we to believe that anyone, no matter how deranged by drugs and rock and roll music, could ignore an under-wearing Scarlett Johansson? Actually, yes. If she was that vacuous, I think anything's possible. Personally, I would be very attracted to any tall, carefully emaciated, Swedish-named heroin junkie with a six inch hypodermic sticking out of her chest. Now where'n the hell could I find one of those?

Charlotte's friend on the phone in the beginning was even worse than Bob's wife. Scarlett Johansson pours her heart out to you on an overseas phone call. You just don't respond with "yeah, that's great, gotta go." Nobody does, except I suppose the people who populate Sofia Coppola's imagination. Perhaps if she spent less time listening to Coldplay and more time working on her screenplay, we wouldn't have to be here right now (I assure you this hurts me, and you, more than it hurts Coppola).

Sometimes when trying to sort out good and great films, we must look to the little clues for help. When Bob gets out of the cab and whispers in Charlotte's ear, it's sold as a transcendental moment shared between the two of them. But this breaks down when the entire point of the scene becomes not what either one of them is feeling, but rather the mere fact of us not being allowed to hear it. We want to know what he said because we're desperate for some meaning to the

whole affair/film when, of course, there is little. In *In The Mood For Love*, when Tony Leung whispers his secret into the wall at Angkor Wat, no one is thinking about what he's actually saying because they're all too busy trying not to explode in huge tears. Coppola's scene is also a copout because it essentially provides audiences with substitute gratification for another scene which did not take place (which we could not have stomached, recall). People have speculated on the many things he might have whispered in her ear. Let me propose that if he told her he loved her or wanted to see her again, that this would be just as unacceptable (to the "do the right thing" gods). And what else besides that could he possibly have said that would have mattered? "Nice wig! You were great in *Contempt*."

A light touch, in a great director, is when the sense of something deeper weighs like a sunken ship at the bottom of the film. But it is left there waiting and not blasted to the surface for vulgar looking/looting.<sup>1</sup> There is only seabed at the bottom of *Lost In Translation*. Nothing is asked of us or expected. We don't have to fight back vomit (except perhaps during the karaoke scene) or tears or see something in any new light. The closest the film comes to being a real movie is when Bob stubs his toe and inadvertently sleeps with the redhead next door, and both Charlotte and us have to deal with it (for, like, five seconds).

Sofia Coppola does not have the light touch of a great director. She has made what amounts to an hour long Zima ad with a storyline by Nyquil fit for consumption by four million Americans ready to lap up an exoticized world and feel like they've learned something. Tarantino may be, as you basically suggest, raised by wolves. But he is the master of the unique domain he himself has created. Not that I'm necessarily going in, but there he is. *Lost In Translation* is a good film for seeing one time. Then just as Bob will forget Charlotte, so too will we forget this film. In time.

Yours Truthfully,  
Cold Bacon

Entrusted by the Emperor with a mission that would cost him his life,

He was not like other men who steal away when favors have ceased.

His great action, rare at any time, makes men weep.

He has put on his armor, and now he must part with his son.

— Murase Taiitsu

豪傑受托和誰辭  
思已終離去六離  
大節在人絕今古  
鐵衣再振不見時

石山人作







## Dogville (2004)

### Negative review by Plexico Burress

*Dogville* is about what happens when an innocent fugitive, imagine Nicole Kidman with a scared look on her face, finds herself in a tiny depression era town in rural Appalachia. The film is shot like a play, all on one set. For example, there are no walls. The characters open and close pretend doors. There's even a chalk outline of a dog, which you can hear barking. It's all very neat, at first.

Patterns of behavior are painfully revealed one after another from one character to the next. But soon the film becomes tiresome if not outright predictable as Von Trier gives us the same patterns over and over and over. I mean, God damn, life may be a box of chocolate, but do we really have to eat all of them?

And the action/acting is just too annoying/melodramatic for film. It's one thing to have characters who embody both good and evil at the same time. It's another to illustrate the slow transition from good to evil (*Star Wars*, *The Player*). But Von Trier's thespians switch from one extreme to the other so easily you'd think they were following a script? In fact, the whole thing would have worked better if they really had been walking around holding scripts. Lars didn't go far enough!

*Dogville* smells of meaning and depth, but it really is about as simplistic as your basic above average morality play.<sup>2</sup>—The whole discussion at the end about forgiveness and vengeance really was some first rate philosophical gobbledygook. Can you imagine such a conversation between God and Jesus—fresh off the cross? I'm thinking no. Probably not really much to say at that point. Of course, Von Trier feels otherwise. His mistake, therefore, is instead of just trying to have a movie that *feels* like a play, he actually is trying to have both a movie *and* a play at the same time. *Dogville* wants you to suspend your disbelief (movie) long enough to fall for its characters, but then it wants you to bend over and take it like a Swede when it comes to your heavy-handed moral bludgeoning (play). And it fails because you just can't have both. I swear. If you don't believe me, watch *Dogville* by Lars Von Trier.

And finally, the way the film ends allows us to indulge our basest urges—and without any price to pay! Thus, Von Trier, to his own delight, withholds the most basic and important lesson his film could have offered. That would have been the lesson of Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*, which covered most of the same themes more deeply and with a lot less talking.

## Dogville (2004)

### Lars Von Trier

There are two moral messages in this film, one, that people suck, and two, that revenge is sweet. The first is pretty indisputable. People do, in fact, suck, and Von Trier does a job pointing this out which would probably make even Stanley Kubrick happy, for a few seconds. The problem, however, is that he kind of keeps making this point over and over without giving us much else to think about. Von Trier's methods, for this reviewer at least, seem heavy handed, at times verging on outright predictable. Perhaps this is some secret overture meant for Lorne Michaels? I do not know. In any case, this type of basic observation on human nature is the kind of thing Mark Twain would have covered in while taking a pee, while still serving up a true and detached fictional narrative.

That is to say *Dogville* has no real narrative. It isn't about the characters, it's about Grace, who is us, and how other people are treating us. This over-identification with the protagonist turns the experience into a purely self-absorbed exercise. The way it's supposed to work is you have to gradually identify with the protagonist so that it's for the right reasons and a learning process occurs. Having the identification forced upon you is overwhelming. That's what life is for, or conceptual art.

Now Hitchcock's *The Trouble With Harry* has just as much of a play-for-a-film feel as *Dogville*. It too has rural suspense in the form of a Sheriff who periodically rolls up in his pip popping old clunker. But Hitchcock's film has at least a semblance of a plot and even some memorable lines. When asked why he won't just go to New York City where the people might buy his paintings, John Forsythe responds, "Yes, but what kind of people. Little people with funny hats." That's a great line. How did I get onto Hitchcock?

Anyway, the second moral message, that revenge is a dish best served by Nicole Kidman, is where the real debate lies. So they burn the town, as those of you who saw the film will attest. So they exact the Lord's wrath. Jolly good. Okay, so what if Jesus did say "Fuck *this*," got down off the cross and, together

with God, torched the Romans *and* Jews into a nice bag of Anakin crisps? Okay.

And if we look at it from the point of view of the Jesus story, with Jesus as this distant figure, which, I mean come on, he is (does anyone really look at pictures of Jesus on the cross and say, “That’s me! That could be me!”), then of course we can accept this alternative ending. I mean it’s not as if the town doesn’t deserve it. And besides, who am I to tell Jesus and God what to do. Ah, but that’s exactly not how the story is presented. As I say, Von Trier has just spent the entire film making us identify immensely with Grace. *We* suffer and are betrayed. *We* are used and abused right there with (through) her. So when the decision comes on whether to forgive and forget or torch, it’s *our* decision. So when an entire room full of New Yorkers at the Lincoln Film Center cheered riotously at the decision to torch the place, I could not help but feel a sinking feeling all through my gutty-wuts. No, no. I don’t want to invade Iraq.

Let me summarize. Von Trier has just filled a room full of New Yorkers with more bloodlust and hate than they came in with, indulged them in it (real head on a platter style), and then sent them home quite satisfied, even as the smoke was still trying to settle. But wait—what is the point of having a film where the moral is specifically designed to go right over the heads of all those who would benefit most?

And here is where the Bergman film *The Virgin Spring* differs greatly. At the end of TVS, the person who commits the act of revenge (acting on our behalf) is made to realize his error.<sup>3</sup>—Error! He must atone before we can go home. Atone before home. *That* is the moral lesson. *That* is what Von Trier has churlishly withheld from a room full of New Yorkers. And *that* is what grieves me the most.

## Swimming Pool (2004)

### Francois “Peebles” Ozon

*Swimming Pool* is about a middle-aged English writer who escapes to her publisher's summer house in the French countryside in order to find inspiration for a book. But when her publisher's beautiful young daughter shows up, well then that's when the plot begins to unfold. And may still be unfolding even now. Who can say?

You see, you have to understand there's a difference between seeing this movie and having sex with the girl in it. Because of this subtle but very important difference, it's probably best to do something else with your two hours. *Swimming Pool* is basically what if you took an Eric Rohmer film, removed half the dialogue, and let Dominik Moll lick the screenplay while Peter Greenaway fondled the camera crew, then soaked it in essence of *Mulholland Drive* and finally, let Francois Ozon direct it.

The problem with the film is its main characters aren't so compelling. Julie's back story only threatened at being intriguing from time to time. The film needs you to be captivated by Julie, but Ludivine Sagnier is neither as endearing as Ana Karina, as pouty as Brigitte Bardot or even as French-anorexic as Julie Delpy. Her body, sensational. Her acting, not so much.

What about Sarah? Sarah was just a straightforward witch. Hardly interesting. Basically how I imagined J.K. Rowling. (Boy was I wrong). And her publisher, Mike or John or whatever his name was? I can't believe someone managed to create a one-dimensional character. But by God Francis Ozon did it.

The next rung of characters was better. Frank the waiter was compelling (in a sort of a “why isn't this guy in a Peckinpah film” kind of way), but I would actually be much more interested in him outside of the film. Julie's boyfriend #1 was definitely amusing with his little Speedo and his pot belly attitude. Intriguing—distribution of body fat, yes. Gerard Depardieu, no.

But the best characters in the film were the most peripheral. The little Poltergeist lady, for example, at Marcel's house with her progeric insinuations. Actually, children born with this rare genetic disorder live to about thirteen. This lady was just a midget. But interesting. As was Frank's dowdy, plump colleague leaning out of the over-shop window. "Excuse me now, I have work to do." What? At one in the afternoon, in France. This *is* a mystery. No, really. On purpose or not (and it's not), what does that say about your film when the best characters have one or two lines? It says give them more lines. You'd think.

The New York Times says:

"Mr. Ozon's gift, extended in different directions from movie to movie, is to combine low-key observational intelligence with high literary cunning. ... [Swimming Pool] is simultaneously a thoroughly mannered, mischievously artificial confection and an acute piece of psychological realism. Whose psychology, and which reality, remains ambiguous even after the tart, delicious final twist."

Idiot. The film relies on your being a lot more impressed with its plot devices than you end up being. Like *Adaptation*, *Swimming Pool* cleverly blurs the lines between fiction and 'the movie' but unlike *Adaptation*, the film is empty. But how can I prove the absence of meaning? Eh.

Ozon's "observational style"—showing her plug in the laptop, mixing yogurt concoctions—is at first promising but without any thematic connection, it fizzles. I mean, why should I be watching Ozon's observations when I could be having my own, like fingering the teeth of my car keys or sliding the credit cards up and down in my old, loose wallet—when will they finally fall out?—someday it will happen. This I know. And it will suck.<sup>4</sup>—Titillating.

Anyway, the film is also boring because of senseless repetition—boobs which keep just walking around not being sucked on or anything, a liquor cabinet which keeps being opened every two scenes and Charlotte Rampling's fingers, which, nice as they are, I've seen enough of. (Juergen Teller take note.) If I'm going to stare at fingers, let them at least be Glenn Gould's and let them be in ice water.

Perhaps if Julie could drink coffee from a bowl, while flashing her breasts, being fisted, and smashing someone with a rock all at the same time.

As for the ending, apparently, someone forgot to tell Francois Ozon they already did that in *The Usual Suspects*. But that's okay because someone forgot to tell me to stop referencing *The Usual Suspects* whenever I can't think of a better comparison. In any case, the ending, rather than giving the film new meaning, actually backfires and makes it all seem less disturbing—less, not more, less. The girl in *Bob Le Flambeur* was fifteen years old. Fifteen years old! What am I supposed to do with that?

*PB interviews Ludivine Sagnier*

LS: I'm much more confident in front of a camera, hidden by a character, enhanced by makeup, so I can go much further than I can in real life. Being naked is quite a natural thing, but it's more the sexual situations. Sexual acting is painful, because even though you're pretending, you have the skin of the person in front of you, and it's not the skin you wish you had. After that you run into the shower to get rid of everything. I felt really dirty after I filmed all of this. It is difficult, but even if you're self-conscious in real life, when you're hidden behind a character you can bare much more.

PB: You mention a boyfriend. Are you one of those stars who only dates other actors?

LS: I just date people who earn a million dollars a month. [Laughs] Actually my boyfriend doesn't earn that much money. He's a stage actor, so he doesn't have a penny in his pocket, but he's the person I love.

PB: Any movie stars you'd love to work with these days?

LS: I wouldn't say "no" to a love scene with Josh Hartnett.

## **Better Luck Tomorrow (2003)**

Justin Lee attempts to transpose Tarantino-esque juxtapositions onto suburban Orange county, and the results are uneven. The dialogue is extra uneven. The film has the same look and burdensome first-person narrative as Rebecca Miller's recent *Personal Velocity*. The thoughts and actions of the characters often are implausible. Don't argue with me. The real story (as I read about it) actually makes a lot more sense than Justin Lee's artistic version. Either Lee has a loose grasp on reality, or he thinks we do.



## Lord of the Rings II (2002)

### Peter Jackson

From salon.com

With "The Two Towers" it seems very clear that we are in the midst of one of the great achievements in fantasy filmmaking and in epic filmmaking. Pauline Kael once said that directors die on movies of this magnitude and turn into technicians. Miraculously, Peter Jackson hasn't died. The filmmaker is alive and well alongside the tactician he must have had to become to pull off the feat of turning Tolkien's books into movies.

I'm not so sure. The director may not be dead, but he's certainly looked better. There are four major problems with this film:

The comic relief was ill-timed. Moreover, I'm not sure we even need comic relief. We're all obviously taking it very seriously because how could we not? "Relief" from what? We can have relief when the battle's over.

Solid comic relief of the Hollywood action/adventure variety occurs, for example, in *Raiders*: "Asps, very dangerous, you go first" and "I don't know, I'm making this up as I go." Solid. The film was getting too serious for its core, and it meshed nicely with Harrison Ford's acting. Sophisticated comic relief occurs in *Seven Samurai* as Toshiro Mifune's character constantly amuses with his attitude that often outstrips his abilities. The comedy is woven into the narrative and flows from Mifune's charm. Twenty-two jokes about being short is neither sophisticated nor funny. Of course, Jackson doesn't have to be as good as Kurosawa. That isn't fair. I do, however, expect to have comic relief, which does not remind me of Jar Jar Binks tripping over himself. It's like Jackson is saying, "Look, I made another dwarf joke. Isn't that funny?" Each time that happens, it reminds me I'm watching a movie and breaks the suspension of disbelief, in which Jackson and I *both* have invested so much. Each time it cheapens the epic seriousness of the film. Like if I reminded you you're reading a dumb website. When you should be out fighting orc. And all this when the film already has more than adequate "relief" in the form

of Gandalf's wink to the Hobbits, the Ents, and how could I forget, the dwarf himself, already, just the character, as is.

Not enough siege machinery. Not enough cool things. Don't get me wrong. There were plenty of cool things, like the ballista-fired grappling hooks, the wall bomb, ladders, etc. Not complaining about what there was. Just asking for more. They should have consulted the guys who did *Starship Troopers*. Every time you thought you'd seen it all, there was some new kind of bug with some ingenious tactic. Hell, all you have to do is open a book of medieval warfare, and you'll get plenty of ideas. Where was the trebuchet? I want my trebuchet! More invention and less repetition. Less horde to hand combat, arrow shooting. Fewer dwarf jokes. That wall bomb was pretty friggin' cool though.

Not enough time spent developing the bad guys. The first film was strong because of its thorough treatment of the dark lord whose name I dare not spell, the white wizard whose name I cannot spell, and the super-orc armies, whose name I can't even remember. There was some of this early in *LOR II*, like when they were arguing over whether to eat the hobbits. More would have been appreciated. Remember when the super-orcs were running like six-minute-miles for like fifty miles in full armor. Dude. How cool was that? That's what I call bad-guy character development. The second film dabbled in it when it talked about the evil human-type guys joining Mordor. What made them so upset with mankind they would join forces with evil? Where are they from? I mean, where would those guys be on *the map*? These sorts of imagination sparking moments, while surely a credit to Tolkien, are what makes this movie great and other action films like *The Matrix* not. Wonder, complexity, hidden depth and history behind the action. And a map. The map is key. Surely the book has more? Surely we could have had ten more minutes of map talk?

"Great understanding is broad and unhurried; little understanding is cramped and busy. Great words are clear and limpid; little words are shrill and quarrelsome. In sleep, men's spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle. With everything they meet they become entangled. Day after day they used their minds in strife, sometimes grandiose, sometimes sly, sometimes petty. Their little fears are mean and trembly; their great

fears are stunned and overwhelming. They bound off like an arrow or a crossbow pellet, certain that they are the arbiters of right and wrong. They cling to their position as though they had sworn before the gods, sure that they are holding on to victory. They fade like fall and winter—such is the way they dwindle day by day. They drown in what they do—you cannot make them turn back. They grow dark, as though sealed with seals—such are the excesses of their old age. And when their minds draw near to death, nothing can restore them to the light.”

Too much love. Liv Tyler’s coveted overbite and baby-shaped head can only hold my interest for so long. Shorten her scenes by ten minutes. Or make them relevant. In *Seven Samurai*, there’s probably twice the screen time given to the male/female love story. But you won’t see me complaining. Because the entire time the pair are on screen, one appreciates the thematic connection working on multiple levels. Why has our young samurai chosen *this* life over the life of a husband? Why should they defend a bunch of peasant’s who don’t even trust them with their own daughters. Would you trust them with yours?

Kurosawa love scenes pop with dramatic tension, internal conflict, and believability. In *Lord of the Rings*, lovers tend to just stare at each other like they’re post-ictal. There’s no internal conflict. Her mind is made up. She loves him, I guess, because— hell, don’t you? As for the father, are any of us really on his side? Let her go with Viggo, right? Duh. And get a damn hair cut. The only theme Jackson’s love scenes develop is elven immortality, particularly the discussion between daughter and father. This anticipates the noble gesture of the elves returning to fight alongside men, because they have *so much more* to lose. It recalls the heroic turnaround of Han Solo at the end of the original *Star Wars* (*A New Hope*). I cry.

Things that were great. The slow motion moments in front of gothic music. The dramatic interpersonal moments. The map of Middle Earth. Gandalf. The king/nephew story reminded of *Ran* a little. That’s a good thing. The elves. The evil warriors entering Sauron’s fortress— ooop! Gandalf. The elves, again. Gandalf.

I suppose I remain ambivalent about (the excessive) Gollumania. I must concede the Gollum story is better than having Frodo disappear every time they can't think of where to go with a scene. Or is it? Overall, *The Two Towers* is an excellent film, almost as good as the first. But partly because of the four flaws I mentioned, and partly because it's not so new anymore, it doesn't carry quite the same impact, and is probably a slightly inferior film.

**Q: Would the elves listen to Bowie?**

## **Eight Mile (2002)**

When your car won't start at all, you must Xzibit. When you're feeling kinda small, you must Xzibit. Xzibit good. Back to the trailer, it's not too late. To not see this film. [Note: There really is some guy named Xzibit in the credits]

## Ghost World (2001)

### Terry Zwigoff

You'd think a film with more *fuck you's* and raised middle fingers than *Breakfast Club* at Tarantino's would be an instant classic. Boo. *Ghost World* was good, but not great. It has problems. The movie is too hung up with the shallow not shallow thing that was so important back in high school. I've moved on, but I don't think this film has. Okay, that's not true. I haven't moved on. But neither has this film.

Anyway, the film, like Pynchon, has too much hostility. The part where the man in the Blockbuster goes Michael Douglas on the fifteen-year old clerk for not having seen Fellini's 8 ½ is ludicrous. I hadn't seen 8 ½ either when I was fifteen. Poor kid, just trying to earn some money on his summer break. And besides I don't need the moralizing like I don't need President Bush telling me what "evil" is. I already know what *evil* is. It's George Lucas. Look, if I'm watching the damn movie, if I'm living in the United States, I obviously already agree: shallow people suck, terrorism is bad, kill/save the whales, blah blah. Tell me something new.

And so the film spends a lot of time trying to score satirical points, at the expense of simply developing an artistic vision, which I know Zwigoff has, because he told me. And don't tell me it's just showing and not taking a position. The film is obviously taking a position, and we're meant to agree with it.

Some of the characters were gratuitously inconsistent. For example, the art teacher suddenly goes from complete idiot to art defender and recognizer of talent, and then back to complete idiot. Well now that's just ridiculous.

Also not believable was Thora's cute little friend, who looks like that kid from *Third Rock* when he was twelve. But hot. Their friendship wouldn't have made it past the seventh grade if that. So that was bullshit too. Lastly, save the magic for *Harry Potter* and *Cocoon*. I mean, magic is fine, but it's out of place in this movie, Terry.

But the film does have several moments of pure pleasure, and earns at least a perfunctory comparison to *Rushmore*. It reminded me of *Rushmore*.

Their convenience store friend was comforting as a younger version of Silent Bob with wisdom beyond his clothing. Also straight out of *Clerks* was the hilarious “you talking to me” guy. Straight out of Jersey. Okay, this is going to get me in serious trouble, but have I ever told you how if Jersey suddenly never existed, I really wouldn’t care? Ha! It’s true. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not talking nukes or anything. But think how much easier to find New York. All those damn fucking bridges! Charging me each way as I keep fucking up. Dammit!

Okay, so the art school scenes had some funny moments, but that whole subplot definitely crouched and tigered a bit too long. There were also a lot of good details and the music was enjoyable throughout, both the blues in the middle and especially the opening Indian rock thing—that was great. But I must, in the interest of being annoying, point out that Seymour (“I don’t collect that foreign shit”) seemed fairly enthralled with Lionel Belasco, who (last time I checked) was from Trinidad, a foreign country, I think. We can take a straw poll?

Terry Zwigoff has a lot of potential, and with the right material, could really make a great film. Wait, he already has. In 1995, he made *Crumb*, a documentary about the late underground cartoonist, Robert Crumb. *Crumb* was great. Fuck.

We need a big naked picture right about here.

## Gosford Park (2001)

### Robert the Altman

With *Gosford Park*, Robert Altman once again shows us that even a beautiful film, with great performances and great attention to detail, can still be a let down.

From an Email I received:

“have indeed seen "gosford park" - twice. must disagree with you- i find robert altman enthralling. even the long tedious ones ("nashville", "short cuts"), also classics ("mash"). fascinating how much care to detail, and subtle-ness of story- did you gather that the daughter, isabel, was pregnant by the glovemaker's daughter's husband? didn't catch that until round two. also interesting b/c i went in expecting a genteel version of "clue" and was pleasantly surprised.” — Teaches At Harvard

Okay, you just wrote “the glove maker's daughter's husband,” which pretty much rests my case. But let me go ahead and make my argument anyway because that's what I do.

Buttercup, though I cannot disagree that *Mash* is a classic, that “suicide is painless,” that “the game of life is hard to play” and that “the only way to win is cheat,” even *you* acknowledge that *Short Cuts* was long and tedious. As for the pregnancy of Isabel, in order to care about that grand spot of news, I would have to remember who Isabel was and which of the five jillion characters was her husband. But I don't.

You seem to believe the “puzzle plot” film should be treated with the same scholarly drool as a great novel. Let me cure you of this. Think of how many truly great films there are out there. Just take the AFI top one hundred. There must be a hundred films right there, all of them more worthy and yet less demanding of your notepad and pencil than *Gosford Park*—that's *Gosford Park*, not Bletchley Park. This is not to say great films should not be dissected and drooled over. But it's a different kind of dissection, with different instruments, and different drool.



The opening credits of *Gosford Park* tell all when it is proudly announced that the film is “based on an idea by Robert Altman and his co-writer.” An idea? As opposed to what? The back of a cereal box? A bit of tree bark? “Yeah, because I totally would have thought my cousin had thought of it. But now I know.” Deny all you want, but this bit of useless pretension is your first clue.

“Complexity for the sake of complexity is bad writing; the structure of the *Great Gatsby* is functional. The reader is required to construct the actual chronology of events, much of which is revealed in flashbacks—thereby becoming a collaborator in the narrative.”

– The Preface (of *Gatsby*)

But *The Great Gatsby* was a book, not an idea. A book is an idea that got refined. A film doesn’t have to be refined. It just has to be produced. I believe we should have a law that all period piece films must come directly from novels. Because the plot and teachings of a novel are bound to be better thought through. That’s because modern directors are too busy worrying about giving interviews, throwing parties, and whether to buy a house in Umbria instead. There’s no ocean, but the hills are definitely alive with Tom Snyder. Novelists, on the other hand, do nothing but think about plot and connectedness, except when they’re giving interviews, going to parties, and testing out Tom Snyder’s villa. Even so, there are only a few books deserving of such effort. I won’t name names, but suffice it to say—no, I said I wouldn’t name names—

Furthermore, I’m not so convinced you should be out there reading and dissecting novels either. The last thing you would ever want to do with a serious work of art is actually think about it. The reason you buy a Bergman DVD is not because you’re actually going to watch it. It’s because you expect to absorb some moral or psychological advantage just by having it in your collection. Even more so with books. I can at least imagine watching *some* of my DVD collection, but finishing *Ulysses*? You must be joking? But I *am* comforted by the fact that hundreds of college students, right this minute, are dissecting away, and will continue to do so in English classes “immemorial,” even weathering the occasional squall of revisionism (“Mark Twain didn’t know what the fuck he was talking

about!” “Wait, yes he did, my bad”). Now as to which books or films you should buy, you can murder a college student and take their syllabus. Or I guess you could look online. I like murder. For movies, it’s tougher. There is Criterion and after that, good luck to you.

Email from another “friend”:

“And you of all people who loves Kubrick — the man who always has beautiful scenes and pictures but whose characters and stories are subservient, should love the tableaux of GPark — the look and sheen of it.”

Ah yes, how could I forget the “then why do you think *Barry Lyndon* is so great” argument? Sure, Kubrick’s films are winsome, but don’t let’s be fooled into thinking of them as mere wallpaper. (Actually, I would wallpaper my entire house with *Barry Lyndon*, if I knew how to wallpaper—or had a house.) But without a real film there, I do not think the beauty would be remembered so strongly by a few. But there is an answer to your question. In a word, “depth.” The depth of emotion generated by any one scene in *Barry Lyndon* is enough to embarrass a hundred *Gosford Parks*. Now I’m not referring to intellectual “complexity” as in holding up to scholarly dissection like I was talking about before.<sup>5</sup>—Here, I’m talking about the kind of emotional and spiritual depth that some directors convey and some don’t. With great directors, there is a sense you are learning or at least being exposed to something real and profound whether you can put it into words or not. It’s not even that it can’t be put into words, it’s just that there’s no easy language to do it, which is why you’ve never heard of any real film scholars. Yes, (the guy you are thinking of) has found a way to overcome this problem of anonymity. It’s called writing well, which is to say, lying. If you don’t lie, who cares? More:

“...but whose characters and stories are subservient...”

Huh? I think our “friend” underestimates the important role Kubrick’s characters play in his films. Jack Nicholson (*The Shining*), Kirk Douglas (*Spartacus*), Lee Ermey and Vincent D’Onofrio (*Full Metal Jacket*) come

quickly to mind.

Although an interview with the director is hardly admissible evidence, I happened to see Robert the Altman give some television interview—which makes him fair game. I couldn't believe it, but watching Altman, the man, talk about his film, I actually started falling asleep. And that was in just three minutes. I mean, it turns out he's just a nice old guy with white hair—someone you'd want for an uncle or family friend. But this guy wouldn't put the fear of God in a door knob. This is clearly not someone to be trusted with three hours of one's life—and hopes. Contrast this with Bergman, who apparently once walked up to some film critic who'd given him a bad review and punched him in the stomach. Wow.

Setting aside the issue of how people should be receiving *Gosford Park*, let's look at the downside of having a bunch of actors walk around with microphones buried in their unspeakables. First, there is the opportunity cost. In trying to develop so many characters, Altman neglects some of the more deserving ones. Take the red headed, snide valet who comes in with the guns saying something like "I know what to do with them, thank you." What a great introduction to a character that goes a begging. He and the coffee-spilling butler are two characters who deserved more. On the other hand, the lead butler, with his secret past and the servant girl who loves him could just as easily be left out, or even inserted somewhere in the middle of *The English Patient* with no harm done. Even within the "puzzle movie" framework, there is still much room for improvement, by simply editing up and down the appropriate storylines. Making them less puzzle-like.

To be sure, there are a lot of really good actors in the film, and some great performances nearly happened. Derek Jacobi, Steve Fry, Maggie Smith, and some others—all rather splendid. In fact, I should like to spank Altman for having such a great cast, but then spreading them too thin like so much pâté on a Carr's table water cracker. Table water? And for those who just can't keep their Best Supporting Actress in their pants, there is nothing that little Irish girl did that Cordelia Gray didn't already do on BBC One, five years earlier. And for those who love the film because they have difficult to control spasms of nostalgia for anything to do with the twenties, I am totally with you. There can never be too

much pheasant hunting or shags and fags between servants. Never. But it's time you were in on a little secret called Mobile Masterpiece Theatre, Poirot, Jeeves and Wooster. I'll stop there.

Positive things? Well, he's got England right—heavy, damp, gray, like I would know. And the film looks good. I mean really good. And there are several subtly amusing instances too, in particular any scene with Steve Fry. The pure snobbery of the Maggie Smith character was a real treat. Her comments about things (“difficult color green”) were exquisite. But these came in clusters too far and few between. I counted fourteen pheasants being shot to death. *Rules of the Game* had twenty-six. Also good were the two late-comers, their being relegated to the billiard room for being late to dinner. Brillat-Savarin would have winked an eye.

And not only that, but Altman is to be commended for the film's adequately restrained manner and introspection as it ponders questions like “Why do servants obsess about their employers personal lives” and “How many servants does it take to scrutinize a light bulb, a light bulb with a dark secret past?” Oh, and for blowing off the question of who did it. Wait, *Rules of the*—oh, never mind. And *Gosford Park* does give us an always welcome peep into the upstairs—or was it downstairs?

In conclusion, you should watch movies carefully and dissect them and not dissect them. You should have read more books in college, but it's too late now, so tough. And *Gosford Park* is probably over-rated, but I can't prove anything. [6](#)

## The Man Who Wasn't There (2001)

### Coen Brothers

Let me first apologize in advance for what is about to be a definitively lackluster review. I think I'm getting too old for this. So whatever I say here may be even stupider than usual. In any case, attack first, pleasantries later: The whole film is a tribute to Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* whether they meant it or not (I'm thinking not).

Bugs: "Come on, read my future for me."

Elmer: "You haven't got any."

Bugs: "Haven't got any?"

This was the exchange between Orson Welles and Marlene Dietrich (as a gypsy fortune teller) in *Touch of Evil*. The pansy businessman even looked like Mr. Grandee from *TOE*. And the fortune teller didn't really add anything to the film the like it did in Welles' film. Again, a nice tribute, but why not just go and rent *Touch of Evil* like the Coen brothers did. But if you want dark humor, why not just go to the source and watch *Dr. Strangelove*? I mean, if you want to watch TMWWT because you've already seen *Strangelove* a thousand times, tough shit. Watch it again.

Pleasantries: The film's main worth lies in its several highly sculpted characters (the lawyer, the French music teacher). Billy Bob Thornton wasn't bad either. They don't call him Billy Bob Thornton for nothing. And there was good detail (the tiny little sink set back in the corner of the spacious music studio). The scene in the car with Scarlett Johansson—*Lolita* played out. Pretty wild to say the least. And for that, I am grateful.

One thing the Coens definitely do well is show you the reality, all up close and personal-like, but in their own stylized way. Tarantino slowed down, way down. I appreciate blood pooling on wooden floors. I do. And their use of Beethoven's piano sonata(s) was the most forthright since *32 Short Films About Glenn Gould*.

And the film was very well shot. I mean these are pros after all. They had good angles and some great lighting. The film just didn't inspire. It lacked a certain grip. And this reviewer is not even that concerned with identification (i.e. whether or not we care about the characters), because Lord knows that's not always necessary. I mean, I didn't care what happened to the people in *Strangelove* either. Oh, I suppose you could argue that we relate to the frustration of the Peter Sellers character(s) as they meet one frustration after another. Oh screw it. I'm renting *The Lion King*. And I'm *NOT* seeing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when that comes out. What the hell can a wardrobe possibly have to do with anything?

## **Chicken Run (2000)**

### **Nik Park**

Great film for both chickens and adults. Similar to *Toy Story* in its rescue hero theme, which by the way is a very popular theme among children I'm led to understand, but it's more raw art and style and less Disney bull crappie. But let's be realistic. It's not THAT raw or art. It's sort of a compromise between Nik Park's original ways and something that will appeal more broadly to kids, otherwise known as 'making some money for a change'. If you want your babies to grow up smart like European children, you better take them to this movie. It won't work, of course, but at least no one can say you didn't try.

## **Gladiator (2000)**

### **Ridley Scott**

The costumes were splendid from the armor to the royal outfits. And you certainly can't beat the exquisite Roman decor of dark mahogany furniture, glorious drapery (all very flammable), plumage and purple, lots of purple. There's nothing like appropriately used purple in furniture and on people. "and all the while dressed in the height of Roman fashion." That said, I felt as angry at Ridley Scott as I felt when Ford merged with Volvo.

The fighting was horrible. It was all close ups with no medium range shots, just a mess of disjointed cuts. This technique reminds me of bad rock bands trying to hide behind a bunch of distortion and other distractions. Scott should take some lessons from, oh, say any other film director of any other action film ever. Even in the one on one fights, where you might expect them to actually have some good choreography, this herky jerky MTV video crap still ruled the day. I could get better fight scenes on my Sega action system. And I don't even have a Sega action system. When was that, like twenty years ago?

Three good parts in the fighting, however, were the early morning-star in the face, the chariots with dangerous spokes and the part where Maximus runs out and kills them all quickly. Yee-haw. Now imagine that same scene in a Cassavetes brothel. "Oh my god, there's so many of them. Let's do it."

Here are the ingredients that could have made a great movie:

**Russell Crowe:** Talk about an ingredient. Convincing. Brooding. All hail Maximus.

**Commodus:** Whoever he was (since my original post, I've been told it was Joaquin Phoenix, brother of River Phoenix, Son of Mr. Phoenix, or as I said, whoever he was) did an okay job at being evil and disturb-ed. And besides, every film reviewer has to praise the villain's acting.



**Maximus' Dog:** Terrific dog acting, running through the forest, biting barbarian hands. Brings back memories of the dogs from *Conan*, or Tiger from the Brady Bunch. I would have stolen Cindy's Kitty Caraway doll too, only I wouldn't have hidden it in the dog house where those idiots could find it. I would have chewed that stupid doll into a thousand lifeless pieces.

**Little Boy from Life Is Beautiful:** Great job getting trampled. Totally convincing. Recalls performance of little boy as a young Conan. Does all his own stunts. Doesn't complain about conditions on set. Never brings twenty-two year old girlfriend on set and leaves her in dressing room with half bag of cocaine. Takes direction.

This movie tries for too much and ultimately fails just like a Roman Empire. And it lasts about as long as one too. I was actually in the Roman Empire, and this film just doesn't capture what it was really like. You'd think that having every character in the movie ask "What is Rome?" six times would be enough, but clearly, they needed to ask it seven times. Also, the attempt to depict Rome's vastness with digital aerial shots and the like is undermined by an excess of poorly scripted intimate scenes and a bad subplot. This is hardly the great Roman Empire I fought and died for. The list of movies that this was not as good as includes *Ben Hur*, *Spartacus*, *Conan the Barbarian* and even *Baveheart*.

*"The judgments Moon emitted impressed me less than his irrefutable, apodictic note. The new comrade did not discuss: he dictated opinions with scorn and with a certain anger."*

## Traffic (2000)

### Stephan Soderblog

We'll get to Benicio del Toro in a minute. For now, let's just say this was above average for Hollywood pap, but nothing special. Of course there was good acting from tragicomic lawmen to insane assassins to drugged-out daughters and, of course, en fuego Spanish women. A movie can never have too many Spanish women, I always say. Even Michael "if you can't be [a Spanish woman], marry one" Douglas is tolerable as his usual between heart-attacks character. It's just minor things like screenplay and direction that had some glaring dips in quality and believability. And the moralizing reminded me of the beat down we got in *American Beauty*. I don't know whether they want me to be more or less existential, and frankly, I don't care.

Soderbergh is weak because he borrows too narrowly and heavily from *Scarface*, *The Player* and the excellent Frontline documentary on the drug war, which may actually have even been called *Traffic*, for chrissakes. In fact, there's little in this movie that isn't directly lifted from other works. Borrowing is fine, but if the sources are this painfully obvious, then you probably haven't made it your own, have you, Steven?

The film was a lot like *The Player*, not only in terms of pace, feel and plot development, but also in the gradual revealing and metamorphosis of characters. Compare the Zeta-Jones character with Tim Robbins in *The Player*. At first an innocent bystander, we gradually see the character become more and more an active participant until finally, the transformation is complete.

*Scarface* fanatics will cheer the return of Al Pacino's sidekick as the drug importer. They will also want to compare the troubled, young assassin with the enigmatic Columbian in *Scarface*. Gentlemen prefer bombs. Also compare the telephone conversation toward the end with that between Pacino and the Columbian drug lord on the subject of betrayal. The tone of impending retribution is identical.

On the down side, the film was more cluttered than a Berlin apartment. It just tries to get too many points across (again moralizing).<sup>7</sup> For example, the scene with the tourists and their stolen car was gratuitous and forced. And seriously, worrying about having your car stolen in Mexico? How much more 80's can you get? Oh, well I guess if you remade *Scarface*.

The speech on why black people sell drugs (which I'm not sure if it's meant to be taken at face value) was more like a preemptive apology to the black community than sincere philosophical dabbling. Apology? For what? Well, let's face it, the movie clearly hinted that it might be undesirable for a young, rich white girl to get f\$#@!d by a wiry black drug dealer in Harlem. Oh, that.

[It hardly seems relevant, but: spoiler] Yet Soderbug's worst crime of all is when he squanders the intriguing young assassin character. Even a fifteen-year old could give you a more intricate or historically-rooted assassination scheme (like *Godfather III* or *In the Line of Fire*) would have been better. This would have obviated the "I won't do it, I'm pregnant" sequence, which sucked for too many reasons. Ooooh, the cocaine *is* the doll. The worms *are* the spice. Dude. Shut up. [/spoiler]

With horrible films, I don't have to say anything. With great films, it's optional. But I really am getting tired of all these could-have-been-great movies, which force me to spend all this time explaining their flaws. Now speaking of flaws, as far as I'm concerned, Benicio del Toro doesn't have any.

## With A Friend Like Harry (2000)

### Dominik Moll

Just saw WFLH starring an older, Frencher version of that (incredibly annoying, passive—I wish he would just die—along with the rest of the show—and cast—and all traces of it ever having existed) skinny guy from *That 70s Show*. To its credit, this film will never catch on in America. It's like real French food. There is some delicious garlic butter to be had, but American audiences will just call it snails. It's sort of like an Eric Rohmer film that went off its medication. It's got a lot of that nice French pastel pink, white, red. And there is even more color that is merely implied with liberal references to drawing, crayons, candy. It borrows a little from *The Shining*, *The Vanishing* and another strange film I bet no one has seen called *The Music of Chance* (sense of trappedness and not-yet-revealed malevolence). The reason I'm not sure I can accept this as a great film is that I've seen several French shorts which I liked better such as *Crazy Love* (wish I could tell you more), and another one about a guy whose wife is cheating on him with the town chemist (can't remember the name but it had great music).

And I'm also not sure whether I got all of the thematic content. Let me see. There was frank portrayal of psychological illness. Check. There was idle rich. Check. There was dirty diaper ennui. Check. There was a hole in the ground. Wait, does that count as a theme? I hope so, because I totally understood that one. But that's okay. It's not as if I can pretend to know what any of Fellini's films were about either, yet 8 ½ is definitely in the running for film I want to have on when I take my final breath.

Several great things in the film. There was a lot of first rate dark humor and situational irony. The moments where the guy just comes out and says the most shocking and uncomfortable things was definitely shocking and uncomfortable.<sup>[8](#)</sup> The suspense was always there and the sexual tension was well done. Same as it ever was.

That the car dealer never said anything was a superb touch.<sup>9</sup>—That the film bothered to show to some extent the details of the actions (Coen Brothers) and the psychological suffering (Sluizer) of the characters should be commended or at least pointed out. Overall, I appreciate the film. It's good, and I'm glad I saw it. I think serious movie fans might see this film. I just feel like the French are capable of more.

**Trivia Note:** AFLH is the first feature length French film in which not a single person is shown smoking a cigarette.

Dear Web Master,

“There is actually someone smoking a cigarette in AFLH. Michel's mother did when they arrived at the chateau the first time. I just rented it the other night.” – Kate Rollins

Trivia Note Redux: AFLH is the first feature length French film in which no major characters are shown smoking tobacco products.

My heart does not reside in this world of ebb and flow,  
Turbulent and agitated like a fish in a cauldron.  
As red flowers and green willows make a spring like those of old,  
I walk through the forest to visit the wine hermitage.

— Murase Taiitsu

世態浮沉心不忙  
船中魚花紅柳  
綠春風得意步自林間  
初酒處

為文侯







## Joan of Arc (1928)

### Carl Dreyer

This film really gets to the point, huh? In fact, it kind of starts out at the point, doesn't it? And it stays right there. And finishes, right there, on the point. Like a French-Greek tragedy? Stylized sparseness. Anticipates Bresson. *I guess you really don't have to have sound*. Dreyer *is able* to maintain exquisite dramatic tension through a relentless degree of craft—intercutting, stopping—uncompromising close-ups with actors who could convince (and blink) very fast. We can all learn a lot from Dreyer. I was moved, and I would hardly call myself religious.

## Thieves' Highway (1949)

### Jules Dassin

Yes, this movie is wild. Imagine if you could somehow combine *Wages of Fear* with *Touch of Evil* and an original old-school Popeye cartoon. Yeah, I'm not kidding. This film really does have a kind of edginess, which is both unexpected and weirdly compelling. And it's not without many glaring flaws, awkward lines, rushed or forced events, implausibles, and some quite grotesque acting from more than one character. But then, the question, as with *Touch of Evil*, is whether all of these flaws are not only present, there to be overlooked or pardoned, but in fact, lie at the very heart of the magic itself.

## **The Hidden Fortress (1958)**

**Akira Kurosawa**

No sleep till Brooklyn.

I will not talk until Ashikawa.

And so you push play with your first Kurosawa film. You'll realize at once you're in the hands of a master. Whatever you were watching before—it must not have been even in the same league. Epic tales of honor and swordplay, but not too much swordplay, and not merely for swordplay's sake. There's something about blood in black and white. It looks like oil. And in certain moments, there's a dreamlike combination of serenity, scenery and impending violence. I'm thinking particularly of the scenes in which they're climbing that Sisyphean "rubble to horizon" and those in which they sit behind a log and calmly ponder their next course of action, enemies closing in on all sides. War is a failure of diplomacy.

There is honor and duty, courage and betrayal, lust and greed, action and regret, and surely there is a message somewhere in all of that. But I needn't unravel the scroll today. Because DVDs are forever. Let me point out just one trick. The way Kurosawa has the audience and the peasants doubt and find out about their mysterious master in lock step. A beautiful technique of story telling. A delicious black and white mojito. "It's not sake for Christ's sake!"

And don't let the language barrier stop you from seeking out and plundering these Kurosawa films. In fact, the language barrier is a good thing because it creates a perpetual opportunity for new translations—each being an entirely new film experience. Surely there are myriad translation houses both capable and eager to interpret such classics. What could be more fun than translating a phrase like "we're screwed" for a Criterion film. I'd do it for free. DVD's should offer a choice of subtitle styles even within the same language. (I know; I've said this before.)

The other point is that the Japanese language, spoken (or shouted, to be more precise), is downright exhilarating. There's no two ways about it. Kurosawa may

not have invented Japanese, but well, it is in his films and no one can deny that.

**8 ½ (1962)**

**Fellini**

A film that resembles an old-school Italian Barolo. To a beginner, it seems difficult to approach, maybe even too slow. And you have to read—the subtitles. But gradually, you begin to understand. As the tannins relinquish their tight grasp, each precious layer of flavor is revealed one after another. In time, you are entranced and no longer aware you're watching a movie. The fleeting hints of various spices and memories pass through you as it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish what is real and what is imagined. The surreal and sublime are delivered through the perfection of black and white. And then there's the gentle, periodic breeze that dries the bead of sweat from your brow. When Fellini gives us moments of silence upon silence. Thoughts of plot structure, balance and new French oak give way to a more detached sense of wonder and appreciation. Analysis gives way to acceptance and bliss may occur. I beg you to go rent this movie before you do anything else. It's at least as good as one of those salt-water meditation tanks, if they even have those anymore. We're back.

## Alphaville (1965)

### Eddie Merckx

On the surface, the plot of *Alphaville* can be placed in a line of films driven by an Orwellian struggle against repression of the individual (*Metropolis*, *Brazil*, *Dune*, the majority of Twilight Zone episodes). Lemmy Caution is sort of a more jaded Paul Atrides, an outsider come to undo a regime that needs undoing (e.g. the navigators of the Space Guild). Okay, this opening paragraph is what needs undoing. Anyway:

“You are transparent. I see plans within plans. You must share....”

— Floating Navigator in *Dune*

“I see there is something you are hiding...But for now, you are free.”

– Alpha 60

The navigators have made up their minds. Paul is to be killed, but for now, he too, is free. The navigators lose, ultimately, but it is not for lack of trying. Alpha 60, on the other hand, seems so incompetent in stopping Lemmy it begs the question whether deep down it wants to lose. This unmotive is echoed by the practically disturbing indifference of Professor Von Braun to his own demise. If this interpretation is valid, then Godard suggests the possibility for change lies within the very heart of the autocracy itself. The external force is merely the instrument of that change. A quite romantic and unusual notion. Is this what we saw in South Africa? Or did *they* just get tired? (*They* being always outnumbered, and in the wrong?) And does this whole business about giving up not anticipate Rutger Hauer’s final (and ambiguously magnanimous) end-actions in *Blade Runner*?

In fact the more I watch *Alphaville*, the more I am reminded of *Blade Runner*. Both films draw strength from some basic romantic poetry. *Alphaville* has more of it. For better or worse. Could be a French thing. They tried having more poetry in *Blade Runner*, but Rutger Hauer’s contract allowed for only a certain number of words, and Harrison Ford couldn’t say the lines with a straight face. As what good American could? But there is a lot of very good crappy poetry in *Alphaville*.

Something else about *Alphaville* is the forcefully romantic, eleven note melody that plays whenever Ana Karina lowers her head.

“Ok — good images, especially at start (the shot of him in the glass elevator, from the outside: the first mural after the credits.) Anna Karina: yes. Great. The first hour: interesting. The second hour: dragged. ideas: a mish mash of standard technocracy/Orwellian dystopian stuff. The emotions, love, poetry: good. Machines: bad. Obvious, simplistic. The attempt to be futuristic: utterly unsuccessful. The voice of the Alpha 60: really irritating after a while. Overall, glad I saw, but not great.”

— t

And so is *Alphaville* good? Bad? Irritating? I don't know. But I believe there is just raw truth in a lot of things (a talk on nanoparticles by a Nobel scientist, a color scheme by Ozu). And with *Alphaville*, Godard gives us some of this truth.

“i didn't really like Alphaville much- i liked contempt and breathless, but that one not so much”

— Clare

# Once Upon a Time In the West (1968)

## Sergio Leone

The first time one looks at any great work of art, one can never fully grasp each of the small and seemingly innocent elements that have gone in. But then over time one begins to notice how they are indeed there, so many of them. And one wonders if it is not the very multitude of these details that makes a thing great.

*Once Upon a Time In the West*, a film by Sergio Leone, bears watching for as many times as you can do. Because it will never cease to yield new pleasures, new details. Here are some of the ones I have found.

### But They Were His Men?

Among others, one scene that really accentuates the three dimensionality of Jill's character is when Harmonica has just shot a bunch of Frank's men and in so doing, has actually saved Frank's life. (Frank is Harmonica's enemy!)

Jill: "But they were his men? And you, you let him get away."

Harmonica: "I didn't let them kill him and that's not the same thing."

Jill: "Sure, it's not the same thing."

It's actually unclear, from the way she says it, whether she agrees, or rather, whether she approves of Harmonica's decision. We know Jill is smart enough to understand why Harmonica does this, but the question is whether she really is *okay with this*. Remember, she, or at least a part of her, wants Frank dead as much as anyone. In any case, by exercising political opinion, ambiguous or not, she perpetuates her status as vital to the film as any. When does this happen in a Western? Where the female "love interest" is both *this* integral *and* this hot?<sup>10</sup> The women in Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch* are either whores or village hens. You've got two choices. And never mind Peckinpah's misogyny. What's worse, having a memorable whore (if you've seen *Wild Bunch*, you'll vividly recall that young wife who hitches up with the general—her purple satin dress, tan Mexican skin, lipstick, big adulteress grin right before—?), or having some cookie cutter heroine



whose main function is to look scared, wear a check blouse, and hug the hero at the end. In Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, the lead female role is the memory of his wife urging him to change his violent ways. Not exactly what I would call a challenging character. Of course, Leone himself, in his earlier films, was the worst. In *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, I don't even think we saw any women at all. And before that, women served cornbread and provided some of the reason for the men to keep killing each other.

"You shouldn't have shot those apples off that tree."

— El Indio

### **Strictly A Need To Know Basis**

One of the more peculiar aspects in *Once* is the strange three way relationship that develops between Harmonica, Cheyenne and Jill. The two men hatch a plan to rescue Jill by buying her property right out from underneath Frank's nose. Of course, they don't bother to mention it to Jill. Instead, they just leave her completely in the dark up to the very last moment. Harmonica does Jill the same in an earlier scene when he has her, "Get me some water. From the well—" only telling her to duck at the last second, but not explaining beforehand. The concrete explanation is that this is a way of ensuring people (Jill) do what they're supposed to and don't tip their hand. Like pawns in a chess match. The last thing you want is for them to know what's going on. "And if you make it all the way to the other side... You can become a queen! How does *that* sound?"

Or one might choose to read some kind of sexist undercurrent here, except it's the same thing we saw in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* when Clint Eastwood sadistically waits until the very last moment to save his partner (man). And it's not just the players, we ourselves get the exact same treatment. When Cheyenne is suddenly rerouted to a different jail, we genuinely worry about his fate. Leone totally leaves us hanging.

### **We Have All Known Each Other Forever**

Throughout *Once*, there is a sense of shared history between all of the major

players, which goes beyond and before the just what transpires on the screen. For example, when Frank talks to Jill as he caresses her:

“I wonder if McBain knew he married a whore. Yeah, I’ll bet he did know. It was always like McBain.”

This clearly suggests a prior relationship between Frank and McBain, which is only alluded to rather than explicitly revealed. And this is better. It’s like in *Star Wars* when the Millennium Falcon sticks onto the star destroyer in order to avoid detection (by their radar?). And the Imperial commander says, “No ship that small has a cloaking device!” Oh, God. Here, it’s not a personal relationship but a suggestion of shared common knowledge (space knowledge!), which triggers our imagination. But we expect this sort of thing in science fiction, like *Star Wars* or *Dune*. Really not so much in Westerns, at least, until Leone. Remember in *Full Metal Jacket* when they are under heavy sniper fire and they’re arguing about tactics, and Cowboy says, “I’ve seen this before...” Oh, God.

When Cheyenne has only just met Harmonica in the stable, he speaks to him with an affection as though he has known him a long time. And when Frank meets Harmonica on the train:

“So you’re the one who makes deals.”

“And you’re the one who doesn’t keep them.”

They refer to the opening sequence of the film, wherein some arrangement had been made between the two. Here, the allusion is explicit. Nevertheless, it establishes the notion of shared history early on. Later:

“Pick any method you like. Just make the deal.”

“Which deal frank? We have more than one you and me.”

And when Harmonica says, “Easy Frank. You gotta learn not to push things.” The beautiful thing is how he says it in that wickedly condescending tone. Again, only possible if there is shared personal history between the two, which Frank, for the life of him, literally, cannot remember.

Frank: "Surprised to see me here?"

Harmonica: "I knew you'd come."

Leading up to the final showdown, as Frank rides up to Harmonica who waits for him, "whittling on a piece of wood." Notice the tiny little hint of a smile he shows. Perhaps this is showing that small amount of respect he feels for Frank. Maybe not before, but now. By making the choice he has made, to confront and live down his past, or perhaps simply to accept his own nature [insert Proust quote about not trying to run with the Jones's], Frank has elevated himself in Harmonica's eyes.

Harmonica: "So you found out you're not a businessman after all."

Frank: "Just a man."

Harmonica: "An ancient race. Other Morton's will be along, and they'll kill it off."

Frank: "Don't matter to us. Nothing matters now, not the land, not the money, not the woman. I came here to see you. Cause I know that now you'll tell me what you're after."

Harmonica: "Only at the point of dying."

Frank: "I know."

## **Say It With Candlesticks**

Near the end of the film, Cheyenne talks with Jill as she sets the table in the background. She lays the table cloth out and begins to flatten it. He tells her he doesn't think Harmonica is the right man for her. The camera then shows us Cheyenne's face as you hear in the background a heavy clunking sound, which must be the candlesticks being placed on the table. It becomes clear that thud we hear is her unspoken (unseen) response to Cheyenne's pessimism, which is a resigned yet dissatisfied acceptance. Remember earlier, "It's not the same thing." Her tone. A fairly straightforward tactic by Leone, but the noise, the exact noise and the action it represents expresses her feelings more precisely and entertainingly than any bit of dialogue ever could.

## God Damn It's Bright Outside

The other main point about all of these films is the bright sunshine. My God there's a lot of it. And it's all this wonderful yellow and brown, dry and hot kind, which you can almost feel. That's one of the obvious but possibly overlooked wonders of all on-loc Westerns. Real widescreen tonics.

One particular element in *Once*, which also happens a lot, if I remember, in *The Searchers*, is this very surreal contrast between daytime and night. Oh, and it happens a lot in a Peckinpah film *Pat Garret & Billy The Kid*. But that abrupt transition from extreme light outside to extreme dark inside when for example Jill stops off at the "general store" on the way to the Sweetwater. Sort of like when you go into and out of a movie theatre on a bright sunny day. That first moment when you open that door, and you're hit with that faceful of light. Wow. That'll stop you.

## Getting Into The Mind of That Minor Character

Remember the scene where Cheyenne gets into that moving train shootout with some of Frank's gang. During the scene there is that worn technique of letting us experience the action from the perspective of the minor character who's about to be killed. It could be some unfortunate German terrorist, Rolf, about to do exactly what Bruce Willis wants him to. Or it could be one of Thulsa Doom's long-haired beauties about to enjoy a truly brilliant trap set by Conan the One-man Austrian Think Tank and Barbarian. The common thread in all of these instances is that the amount of time we spend inhabiting the doomed minor character is usually no more than fifteen seconds. But here, I can promise, you it's longer than that.

And as we watch Frank's henchman take that slow walk through the train car as he's stalked by Cheyenne, we have plenty of time to develop the keenest sense of shared identification with that quite justified look of fear he's got on. It's that same "Ueuhh, how did I get into this?" we see in both great films—the final duel scene in *Barry Lyndon*—and not so great films—*Gladiator*—when the newbies get their first taste, or I should say, faceful of the arena.<sup>[11](#)</sup>

But Leone makes it even more fun by having Charles Bronson just stand there and watch the scene unfold. He looks just as intrigued as we are. Bronson as spectator (and stand in for us) is risky in coming dangerously close to breaking the suspension of disbelief. But the risk pays off big as it creates a remarkable and strange emotional sensation for all of us. And not only that, but it's perfectly in keeping with Bronson's almost Malkovichian character, who is already odd enough by his quirky grammar, his unexplained behavior (e.g. his seemingly random rape overtures with Jill), and just the fact that he gets shot in the first scene (for crying out loud). Not your average, everyday hero. Remember how Tuco wears his gun around his neck on a string. Oh, God.

And then there is the stunning depiction of McBain's agony at the sight of his felled daughter. His desperation brilliantly filmed, as he runs for the chair where his gun is. At this moment, he cares about nothing else, not the money, not his dreams, not nothin'. Just a girl, his daughter. And that is gripping. I don't care what anyone says.

## **Romance, Perspective**

In most Westerns, the final shootout scene takes place in some private, secluded place. The two heroes battling it out, their isolation underscoring their lonely and heroic lot. Blah blah. But here, the duel will take place right in the midst of droves of railroad workers. The workers, who represent modern society and progress, are physically present, but simply could care less about the activities of these two eclipsed individuals. In this way, Leone rather emphatically highlights the discrepancy between personal, appropriately irrational goals versus the cool advancement of society as a whole. And so we may still choose to sympathize with the hero, to reject society, reject Microsoft, cell phones, Starbucks, the EU. But we must do so, thanks to Leone, having seen there is another side to it, a side which totally doesn't care what we think.

I was born in 1957 in a sod house at Kapuivik, my family's winter campsite in our life on the land. We were living happily like my ancestors waking up with frozen kamiks for a pillow. In 1965 my parents were told by Government workers, 'You should send your kids to school or you could lose your family allowance.' I was nine years old getting ready to be like my father. The next summer I was on the boat to Igloolik with my brother. While my parents lived on the land I stayed in town and learned the English language. Most weeks they showed movies at the Community Hall. They cost a quarter to get in. That's when I started carving soapstone to get money for the movies. I remember John Wayne in the West. He spearheads the US cavalry and kills some Indians at the fort. One time the scouts didn't return, we go out where there's arrows sticking out of dead soldiers and horses and one soldier says, 'What kind of Indians did this!' I was shocked too. That's what I learned in my education, to think like one of the soldiers.

In the 1970's Igloolik voted twice against TV from the south since there was nothing in Inuktitut, nothing in it for us. But I noticed when my father and his friends came back from hunting they would always sit down with tea and tell the story of their hunt. And I thought it would be great to film hunting trips so you wouldn't have to tell it, just show it. In 1981 I sold some carvings and bought a video camera. When I watched my videos I noticed kids gathered outside my window looking in to see the TV. That was how special it was at the beginning.

In 1985 I received my first Canada Council grant to produce an independent video, *From Inuk Point of View*, on my summer holiday. I was director, Paul Apak editor, Pauloosie Qulitalik the cultural narrator, and Norman Cohn, cameraman. This became our Isuma team.

Our name Isuma means 'to think,' as in Thinking Productions. Our building in the centre of Igloolik has a big sign on the front that says Isuma. **Think.** Young and old work together to keep our ancestors' knowledge alive. We create traditional artifacts, digital multimedia and desperately needed jobs in the same activity. Our productions give an artist's view for all to see where we came from: what Inuit were able to do then and what we are able to do now.

## Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972)

### Luis Buñuel

Haven't you ever wondered what would happen if, just once, a great artist were allowed to evolve to the later years of life? What untold genius would result? Well my friends, there is an answer to that question, and his name is Luis Buñuel. *La Belle Du Jour*, *Diary of a Chambermaid*, *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *That Obscure Object of Desire*. These are not bad films. Shot in glorious French 1970s Technicolor, *Discreet Charm* is a masterpiece. It's enthralling. There's a scene with a waiter that looks just like Tom Snyder. I *said* it was enthralling. Like any decent film, it tackles the bourgeoisie, the church, men, women—the military. It has enough surreal twists and turns to shake a stick at. Although I wouldn't. And it has a pervasive and paradoxical (because it's so bright and colorful) melancholy which leaves you feeling both empty and full. Was that just a load of crap? Yes. It was. Anyway...

Let's talk about the humor. Grand Master B's humor is unusual in the way it sneaks up on you. Many of the jokes are weird. It felt as though I was watching it on one side of the couch, my brain on the other. I was busy reading the subtitles and trying to figure out what was going on, while some other part of my brain was over there just cracking up at everything. Sometimes I wanted to ask my brain what was so damn funny, but it would have said, "It just is" or perhaps even told me to "Shut the \_\_\_\_\_ up." Jerk. The lessons are complex. You feel as though you're probably only getting ½ of the point at any given time and that repeated watching would add up to the other four or five halves.

So many memorable moments. I won't belabor the obviously funny ones, those involving animal lust, the bishop as gardener, the dialogue, the film. But what about the waiter (a young Peter Jennings—crossed with Tom Snyder?) dropping the ducks, which suddenly are props? And the way he then places them back on the tray with quiet callousness. Every bit as dark and disturbing as the dream sequences of the emotionally disturbed army officer. Oh, yes. Technicolor blood packets. You won't see that in *To Catch A Thief*. Oh, no.

The film is a tour of color. The blood red window frames against the white walls of the couple's country home during the "love in the bushes" scene and again in the aforementioned Tom Snyder scene. Real, not real. Real, not real. And so on. Buñuel, like Mies, is the man.



## **Cries And Whispers (a.k.a. Cry Babies and Repressed Bitches (and Ho's)) (1972)**

### **Ingmar Bergman**

Now this here's a nice littl'old story 'bout these three fucked up bitches and their bitch-ass husbands. They's s'posed to be sisters even though one of them act like she they mother or som'n. Now one a these bitches be dyin' of some kind a cancer, so it's like all sad and shit. But ain't nothin' I can do about it. So I just sit back and watch.

Film starts with ten whole minutes of nuttin' but red and white. I's like, "Sweet Jesus, I gotta get this here colors scheme goin' at my house." I call my bitch at work said, "Baby, you gotsta pick up a can a that red paint on your way home tonight, y'hear!"

Next thing I start noticing how he be movin' the camera 'round—zooming in and out—front of things—behind things—all up in everything. Clocks tick'n and shit. I'm think'n "Man, this Bergman mother fucker really know what the fuck he doin'." It be like fuck'n child's play for him—like a fuck'n dollhouse—and he own it. Course, poor brother must be wound up tight as one of those fine Swedish ho's. Motherfucker need to get himself a massage or som'n.

Now let's talk about specifics. I think one 'da key moments in this film is the "Do you realize I hate you" speech. It's like, at first, you're like, now how 'n hell was we leading up to that? I mean, all we had was a couple a scenes—that old affair between Doctor What's His Face and Sister Smiley and that relationship between Old Mama Hen and her pale-face husband. Man, that dude's meaner 'n my landlord on Malcolm Xmas. Other than that, there was basically just, well, a bunch of cries and whispers, and some off the hook camera work. No, I really do say. But then I realized how subconsciously, he *was* preparing us all 'long. Deep down, you knew (I knew) it was coming. Cuz now I'm lookin' back and I'm, like, think'n now wher'n hell was all this tension coming from? Cuz it couldn't all been just from that one littl'ol bitch lying up there in bed all day. No. It had to be those two damn sisters. Hat'n and a hat'n all the damn time. Shit.

## **Mirror (1974)**

### **Andrei Tarkovsky**

#### **The Artist's Dilemma**

In the scene where Ignat has taken the art book, and we watch just the hand slowly turning the pages. The India paper inserts, which keep trying to crumple between every turned page, seem to present a dilemma for the neurotic book turner (artist). Do I stop and try to smooth the pages out (more takes, more cuts, more time)? Or do I just let them be crumpled and move on?<sup>[12](#)</sup><sub>-</sub>

In the printing press scene, Masha is paralyzed with the fear she has made a mistake in the newest issue of the newspaper where she works. Here, the artist's insecurity is dramatized on a grand scale with big machines, big paper, and the work of many other people all in the balance (the bell making scene in *Andrei Rublev*). It is interesting to note how Masha obsesses over her imagined error and seems unaffected by her co-worker's pointing out that the paper is already being printed, so it would be too late to change anything anyway. This echoes the internal preoccupation we saw in the burning barn scene as she just stands there watching.

#### **Wake Me Up Before You Go Go**

At the beginning of the printing press scene, Masha runs down the street, and it begins to rain (dump). She runs through the rain into the building where she is checked by the security guard. Okay, so we're inside and out of the rain. But wait, now she has to go back outside and run through the rain again. Is this just the layout of these damn Soviet-era printing complexes? Or is this sequence designed to jump start thought by sidestepping our sleepy expectations. We're never out of the rain. The artist's work is never done. I don't know about you...

#### **People Are Who They Are**

When Masha gets chewed out by Liza in the printing press scene for refusing

to deal with reality, for running away from her problems. What does she do? She runs away, out of the room, down the long corridor, even outrunning the camera. (It was a pretty damn slow camera; I'll give you that.) And so she escapes to a day dreamy shower. And we almost get to see a plump breast. People are who they are, and the cycle continues.

Then during the scene where Ignat's mother and father discuss which one of them the boy will stay with, we flash back to the same argument from years earlier, which shows that people have the same fights over and over again. Little is truly ever resolved, in such post-marital aftermaths.

### **Anxiety, Tension, Conflict, Reconciliation, Next**

The grenade scene is as tight as it gets with all the elements working together toward one singular tension. From the moment the kid starts disobeying the drill sergeant, you begin to know this can only end badly. The steadiness of the camera as it zeroes in amidst the wild commotion of the kids in the background alerts us (perhaps operating on our subconscious, which is Tarkovsky's way) that we are headed for something. The endpoint itself, of course, is perhaps the epitome of tension, a hand-grenade with the pin out.

[spoiler] And when the drill sergeant sacrifices himself by jumping on grenade, we see his little blue plastic under cap which covers his war wound, semi-translucent almost like a halo, perhaps symbolizing his selfless gesture. Echoing Stalingrad—heroism, his scar, a nation's scar. And the next shot has the sergeant with his military cap back on. The 'halo' is once again concealed. How long is a hero a hero? When does he become himself again?<sup>13</sup>[/spoiler]

### **Next**

In the scene with the Spaniards, Alexi and M are having their post-divorce argument in one room, while their guests entertain themselves in another. Here, Tarkovsky unleashes a brilliant technique wherein the implicit emotional content in one room, Alexi and M's marriage, is explicitly acted out, by someone else, in another, separate room.

The Spaniard's passion as he performs his bullfighting routine is the lovemaking which Alexi and M used to know. The bullfighter, Palomo Linares is sent off by the entire city, father and son not knowing if they will ever see one and other again. <sup>14 15</sup> - Meanwhile, Alexi, Ignat and M find themselves now in much the same predicament. Then the juxtaposition of the deeply nostalgic video footage with its historical load creates a sense of gravitas, which is both pleasing, and unbearable. The scene then moves to conflict with the Spaniard slapping his daughter for his perceived mocking of him. But it could have been Alexi slapping M, probably for that same smirk she now makes again in that fogged up old mirror. We can tell by her face and eyes the Spaniard's wife is reminded of the many times the girl's father (her husband) has done the same to her. People are who they are. Then there is another attempt at reconciliation, this time M consoling the Spaniard's wife, both physically and thematically bridging the two scenes.

Masha had been chastised for being self-centered and trying to emotionally co-infect her husband. But here, we have every indication the Spaniard's wife is a loyal and selfless wife, and yet, look what it gets her. To the question of how a wife should be, how much to give or to take, the answer is there is no good answer. Although Americans will probably have more respect for the divorced Masha. Cut to the historical footage of families parting with their children, which visually recaps the deep sense of anxiety and loss in the bullfighter's story and in all of their lives, Spanish or other.

## **Shining Power**

Ignat has the same sort of premonitory fifth sense of the young boy in *The Shining*. A weird little kid caught in the middle of a bad marriage. Sort of an autistic savant. No word yet whether Kubrick was influenced by *Mirror*, although how could he not?

## **We Should See Beauty In Everyday Occurrences**

Yes, well, sort of. But don't be fooled by Tarkovsky's skill. It's not easy. He

just makes it seem that way. Watching his films one might think he could point the camera just anywhere and find beauty unlimited. But this is not the reality. What he does is couch everyday images in a surreal, carefully crafted and sublimely articulated context. In fact, Tarkovsky's world is hardly any more 'everyday' than *Terminator 3*. When was the last time your barn burned down in the pouring rain? The last time you ran through the rain to the printing press in 1930-ish, panting your way through a maze of hallways, past the strangely unaffected security guard, past the big machines thumping and bellowing as only big machines can do, past the giant rolls of printing paper that look as they could have come off the front of a steamroller—all of this because you are desperate to stop a mistake going to press, and the subject of the error probably is none other than Joseph Stalin. But then finally you relent to the cooler heads of your assembled colleagues, whose main concern is that you take a shower? That's what I thought. And I'm sure you haven't forgotten the time you talked to your dead relative on the other side of the wall or watched your drill instructor jump on a hand-grenade? When my father was dying at the hospital, and he was holding that little bird, I couldn't believe it. The nurse almost tried to take it away even. Something about hospital policies and standard practices for the palming of small birds.

Even the most mundane and seemingly natural elements cease to be the moment they go onto film (mini DV). The wind double sweeping across the field in the opening fence breaking scene. The fence. Breaking. Happens all the time. Maybe in your life. In which case, you should probably buy a film camera. Tarkovsky's genius is the very fact that he has made you feel as though these are every day occurrences. He shows you sublime, transcendent and utterly stylized beauty, which is derived from, but not comprised of, the every day.

## **Fitzcarraldo (1982)**

### **Werner Herzog**

Any film made by a German, who takes more than five years to do it, is, (if you've heard of it at least once) by definition, going to be great. *Fitzcarraldo* is no exception. First half kicks so much ass. Second half kicks ass too, but the first half kicks so much ass. It's like Peter Weir, Nick Roeg. The sounds and haze of *Blade Runner*.<sup>16</sup>—The bell-making scene in *Andrei Rublev*.<sup>17</sup>—And National Geographic all rolled into one. Okay this film kicks so much ass I can't even tell you, even though I've just tried.

## **Blade Runner (1982)**

### **Ridley Scott**

Contrary to popular mis-conception, this is actually a girl movie. Check that. This is totally a girl movie. The concept for the film's romance here was seen earlier in Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*, the ending of which offers a more ambiguous and equally beautiful promise. Translation: If you liked the romance in *Blade Runner*, you should watch *Alphaville* and then buy *Ghost in the Shell*. I'm not going to say it again.

One small point. The entire movie, the way I see it, you are waiting to hear what Rutger Hauer has seen. In just four years, what could he have possibly seen that is so special? Android or no.

## Dune (1984)

### David Lynch

Oh you knew this was coming. But let's not talk about *Dune* the movie, let's talk about *Dune* the language "spicer upper." A typical exchange between two people

Q: Gee, I wonder what I should have with my Mexican-style dinner?

Q: Oh boy, what about some margaritas?

A: Hey, great idea.

A: Yes.

Now, here's the same exchange, after Dune-hancement

Q: What's in the box?

A: A blender.

Q: What's in the blender?

A: Margaritas! [Mar-gah-ree-tahs]

Examples of other Dune-hanced phrases: "That would suck" becomes "That would be bad for spice production." Those of you who don't like tailgaters: "Why are you riding me? Can you not see the red light directly in front of us?" would be "The slow bullet penetrates the shield, asshole." And finally, "Hello" would be "I *WILL* kill you." But seriously, this movie is so ridiculously good. The first time you watch it, you may be overwhelmed by its sheer breadth and complexity or perhaps concerned about its over-the-top ness. Toto? Just watch it a few more times. It's artistic vision alone combined with moments of pure poetry in the screenplay are enough to make this one of the few good things to come out of the 80's.[18](#)

Funniest look ever is when Huey says "You think you've defeated me. You think I don't know what I've done—for my wife." The look on Pieter Devries' face is priceless. Because he's just as confused as we are! Another time is when Paul says "Aleia keeps pace with the storm," and Patrick Stewart and the other guy just look at each other with this dumbfounded expression. It's obvious they



have no idea what Paul is talking about. But they believe. Now why can't you?

Candidates for most random, strange reference in a film: "What do you call the mouth shadow in the second moon?" And from *Blade Runner*, "I've seen c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tenhauser gate." Ahh, fiction.

High today 50's, low 32.

## Brazil (1985)

### Terry Gilliam

*Brazil* is an extraordinary film, and I'm better for seeing it. But I must admit it took me about two weeks and a year to recover from the experience (that means  $\leq$  one flashback per day). It's as if Terry Gilliam has some special knowledge of the human mind—and how to disturb it. The scene with Michael Palin in the Ministry of Information Gathering was probably the single most disturbing of any film between 1983 and 1987. In the scene, an office secretary dutifully transcribes torture sessions as if they were ordinary business meetings (like, say, at Microgoogle mergers and acquisitions). If you formed a think tank and said, "You people aren't leaving this room until you've come up with the most disturbing thing possible for a torture scene," they would emerge from the room approximately two years later and say "giant baby mask," although those Nixon and Reagan masks are pretty good too. But no, giant baby mask. Definitely giant baby mask.

But Terry Gilliam isn't the only one man think tank. This baby concept appeared earlier in Tarkovsky's *Solaris* where a whole scene culminates in a purely verbal description of a grotesquely large baby floating in a supernatural ocean. This image, which in *Solaris* is entirely from your own imagination, then haunts you throughout the remainder of the film. [Stop here if you haven't seen the film] [spoiler]. Most viewers go from unsettled to unraveled as Sam learns the second most disturbing possibility, that the person wearing the baby mask is your own best friend. Gilliam is both willing and, more importantly, able to cross the line. [/spoiler]

Gilliam's uniquely weird filmmaking vision finds roots in his own animation work done years earlier for "Monty Python's Flying Circus." That is to say, Gilliam uses a proprietary blend of "clip and paste" sets and mechanically naked effects to create a low-budget-esque alter-reality that is all the more convincing for it. This visual style is a perfect match for the orchestrated clumsiness of Gilliam's society, where technology and law seem to have plowed right ahead in spite of a mutation or two early on. So we have pencil sharpener's that are uber\_complicated and computer screens that can do everything but show you your

work. All of this not unlike Woody Allen's *The Sleeper*, but 180° darker.

The effectiveness of *Brazil*'s cheap looking but hard-hitting special effects stands in stark contrast to the computer-generated movies of today, which are expensive and soft-hitting (I won't name names). "But what about *The Fisher King* and *12 Monkeys*?" you say. Surely, Robin Williams, Brad Pitt and Bruce Willis do not come cheap. Okay, Jeff Bridges did. Whatever. Yeah, *The Fisher King* did look pretty much like a normal-budget Hollywood movie. And to that, who talks about it now? But *12 Monkeys* sure didn't. It went back to the watch-with-gears-showing, only this time it was a Rolex. And yes, people (not just Lebbeus Woods's lawyers) do talk about it. In any case, the point that you don't need a high-budget set to make a great film is probably less useful than the simple fact that some filmmakers are better than others. This review sucked. Fine.

“...hobbies include fishing, sightseeing and reading what people have written about Terry Gilliam’s films.”

dear phillip,

saw "broken flowers" yesterday. <sup>19</sup>not that bad actually. not perfect (useless flashbacks showing same footage twice, some of the jokes verging on patently stupid, bill murray almost playing it *too* cool). but by and large not that bad. worth the 90 mins. sort of a straightforward, minimally-offensive representation of one kind of reality. jarmusch (and i hated his only other film i've seen, "ghost dog") is too forceful though, but for some reason I feel more lenient toward him than i would some others. it's because i think he's sincere. my only other complaint is that there just wasn't enough pedophilia. there was some, but surely there could have been much more.

read more of your book recently. enjoying it terribly. my only complaint is that there just aren't enough dragons in it. surely you could have included more?

love anyways,  
cb

## **Tampopo (1986)**

### **Juzo Itami**

At times hilarious, at other times, even more hilarious. It's sort of like a parody of a Clint Eastwood Western, sort of. It's about learning how to make the perfect noodles. No, that really is what it's about. The film is secretly similar to *The Gods Must be Crazy* in its expository jump-around style. So don't be freaked out when it teleports from scene to scene, and when some scenes don't even include any of the main characters. And what about when they walk into that shop and tell those guys their noodles suck? It's downright exhilarating. I wasn't kidding when I said it was about noodles. Oh, just see it. This film kicks very much ass.

## Full Metal Jacket (1987)

### Stanley Kubrick

*Full Metal Jacket*—everybody's heard of it, most people have seen it, and no one can agree on whether it's a great film or not. Stanley Kubrick's Vietnam film is made of two distinctly separate but related halves. The first follows a group of new recruits as they slog their way through marine boot camp at Parris Island. It's a non-stop showcase of some of the most riveting dialogue ever put on film. The second is a series of scenes depicting a group of young men's experience in Vietnam. Admittedly, the first half is tighter, and some viewers may even fall out of the chopper during the second. For those who have already fallen out, may you land in deep mud and possibly survive. For those who are only at risk of falling out, let me strap you in.

The film is essentially a character study in what happens when a bunch of young men are crammed like bullets into the odious metal magazine that was Vietnam. Those who view Kubrick's work as cold and aloof, lacking a sufficient quantity of humanity will see the young men as entirely depraved, reflecting/confirming a deeply cynical view of mankind. To read this unipolarity into Kubrick's work is to ignore the facts as they are on the screen. Each major character should evoke both negative and positive feelings. Real life former marine drill instructor Lee Erney plays Sergeant Hartman, who treats his "pukes" sort of like Kubrick treats his actors. He represents "The Man" whom we are all inclined to hate, but nonetheless whom we understand; we know why he must do what he does. He loves the Virgin Mary. So does the President.

Matthew Modine's Joker is the character with whom we most easily identify. Cocky, funny and skeptical—yes, *love* that Joker. There's really not much to dislike about him except that being snarky isn't necessarily a better solution. For example, his sense of humor certainly doesn't get him out of the draft, nor does it get him out of the war once he's in it. In fact, his cockiness takes him right to the front lines instead of "in the rear with the gear" where we should all want to be. When Joker *is* confronted with reality, he shuts up and falls in line as much as anyone else. For example, when he's chewed out by his superior officer in the



“Who’s side are you on anyway” speech. His response is all of our response at that point, which is “Sir, yes sir.” And though this is perfectly sensible behavior, it does reveal his arrogance to be nothing more than what arrogance is, just a coping mechanism of a frightened young boy. And again, in the very last scene, when confronted with a very harsh situation...

Gomer Pyle is the character we fully pity, but my God why did he have to sneak that donut into his trunk? Kubrick’s trick is that by forcing us to watch him fail so many times as we go through boot camp, he almost makes *us* begin to lose patience with Pyle ourselves. We’re all ready to get the hell out of Act One and this guy just keeps screwing everything up. The punishment scene is basically where our subconscious minds were already heading, and only by offering it, does Kubrick snap us out of our Salem-esque trance.<sup>20</sup>—We then go back to complete pity and hatred of ‘The Man’ like we’re supposed to, right? The final scene of Act One is obviously one of the most intense scenes in film and is the appropriate climax of all of the powerful and conflicting emotions in the scenes leading up to it.

Rafterman, meanwhile, is a visibly insecure, chain-smoking blonde guy who has an empty space where the personality’s supposed to be—basically your average cable news anchor. But we pity his naivety and we are hard pressed to deny him his little moment of happiness when he finally experiences the thrill of firing a bullet into another human being. Consider too the simultaneously complex and basic relationship between Animal Mother and Eightball, a relationship which permeates the film’s second act. The home-grown racist who may or may not have an even deeper sense of loyalty to his fallen comrade—cold and contrived, or just cold truth?

Consider the scene where the men negotiate the price of a Vietnamese prostitute. We are confronted with the same ambiguous character portrayal we’ve seen throughout the film. On the one hand, these men exhibit wanton disregard for women and flagrant racism. On the other hand, they don’t know any better, they haven’t had sex in months (you try it—I already am) and frankly, their witty remarks are still damn witty in spite of their moral depravity. The way they all say “No” in unison to the initial offering price of the hooker evokes our sympathy as

we can all relate to the experience of bargaining (um...). “You want fifty bucks for that? You gotta be kidding!” We’ve all been there. The way Cowboy mimics a Vietnamese accent in answering the motorcycle pimp is a perversion of the congenial act of going to a foreign country and trying to speak the language. Ignorant and insensitive, but somehow his enthusiasm still manages to be endearing—like Ted Stevens (R). Also note how the pimp shows deference to his hooker as he faithfully translates her objection when she refuses to service a black man. “Too beaucoup. Too beaucoup.” Imagine the same scene in an American movie. The hooker wouldn’t dare object, and if she did, the pimp would probably hit her right then and there. But then Bruce Willis would kill him and everything would be cool. The pimp also preserves his own dignity both by firmly negotiating his price and by looking away when Eightball pulls out his “Alabama black snake” for all to see. Then at the end of the scene, there is more development of the relationship between Animal Mother and Eightball, which will come back later on.

In the scene where Animal Mother attempts to rescue his fallen brother. Notice the war whoop he makes as he runs toward the building guns blazing. Does he undertake this heroic action purely out of a sense of moral duty, or because he’s just jacked up and wants to shoot someone? You can’t be sure, can you? Ambiguity: preserved. Kubrick 1, *Time Out Guide* (-4). Another point of the scene is to show how command and control can break down in the heat of battle. I find it a particularly good decision to have Cowboy lose control of the situation, while exhibiting absolutely no sign of weakness or incompetence whatsoever. In fact, it’s even hinted at early on when he assumes leadership of the squad. At first he seems a little frazzled and unsure of his new status. Because of this and the previously established awareness of his small physical size (“I didn’t know they stacked shit that high”), the viewer expects some hint of weakness which would allow or invite others to challenge his authority. But far from it, in the final moment, he displays none, but stands firm behind his loud voice. I believe Mr. Kubrick has done the same.

## **Ghost in the Shell (1995)**

**Mamoru Oshii**

*He loved her, but she wanted something more.*

What should I say about this film? Other than it really needs to be projected. Earlier, being almost completely naïve to Japanese animation, I asked the question of whether watching more of these films would dampen or enhance the pleasure of viewing *Akira*. And now (having seen a bunch) I can answer. For me, it really didn't make any difference. *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* are two great films. That's all that matters.

## **Eyes Wide Shut (1999)**

### **Stanley Kubrick**

Shit, I can't believe I almost forgot about 1999. Whatever you say about *Eyes Wide Shut*, you cannot deny that when you walk into a room with a bunch of people wearing strange robes and Venetian masks and hear a line of eerie piano notes, it totally reminds you of that movie.

## 8 ½ Women (2000)

### Peter Greenaway

This film has totally caught me with my pants down. At times amusing, at times a little slow, always thought provoking (and not all of them of the wholesome variety), and often visually stunning. The Academy should, in addition to renouncing all prior decisions and dismembering itself immediately, do away with cinematography and replace it with a category called visual splendor. *8 ½ Women* would definitely be a frontrunner.

It won't appeal to everyone. In fact, it will only appeal to about four hundred people. I myself didn't think I would want to see it again right away. But now I do. As for the themes and what the movie is trying to say and whether I should call it profound or pretentious, I have no idea. I just love the colors, the costumes, the absurdity. Although I do wonder if it wouldn't have been better for her to just see all those milkshakes and never actually let *us* see them being consumed. And I know I would have preferred just one "Jesus, the Son of God", which was funny the first time. Anyway, whatever.

If you want to read what somebody *much older* than me has to say about Greenaway, you should read Roger Ebert's review of *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (after you've seen it, of course). And also look for the twenty percent more perverted European version, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Brother*. I think Roger Ebert is probably the only person out there who *really* gets Greenaway. [21](#) -

## Mulholland Driveway (2001)

### David Lynch

I walked out one evening from *Mulholland Drive*, and some big fat guy said to his medium-sized friend, "I'm glad we don't have to do a term paper on this," I thought:

1. Me too
2. I'm glad I don't have to read your term paper on this.
3. Brilliant fat guy, brilliant fat guy.
4. Nothing, my brain was already done.
5. *Short Cuts, Pulp Friction, Been John Malkovich, Hellraiser, Debbie Does L.A.*

### ● Cast Your Vote Here

## **Saraband (2005)**

### **Ingmar Bergman**

Long awaited sequel to *Scenes from a Marriage*. It's good. It's standard Bergman stuff. No pain, no gain. And let me assure you there is both here.

## **Zatoichi (2003)**

“Chopping up Basho, oh ho ho ho. Slicing up statues, oh ho ho ho. Don’t know about you, but I am a Chien Edolusian...”

Imagine Ang Lee and *Kill Bill* race toward a platform where Akira Kurosawa and Takeshi Kitano both stand. As they reach the platform, Takeshi kicks both of them in the head. Kurosawa then places his hand on Takeshi’s shoulder, while Juzo Itami and Toshiro Mifune can be seen laughing boisterously from across the stage. Good, because that’s pretty much what just happened.

### **The Violence**

Although plenty of it, is not over-the-top or purposefully pointless like the others. It doesn’t announce itself on the way in and then give an exit poll on the way out. The violence in *Zatoichi*, however, does seem completely appropriate for the story and befitting whatever genre the film has created for itself. In other words, it is artistically pure.

### **The Back Story**

The personal tragedy (or *raison d’hate ya*, if you will) of the young Noruto XX and XY, although a bit of a lengthy side plot, was more compelling than QT’s analogous animated back story involving Vivian Hsu’s murdered cartoon parents. (When Godard fails, you learn something; when QT fails, you sigh.) Our natural tendency, of course, is to want more back story on Zatoichi himself. But no, we don’t get to choose, and good thing too because it’s better for us to not know any more about Zatoichi than we do.

### **The Anti-hero**

Although Zatoichi never officially gave up fighting, he is still very much the anti-hero by living or attempting to live in anonymity. This is vaguely similar to Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven*, although it differs in that we are constantly indulged with Zatoichi successes as Kitano (probably at great amusement to



himself) dispenses with the customary “watching the hero get beaten down for a while before he can triumph in the end.”

## **The Meaning**

The message, if there has to be one, could be the same as Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, which Pauline Kael didn't much care for, which is that duty, battle, death, life, is what it is. Take it or leave it. The film's only potential flaw is an occasional tendency to dip into Ang Lee-ism with a few extra pauses and tears here and there. And perhaps there is not enough in the way of sacrifice or a sense of loss to pay for our near constant exhilarations. Or is that true? [spoiler] For example. We can't help but grow fairly attached to the charismatic bodyguard (anti-villain to Zatoichi's anti-hero) and his wife. Their loss is indeed pain that we must endure. Kitano doesn't quite make it the ordeal that was the loss of our all-star, navy blue skirt-wearing swordsman in *Seven Samurai*. But a loss is a loss. And this one is particularly good because our sympathies are now crossing over, to the other team as it were. [/spoiler] And the film makes us eat more than a few bowlsful of psychological suffering with the story of the Noruto children—their suffering perhaps even verging into Michael Jackson territory. Now that's catharsis!

## **The Acting**

Goes without saying. Beat Takeshi's ability to both perform and direct simultaneously brings back an earlier time, when giants roamed the earth (specifically Orson Welles and Jean Renoir). And finally, although not explicitly blown-up, we do get a sense of Zatoichi's backstory. The pure violence of his flashbacks reflect the reality of his present existence. We grieve for the incalculable loneliness we cannot help but project onto him and for the fact that he cannot escape the past. His face, his eyes (or eyelids, I guess), and his twitches all allow this.

## **The Colors**

Takeshi Kitano also possesses the Peter Greenaway gift of still color, yet with

some of Yasajuro Ozu's ability to keep it all in frame. The ceramic blues and dark wood of the tavern scenes. The navy versus red kimonos. The gray and black of the rain on the ground.

## **The Style**

Kitano demonstrates a joyous flare inserting seemingly tangential, creative moments reminiscent of Juzo Itami (*Tampopo*) and Seijun Suzuki (*Branded To Kill*). People dancing in fields, running around with spears, the theatrics at the end, pretty much all the jokes—these things are all perfectly relevant to the story/film itself and merely require an expanded sense of organization in order to appreciate (or at least not complain about). If you need help following Zatoichi, then you just need help, is what you need.

Spinning umbrellas  
Do little to stop the rain  
Falling on the ground.

## Amores Perros (2000)

### Alejandro González Iñárritu

Incredible. Mendes and Ozun (and anyone else out there who isn't as good) can all just sit down and shut up and kneel before your Aztec god. Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, master storyteller. Tells you what's going to happen and then goes back and retells it. Lots of films do this, but this is on the level of Greek tragedy (no, I'm not talking about the miserable lack of effective steroids at the 440 BC games). I'm talking about "You're going to fuck your mother dude! How you like them figs?" "Whatever, Ponch." "Okay, I warned you." (Herodotus snickering) And the thing is, in spite of this, you *still* care and are surprised by what happens, partly because you refuse to believe the prophecy and partly because you just forgot, which is fair. Because Iñárritu makes you forget, and makes you care about people with flaws, big flaws, people doing the worst things, and you *still* care.

The car driving scene is just frigging cool. I swear, and so do Mexicans, and it's music to my ears. If you made an entire album with just "puta" and a cheesy synthesizer track, I would buy it. Throw in a couple of "corazons" and a "chinga tu madre," and we're talking Grammy. I think we would all swear this much if it sounded so good in our language. Brother #1 is the poster boy for skinny cool heroin style. There is a rose in Guadala-harlem, and he reminds me of Ewan McGregor. Somewhere between *Trainspotting* and a blue jean commercial. Brother #2 is like a crazed Tim Duncan, a-little-bit-a-smaller sized. The old Zapatista dog guy? I don't know *what* was up with that guy. But still.

Some characters change. Other's cannot. The dog becomes a fight dog and cannot change. That is his nature, and he is to be accepted for what he is, both loving, as well as capable of unleashing great damage. The dog is a character as important and complex as any other. He serves as a metaphor to help us understand the old man and his challenge. This last paragraph was boring for me too. Mexico City is not boring, obviously.



**Contractions:** When con is followed by the pronoun mí or ti to say “with me” or “with you,” the phrase is shorted to conmigo or contigo, respectively. Recent examples: Vende conmigo. (Come with me.) Vendré contigo. (I will come with you.) : **Contractions**

## Hellboy (2004)

### Guillermo Del Toro

*Hellboy* is an amalgamation of some of the best aspects of *Lethal Weapon*, *Raiders*, *X-Men* and *Hellraiser* all fused into one very active little genre film, which manages to be both funny and intense at the same time. The film goes way beyond expectations with the immensely charismatic Ron Perlman as Hellboy, or H.B. as he is affectionately referred to by his ex-girlfriend.

Ex-girlfriend? Yes, *Hellboy* delves sensibly into the inner psychology of its red hero and in doing so acquires a real human interest angle. Whereas Wolverine's past is about as intriguing as it gets, his present is fairly straightforward. Watching Wolverine cut people is exhilarating. Watching him brood is filler. But when Hellboy broods, we brood with him.

And what about that Nazi villain who seems to be kept alive in part by a mechanical device? It's a beautiful idea,<sup>22</sup>—which came from a very odd Mexican film called *Cronos*,<sup>23</sup>—starring none other than Ron Perlman. Oh, wait a minute—that's a Guillermo Del Toro film. Ha! It's all good.

## Harry Potter III and the Prisoner of Azkaban (2004)

### Alfonso Cuarón

Okay, seriously. Against my better expectation, this film ended up actually being great. I am totally not kidding. It's just a great film. Okay, I'm not saying it's *Andrei Rublev* or anything, but this really is a very good film. The visuals (and included in that, the fantasy itself) really was, and I bristle at this term, but it was *brilliant*. I could sit here and catalog some of them, but I'm sure this would be a waste of our time. Instead, let me just go down on record as saying that two things in this film, which should be noted by all (and I can only hope what I am about to say makes it apparent that I haven't actually read the books) were 1) the pure hostility of that tree whenever anything, car or small bird misfortunately flies into it 2) Sirius Black on that living newspaper. It's such a great visual they keep going back to it throughout the film. But there, in that "tavern scene," at exactly that point in the film, it's magnificent. It could possibly be one of the greatest moments in the history of adolescent fantasy filmmaking. Okay, I'm done.





*Oh, baby don't you know I'm human.  
Have thoughts, just like any other one.*

Whenever I see a trailer for a movie like *Freddy vs. Jason*, or now I suppose it's *Predator vs. Alien*, I can't help but wonder, just who is it that makes these films? I know *why* these films are made. But what I want to know is what kind of self-respecting director would do this, I mean, besides Chris Columbus?

I guess maybe the best answer is to think of them as scabs—these are the people who come in and lube your plane when the regular lubers don't want to. These are people who, unlike, say, a Ridley Scott or a Clive Barker or even a Peter Jackson, just couldn't get their shit together and make a movie that's based on an actual science fiction work. But one thing's for sure. They know how to make CGI, because everyone does, and they need—work?

So they make these carpet-bagging, second-rate, bullshit science fiction films. They grab our attention by showing pictures of our favorite monsters in a trailer—with sound. It's like, not fair. How can we resist? But of course, the film has no more basis for existence than *Spiderman vs. Citizen Kane* or *Indiana Jones vs. Gumby*. Okay, maybe a little more. But still. The plot has more holes than George Lucas' black soul, and the acting isn't even worthy of parody. Okay, it is. But that's not important. In fact, none of this matters because, basically, the people who are going to pay to see this movie either won't know the difference (twelve) or won't care (fourteen) or both (the rest of us). The people who unquestioningly accept these films are generally the same ones who are going to be making them in ten years. They have a craving for science fiction that cannot be filled and don't have the patience to wait for something better to come along—which is roughly six minutes.

As to the question of whether these filmmakers know what they're making is garbage—whether they actually believe the made-up press releases—or whether it being on a kid's cereal box actually implies anything in particular—about anything—or if, in fact, they know they are just filling an ever-present void like Krispy Kreme or Sharon Osbourne. Obviously, I have no idea.

## The World (2004)

Latest film by **Jia Zhangke**. Talk to your local art house theatre today. Demand playage. Sadly though, I fear this one may not be quite as good as his last one, *Unknown Pleasures*. It's because he was on crack. Yes, I know it's hard to believe. No, this is a very good film. The meaning is all there—the depth, the thought, the pause. I just wasn't crazy about the little cell phone interludes. I know. I know. Godard. Statues in *Contempt*. Blah blah whatever. I'll say what I want.

Jia talks about his crack addiction: “Unknown Pleasures was the ending of my previous phase,” he says. “I’ll restart from scratch to make my next movie, with new methods and production modes. But I shall stick to the same theme and same people. I am excited about it and will try my best to make it accessible to domestic audiences.”

## Masumi Hayashi

I just had the good fortune of randomly chancing upon a series of photographic works by Masumi Hayashi in a side corridor in the Cleveland Art Museum, about two hundred yards from where I work. That'll teach me to skip out of work early—more often.

What Hayashi does is shoot/snap/take about 100 (or so) little 5x5 inch photographs (the technical term is “boatload”) of a subject covering the entire field of view. She then rearranges the individual pictures like tiles in a mosaic to recreate a new version of the original subject. Sounds simple, doesn't it? It's really not. If you consider that each individual photograph has four sides (trust me), that's 4 decisions right there (where to cut each side). Then multiply that number by say 45 photos (the number in “Jain Temple,” for example). That's 180 decisions!

And with each and every panel, there is the opportunity to either increase or decrease the overall coherence of the work. Hayashi is probably able to assemble all of these panels into what must be an immense working visual memory, in order to affect a coherent whole. Just think of her as a giant supercomputer of Japanese descent.

The technique affords much room for manipulation/creativity. She can snap one panel at one time of day and mix it with different ones from different times, with different light (and color). And sometimes people wander into frame. More options. The process seems somewhere between Ansel Adams manipulating negatives in the dark room and Wong Kar-Wai taking footage of Ancient Beauty and splicing it into a story about people.

She can take a Cleveland RTA station and turn it into a semi-abstract thing of beauty. Admittedly, there have been times I have contemplated the unassuming beauty of some of those RTA stations (the beauty of an RTA station is somehow always directly proportional to the level of economic decay of the neighborhood). Sure I've wondered—what it would be like to just— But that was when I was more depressed. And anyway, the train would always start moving before—

And when she starts with a subject as already-beautiful as a Jain temple in India, for example, the final result is sublime squared, which brings me back to the wall in the art museum. And the need to miss more work.

And for those of you sitting there thinking, “Oh, yeah, I could take a bunch of little pictures of something too.” No, you couldn’t. Not like this. Her style is built on solid conventional photographic methods (each picture must itself be a very good picture). Let’s look at “Jain Temple,” and some of the things she does which go beyond what you would have done.

First, there is the overall visual feeling of the *cavern* which is accentuated by showing multiple vantage points in the same picture. Whether real passageways or just nooks and crannies, the work is loaded with places into which your eyes and *you* want to go. You explore the image like a Chinese scroll or an architectural model. And all of this is made feasible by the final size of the work, which is about four or five feet across. A smaller photograph could not contain multiple vantage points in such peaceful coexistence. They would be too close together. It would be discombobulating like an Escher drawing or an episode of “Real World.” Of course, the vantage points could be smaller, but then the whole work would be smaller. And have less of an impact. If you don’t believe me ask Roy Lichtenstein or Claes Oldenburg or Godzilla.

One of these passageways (in the middle there, you see it?) leads to a step down into a separate room. Wow. I had never consciously realized how magnificent a step down is. You remember them from grade school, when you would visit your rich friends’ fancy suburban villas (the 80s...). But somehow a step down into a wall-to-wall carpet and a big screen T.V. (C.R.T., you know, with the three colored bulbs). But here, this step down is yellow bliss with the hidden light source and lure of distant knowledge. The whole scene is like the ancient section of the British Royal Museum only it’s (a picture of) the real thing and not suffering the incurable loss of transplantation. Notice how the little two-inch raised parts of the temple floor give it the impression of a busy market street with all its life and activity. Hayashi has brought out this element and juxtaposed it to the otherwise dominant stillness and solitude of the rest of the temple, the final

effect being quite surreal. I am not projecting. It's in there.

As for the post-production. I'm reluctant to speculate on what theoretical concerns inform the process, but one particular thing stood out. There are certain details carved into the ceiling of the temple. And in certain instances, it appears as though Hayashi has multiplied and rearranged them slightly making them even more visually complex than they probably are. Purists would probably blow a gasket over this. Not me.

Now I'm going to assume this (her chosen location) is one of the most *happening* views in the entire temple. If not, then this temple is even cooler than I thought, which hardly seems possible. Which brings us to the issue of eye—where to point (and bring) camera. In other words, she not only has to take the pictures, but she has to find the right subject—and go there. This effort cannot be overstated. *She* got the funding. *She* sat on the plane for God knows how long. *She* had an old man try to clean her ear with the most frightening instrument ever while ten small children tugged at her shirt in desperation, none of which shows up on any placard, and none of which is inherently conducive to better photography. Meanwhile, I was probably back home, defending the country, by ordering a chicken Nugget.





108:21 There is some onion, if you want it.

108:32 Where were you?

皇極忍見日葉  
北面故人朝玄朝

一擲裏見  
是難有

尔来無物

孰銀猫

无矣保以





It's sad to see the Imperial Palace daily more desolate,  
Each dawn sees more samurai moving to the north.  
Leaving one's wife and children is truly a hardship,  
Since that time there is nothing but this silver cat.

— Murase Taiitsu



# *Always*

## **Cheerios**

Classic Coke, Bread, Penicillin. (compatible with: bananas.)

## **Rice Krispies**

Snaps, Crackles *and* Pops. Wonderful, understated aftermilk. (compatible with: blueberries, strawberries, bananas.)

## **Grape Nuts**

They may look innocent enough, but watch out. They'll expand inside your stomach, and you will know it when it happens. Also great for adding live fruit (mostly berries.)

## **Corn Flakes**

Classic cereal. Always reliable. They do soften quickly, but it's okay. It's okay. Loved by the British.

## **Special K**

Similar to Corn Flakes, except slightly different. More puffy. It's not that they don't get soggy. But the thing is, they aren't coming from the same place, really, are they?

# *Sometimes*

## **Wheaties**

Buy this cereal and help keep America's top athletes off the streets. (extremely compatible with: blueberries.)

## **Raisin, Nut, Bran**

Sometimes, three inches of sugar coating around each raisin is just too much. Other times, it's just what a body ordered.

## **Captain Crunch Crunchberry**

Very tasty but watch out for the "no-joke" cut-mouth effect, which is interesting considering the cereal's rapid progression to complete and utter sog. Also has an excessive amount of residuum (the powder that contaminates the last portion of the box) and an aftermilk that's too sugary to enjoy (compare with Rice Krispies). Despite (probably because of) these many flaws, Captain Crunch's unique and highly addictive flavor makes it the "cereal that launched a thousand spoons." Mine included.

## **Trix**

Okay, wow. These are pretty good. They're basically like fruity pebbles that don't get soggy before you even have time to bring the bowl to the table. And yet at the same time, they don't start out too sharp/hard and thus are able to avoid the cut-mouth effect as seen with Captain Crunch Crunchberries. So how do they do it? Magic. Pure and simple. Magic. I will say this, though. They do have an ever so slight hint of, for lack of a better term, slime on their outer surface. Which is probably the other word for magic.

## **Chex**

Not bad. Also crackles like Rice Krispies—is it something about rice? Also decent for dry snacking.

## **Life (cereal)**

Very good. Quite good, in fact. The pieces are shaped like Chex that have

been flattened by a miniature steam roller. You can really pack this cereal in your mouth. Comes with standard sog curve, and is receptive to bananas. Overall, a great choice and a bargain at (whatever it costs now).

### **Life Cinnamon**

Very good. Also good as a dry snack, which can be very useful for people who cannot afford or are too lazy or it's too friggin' cold to go get milk.

### **Corn Pops**

Tendency to become stale between the time you open the box to the time you get it in the bowl. Also tends to be slightly chewy, and dare I say—oh, I better not say. Nonetheless, I still buy it sometimes. Addiction.

### **Honeycomb**

This is one cereal you can snack on even without milk. Bur it is definitely best with ultra-cold milk.

### **Honey Nut Cheerios**

If it were just a tad sweeter, it might be more tasty without being as over-the-top as Sugar Smacks. Are you still there?

108:38 These forests are impenetrable; I'm all scratched.



# Really Sometimes

## Apple Jacks

Similar to fruit loops, but a little more subtle. Interesting flavor that seems to pick up as it integrates into the milk. Although I'm not sure how much it has to do with apples. And what's with the little red flecks? And now with the addition of green jacks may well be the only cereal in existence in green Technicolor. Something else I just noticed: as the jacks soak a while, they toughen up a bit on the chew like an overcooked calamari and unlike Cheerios. This may seem like nothing, but woe to the man who ignores one too many nothings. It's definitely suspicious. Kind of like when a restaurant you thought was really great starts advertising on T.V.

## Frosted Flakes

This cereal actually tastes exactly like it looks—orange Technicolor. And for all it's unnaturalness, the flavor still possesses a kind of unholy allure. It's like a seductive supermodel vampire. You know you have to kill her. But oh, the humanity.

## Fruit Loops

Too much artificial flavoring.

## Fruity Pebbles

I don't know how to describe this utter mess of a cereal other than with Haiku+.

Shaped like Rice Krispies<sup>24</sup>—

With artificial colors

It gets soggy fast

Yikes!

## **Cinnamon Toast Crunch**

Good size. Good initial taste. Questionable flavor on the late palate. Ingredients list includes caramel and annatto, which roughly translates to “you can smell it from five feet away.” What’s annatto anyway? Should I be paying for it?

## **Sugar Smacks**

Similar to sugar corn pops in having a prominent sheen of glucose around a crunch that most resembles those caramel popcorn pieces you used to get in those three panel popcorn tubs your uncle would send each Christmas. Uh, it’s kind of weird tasting. And I hesitate to actually say this but perhaps there is a point at which there really is enough sugar. And maybe, just maybe this point has been reached.

## **Captain Crunch’s Little Chocolate Donuts**

I bought these because I thought they would give me some comfort in these cold, lonely days. In other words, for the same reason I always buy cereal. And they have—to an extent. They taste okay, and the texture is about the same as Captain Crunch minus those unbreakable crunch berries. Unfortunately I just can’t get that excited about a chocolate cereal. A breakfast cereal based on chocolate is like a white guy climbing Everest without oxygen. There’s just so far he can go.

112:32 come here

112:37 he's just wasting materials.

112:39 who needs it?

# NEVER

## **Frosted Mini-Wheats**

I've seen more T.V. ads for this cereal than any other cereal I can think of. And yet somehow I managed to resist the temptation—until now. The first sugary second is alright,\* but then the flavor kind of craps out on you're soon left with a sort of knockoff wheat flavor with a sort of remnant of powdered sugar flavor. Like watching some old washed up actor trying to cling on to that old charisma, which used to do something for a lot of people, but now is just sad.\* Who ever complained about powdered sugar?

## **French Toast Cereal**

This is a cereal that can be smelled from across the room. The cereal that launched a hundred ships—the other way. Does it have sugar? I can answer that. I was pouring some into a bowl, when suddenly it stopped coming out of the box. I looked inside and discovered the entire contents had stuck together forming one large clump. Wow.

“It was like eating air,” said 9 year old Timmy Jones. [23 cents/oz]

## **Grape Nuts Flakes**

Everything Grape Nuts isn't. They're not crunchy or tiny or fun. They don't explode inside you. They *do* get soggy on contact with milk. So soggy. There really is nothing to recommend about this cereal. Conforms to bowl?

122:03 Princess, is that nice?  
122:07 It's sinful to splash milk.  
122:10 Such a naughtiness.  
122:16 Why is it sinful?

# The Raisin Bran Question

## **Total**

And just as I inserted my spoon in the cereal, two pieces jumped out of the bowl and onto the table. This is the kind of enthusiasm one wants in a cereal, which is, it must be remembered, only as energizing as the least inspired flake. In mathematical terms, jumping flakes suggest a high degree of interconnected tension, potential energy if you will, which is as unique as it is desirable among cereals. The flakes hold up well in milk, and they're sweet. Meanwhile, the raisins do their duty without trying to steal the show. This is clearly a superior raisin bran.

## **Post**

The raisins have much more sugar coating, and the bran pieces seem a little more flimsy. It's still raisin bran, so I shall not want. But I think it's less than inspired.

## **Kellogg's**

This is a good middle ground in terms of sugar content, but the raisins are on the small side. The flakes get soggy rather quickly too.

*Update: The year is 2005, and Kellogg's Raisin Bran Crunch has just answered all of these concerns.*

*One could do worse than be an eater of cereal.*

# Sobe Beverages

Sobe, roughly translated from Korean, meaning “so bad.” One would be hard pressed to find a better definition of second-rate than Sobe Beverages.

## Orange Carrot Elixir

I would like to review this beverage by telling a largely irrelevant personal anecdote. The first time I ever heard of the word elixir was when I was 12 years old, and we were playing this game called Minotaur on the Apple IIe (or was it IIc?). You were Theseus, Greek hero, and you had to joystick your way through an extensive maze of 2-D lines while shooting monsters with your late 4th-century laser gun? We always wondered about that, but it was quite effective against centaurs, harpies and other evil denizens, so we didn’t complain. Anyway, when your life bar would get dangerously low, and believe me, it would, you were in big trouble, unless you could find that little bottle of magical elixir. This is not it.

## Voodoo Rain

One would be hard pressed to find a better definition of second-rate than Sobe Beverages, unless of course, one’s supermarket happens to carry Voodoo Rain. With so many horrible flavors, I can’t make up my mind which one to not choose. Now let’s have a look\_see.

## Mojo Luv

*Yohimbe + Damiana + Schizandra Berry (no, I’m not kidding)*

Now I’m pretty hip. I’ve heard of Yohimbe. But where on earth are they getting this Damiana from? Sounds like some pissed off wife who decided to chop up her husband with an axe for bad behavior (and good riddance). Schizandra who? Listen, we both know I’ll buy anything if it comes in a pretty glass bottle (I like blue especially). You can even pray on my superstitious hopes for better health by mentioning various well not-proven Chinese roots. But if you think I’m



going to believe there's such a thing as Schizandra Berry, then you can just kiss my Jabobo (root).

## **Taboo Tea**

This tea, if I may call it such, has a flavor that might be generously described as bad. It's a flavor that makes you want to read the label immediately and then call someone and arrange for them to check up on you at 30 minute intervals, at least, until in fact, you *are* dead.

## **Firefly Buzz (citrus energy drink)**

*Guarana + Caffeine (caffeine) + Panax Ginseng*

Lime flavored Gatorade chewing gum—is 10 times better than this.

## **Brain Broo (orange think drink)**

*Ginko + Ginko + Ginko*

No no no.

Sort by: Product name | Lowest price | Editors' rating | Review date

## **Mike's Hard Lemonade (3.0)**

Okay, so I was shopping the other day when I saw this lady grab a 6-pack of Mike's Hard Lemonade. She looked like she knew what she was doing. So I figured I better get some too. *Two hours later:* Okay, wow. It tastes like a hyper\_carbonated lemonade with bonus acid. But it's pretty addictive though. I'm addicted. *And* it really gets you drunk fast without filling you up (except with acid and carbonation). But who cares? You're drunk aren't you?

## **Bacardi Silver (0.5)**

The 0.5 is because it's alcoholic. I could not even recommend this to an eighteen-year-old on spring break.

### **Smirnoff Ice (3.5)**

This was my next thing. It's good.

### **Stolichnaya Citron (3.5)**

Tonight, we drink Citrona. <sup>25</sup>—Tomorrow, we vomit.

### **Ice Blue (3.0)**

Bit of a peculiar taste to it. It's like, not *that* bad or anything, but why? Why bother with a peculiar taste when you could just drink Smirnoff Ice and not have a peculiar taste.

### **Zima (2.5)**

This was already out for, like, ten years, and yet the clear malt craze didn't explode until Mike's Hard and Smirnoff. Try it and see why that is.

*Valerie Plame worked for the CIA.*

He has many plans to gain his just revenge,  
In difficult times his natural spirit is very rare.  
Although he drinks in brothels, in his heart he is never drunk,  
Everyone looks at him as though he were a coward!

— Murase Taiitsu

復讐誰計亦多端  
落魄沉寢花是難  
醉戲花街心不醉  
當時人作熟眠看

本為人併送





### **Delimex Chicken Taquitos (3.0)**

Says on box it's America's #1 chicken taquito. It was the only one on the shelf, so I'm going to assume for now it's America's *only* chicken taquito. The way it works is you take the bag out of the attractive box, then snip with some scissors or a knife to release the taquitos. Then you take out however many taquitos you want to eat, which is totally up to you, although the picture does seem to imply five is the correct number. You then put the taquitos on a plate and microwave them for about three minutes, thus making them very hot. Accessorize with cheese, ketchup, shredded lettuce, sour cream (all are pictured, none are included) and eat. The box provides a recipe for making delicious salsa. May I gently suggest that whomsoever is going to make delicious salsa probably did not buy these taquitos. No matter. So does the shell of America's #1 chicken taquito resemble soggy cardboard? Let me just say, on the record, "I have no reason to doubt these are America's #1 frozen taquitos."

## **Movies I Almost Saw But Didn't**

**Penguins:** Yes, I'm sure it's great. But I already watch more PBS than I probably should. I think I'll be okay.

**Master and Commander:** Almost: Peter Weir. Didn't: Russell Crowe.

**Naqoyqatsi:** I can't even say it.

**Secretary:** This might not be bad. I like James Spader. Wait, no. I definitely am not going to see this.

### **Minority Report:**

Trailer not so bad  
I almost want to see this.  
More like HBO

**The Royal Tennenbaums:** Would have seen this one if everyone and their reptile hadn't said *Rushmore* was better. I mean, it's not like a director has to always outdo himself or anything. That would certainly be an unfair expectation, and I would certainly never heap it. But then again, my time *is* precious, obviously.

**You Can Count On Me:** A trusted friend says this film was really good. Trusted friend? Who says that? God I hate myself.

## Movies I Was Never Meant To See

**The Hours:** I will not watch *The Hours* I won't. I will not watch it on a boat. I will not watch it on a tram. I will not watch it in a van. I will not watch it when I'm cold. I will not watch it when I'm old. I'm sick of films on books I am.

**Fahrenheit 911:** not art. not news. not seeing it.

**Reign of Fire:** I was recently dining with friends at an upscale Transylvanian restaurant, and we were talking about this ridiculous movie called *Reign of Fire*, in which these conspicuously small dragons take over the world. The conversation shifted to some bad Richard Gere movie that had also just come out, and someone commented that the Richard Gere flic might have been better with a couple more dragons. And then someone else joked, "What movie wouldn't be better with a couple of extra dragons?" And everyone giggled, and then came the beautiful moment when all of the sudden the giggling stopped and there was this unspoken, shared realization that this was, in fact, probably true.

01:01:54:Where were you?

01:01:60:Did you meet someone?

01:02:09:You should be dead.



## **Frozen Burritos**

A taste test was planned to be held between the various purveyors of frozen burritos: Amy's, Delgado's, and the always cheaper Tina's Burrito. Unfortunately, however, the study was unable to be completed because I soon discovered I will like any burrito you put in front of me. Final result: I love burritos.

### **Frozen Burrito A**

Clearly the superior brand. The secret here is the beans. Good beans. They come in several varieties including pinto and black bean inside. Cannot go wrong with Burrito A.

**Note:** When microwaving be careful to wrap in a moist paper towel. This keeps the wrapper from getting too hard around the edges. This same principle goes for pretty much anything you wish to microwave. Basically, the rule is, if it can be wrapped, do it. If you do not believe in the use of paper towels then why are you buying frozen burritos?

### **Frozen Burrito B**

Not bad but totally over-hyped because of the packaging. It amazes me to this day how people are so easily swayed by packaging.

### **Frozen Burrito C**

Okay.

### **Frozen Burrito D**

Should remain frozen. On the shelf. At the store. Wouldn't eat it if I was starving to death on a giant asteroid.

01:02:27:You are stupid, and you'll never understand anything.

## **Bush Beans**

Baked Beans are one of the best kept secrets among EZ gourmets everywhere. They taste great out of the can, but can also be dressed up with a variety of cheeses and other EZ additions to make a delicious meal. And beans contain a lot of protein and little fat. Moreover, Bush Beans in particular come in very high quality cans that are always a cinch to open, unlike some *other* cans that drive you crazy with the can-opener. If their beans could talk, like Allens' beans, they would say, let me go.

**The Little Bird Says:** Hasn't this idiot seen Campbell's new peel-off tops?

**The Little Bird also says:** Has this idiot tried B&M?

01:02:31:Someone keeps calling me; I must go.

### **Orville Redenbacher's (Smart Pop; 94% fat free) (4.0)**

Okay, now here, we have much better popcorn taste. What I would have to describe as normal. But now that we've got that down. Let's talk about my kitchen smelling like microwaved popcorn for 3 days. My lord. There's got to be a better way. Stovetop? Air-popping? My friend says no. Anyway, Orville definitely has the microwaving thing down. Very few unpopped kernels. Also comes in neat little half bags! So you can pop two half bags and have enough.

### **Healthy Pop (Jolly Time) (4.0)**

No kidding. This is great stuff. Microwaves well. Okay, well enough. (To not burn, must accept a fair amount of unpopped kernels.) Tastes like normal popcorn. Listen, all I ask is that it not taste like something Mars delivered. And if I want butter, I can always add it. Just give me something to work with, and not against.

### **Smart Balance (Light Butter) (3.0)**

Flavor okay, but has a tiny bit too much disingenuous butter flavor for me. Again, give me simple, minimal butter. Then I can put more if I want, and if not, then not. But give me the choice.

### **Newman's Own Organic Pop's Corn (2.0)**

It's not so much that this "Pop's Corn" tastes bad, but rather than it doesn't taste good. It just doesn't taste good. A truly unimpressive effort.

### **Pop-Secret Popcorn (diet) (1.5)**

Terrible. Just a weird, bad flavor. Doesn't taste like normal popcorn. Has a strange peculiar taste, which can only be described as not popcorn-like.

### **Orville Redenbacher's Smart Pop Kettle Corn (1.0)**

Disgusting.

00:14:49:May God guide us.

00:14:51:What if He does not?

“I’m surprised at how much cartoons have influenced my comedy. I grew up on cartoons and the great silent comics.”

— John Cleese

## Adult Swim

*Aqua Teen Hunger Force* is only one of the best cartoons in the history of cartoons. It’s sort of like what if the Beastie Boys merged with Cartoon Network, Kevin Smith, (a funny version of) Nathan Lane, whose name is Dana Snyder, New Jersey (Atlanta), and a McDonald’s value meal. Everyone will be converted.

Produced and overseen by my personal friend, Mike Lazzo of Williams Street Productions and the Cartoon Network. Seriously, this show is God damn art. I bet David Bowie even watches it! Actually, I know he watches it because he is a personal friend of mine too. We watch it together, at my house, while our wives play with the kids and Michael Jackson flings brownies out the window at passing cars. Michael is so funny like that.

*Squidbillies*. Takes a few times. I still can’t handle single malt scotch. But that is just because I’m a pussy. This show makes me very very happy.

*Sealab 2021* is great. I’m not going to spend my time here trying to convince anyone of that. But let me pass on one bit of key strategy for those who would hear. It is very important to watch these shows in the order they were made. On the second season, there are three brilliant episodes (you will know when you see them), the humor of which is almost entirely predicated on your understanding of the show so far.

*Harvey Birdman* is great. *Venture Bros* is also great.

*Family Guy* is always good for some laughs in spite of itself, and *Southpark* somehow never gets old. I don’t know how, but it just doesn’t. [2012 note: okay i’m starting to think this show is too negative. It just depresses me now. Maybe.]

On November 3rd, the Cartoon Network (Atlanta, GA), will show a short film/cartoon called *Rejected* by Don Hertzfeldt. After this, nothing will ever be the same again.<sup>26</sup>

### **ESPN Sports Center**

It's on just about all the time, so the only way you don't know about it is if you are a non-carbon based life form, you don't get cable, or both. Whether one follows sports or not, this is a fun show that everyone should watch. ~~Unless you don't want to.~~ The highlights are presented cleverly so as not to be predictable and the writing shares a great awareness of the social climate in America (perhaps even rivaling MTV's *Real World* and/or the brain power of Carson Daly). The show is light-hearted and entertaining enough to make you not care that professional sports is really all fake anyway (except pro-wrestling and boxing).

### **FOX News Sunday**

No matter what side you swing from, this is one "entertaining" news show. Many feel the moderator is "a breath of fresh air" as he ranges from cool indifference to smug to outright disdain, depending. Others say the decor is "like a bad suburban country club" and the food has "enough grease to start a refinery."

### **PBS McLaughlin Group**

I do not miss an episode of this show no matter what because sooner or later, John McLaughlin's head is going to explode, and I definitely don't want to miss that. You know I'm right.

### **SSX**

The last time I played a video game for more than ten seconds was back in college, when you couldn't find a dorm room without that little hockey game, you know, the one. In college, it was fun to watch two friends clobber each other in some video game. But it was mainly fun because one of them would lose (usually the same one) and get pissed and throw the controller across the room, and you could feel smug about not being as much of a hot-head as your friend, Tomas.

Well now another friend of mine just got this thing called a Sony PS2, and he showed me this game called SSX. The game's about the (for now) made-up sport

of cross-country free-style snowboard racing. But like, wow. The visual effects and sounds are nothing short of mesmerizing. And although I have no desire to actually play it, I have to admit it's pretty damn exhilarating to just sit back and watch someone else, especially on a huge T.V. Hell, it's better than watching golf.

### Advertising

Advertising is good in Europe and Japan. And Australia. And Canada. Mexican ads can be funny too. Come to think of it, advertising is good just about everywhere except the United States. I don't know why that is. But suffice it to say that in car commercials, there are only three companies worth shit. Volkswagen (best in class), Mitsubishi (good music), and there was a third I was thinking of...maybe it was Toyota? Ooh, maybe Mercedes? Huh.



00:14:55:Remain at arms.

00:14:59:Practice. Perfect yourselves.

## Dramas and Sit Coms

*On Dramas, Sit-coms, Game Shows, Reality TV and Other Quality Entertainment...*

I know you don't care what I have to say about any of these shows, and frankly, neither do I. So let's spare us both.

Late Night Talk Shows

~~Each to is own.~~

Each to is own.

Sketch Comedy and other Comedy Shows

Some are good, others are not. Whatever.

Blind Date

Now we get into the good stuff. This is that show that lets you tag along on the blind dates of some pretty dim witted people. As you follow along on their dates, the show throws up one caption after another to provide running sardonic commentary. Think of it as *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*, but instead of B movies, it's B people. You can't watch this show more than about twenty minutes before you're ready for the vomitorium. But the show has some truly brilliant writers and every time I watch it, I end up falling out of the chair more than once, especially whenever real animals are involved.

“Be what it may, I will always esteem and adore the divine genius of this gentleman, taking from him what I understand with humility and admiring with veneration what I am unable to understand.” – Jorge Luis Borges

Anything by Ken Burns

Ken Burns could write a documentary on rubber chickens and it would kick

ass. Anything and everything he has done, including *The American Experience* series, particularly the ones on Frank Lloyd Wright and Mark Twain, are required viewing. Ken Burns could have my baby, if I ever get tired of it. All of this, and to see him talk, you'd think he was a twenty-seven year-old dork. Wow. He totally looks like Bo from *Days of Our Lives*.

### Frontline Documentaries

No idea if they're as true as they portend. Okay, they totally make shit up. But so what? The stories are so well told. That's all that matters. Say it with me. Resonate. And sometimes they're about human trafficking! That never gets old.

*All spelling mistakes are Lana Choi's fault. She was supposed to edit this page. Lana Choi: supposed to edit this page.*

00:15:01:Remain united; forget your quarrels;  
cultivate friendship.

## Painters Brag and Contend (Parts I and II)

Painters brag and contend over brush and ink,  
But who can climb the hills and peaks within?  
If you ask what method was utilized by men of old,  
The spirit resonance rose up, and its overflow created mountains.

— Murase Taiitsu

通平多清年夏間月月中五日  
有流蘇子在門中竟何忘矣  
山陰王羲之

吳山作





On Tue, 23 Nov 2004 11:01:51 -0500, Cold Bacon wrote:

- > the problem w/ arcade fire i've realized is that they indulge by jumping
- > right into emotional hysterics w/out providing any explanation of how
  - > or why they should be so hysterical. it rings suspect.
- >
- > this is in contrast -- even -- to the strokes -- who are similarly
- > hysterical -- but at least offer some explanation in their lyrics.
- >
- > does this make sense.? you can't begin your song in hysteria. and
  - > then just go from there.
  - >
  - > arcade fire is all dessert and no meal. all gain and no pain. melody
- > without middle earth. it's what we used to call shallow. and it
  - > thins over time.
- >
- > but my how the first few times are good. arcade fire would be great on a
  - > mix tape -- thus.
  - >



50:23 as regards praise, what is praised today is abused tomorrow.

50:27 they will forget you, me, everything.

50:31 all is vanity and ashes. Worse things have been forgotten.

## Arcade Fire (Studio Version)

The problem with Arcade Fire is they get all hysterical right away without providing a reason or context. The Strokes do this. But it's okay because eventually they do get around to explaining the situation—who has been dumped or who is having an existential crisis—and offering some possible suggestions as to what pills may help.

Plus The Strokes, you sort of feel sorry for. They can't help it. They get hysterical. It's just how they feel. You get a sense Arcade Fire is trying for something more (which Clap Your Hands also won't have achieved).

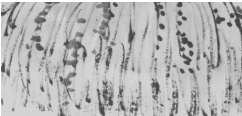
As for the music, it's an orchestralized reformulation of things we've heard before. The cadences of The Strokes, the garage sound of the Pixies. "Wakeup" suddenly breaks into an Iggy Pop riff straight from the *Trainspotting* soundtrack, which everybody has. Like we wouldn't notice? There's even a simulation of Bjork on "Backseat." But the first few times, it really is pretty exhilarating. And Haiti is a good track as well as the line "When daddy comes home, you always start a fight..." I guess Arcade Fire isn't so bad. They just need to settle down.

50:48 If Jesus returned to earth, they would crucify him again.

50:52 Of course, if only evil is remembered

50:56 then you will never be happy in the site of God.





## My Opinion On The Fiery Furnaces (2)

by Me

I like them. A lot. A damn lot. As for their new album, *Blueberry Boat*, it's damn good. It has good songs on it. My favorites are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. Oh, it's true. In fact the whole album in general (in particular \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_) seems to be approaching a sort of rock epic quality, like The Who's *Tommy* or Pink Floyd or something.

“He’s getting up the courage so to leave you. He’s gettin’ ready to say he don’t love you.”

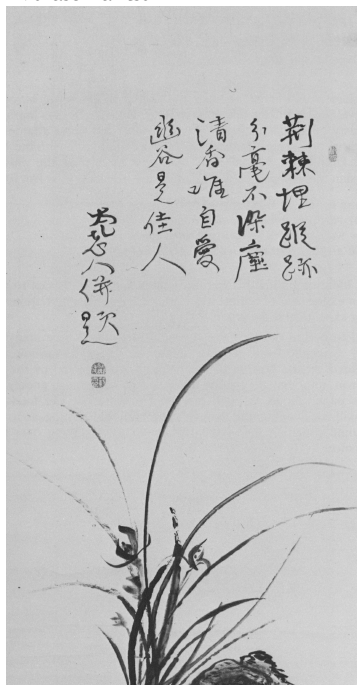
*I love you.*

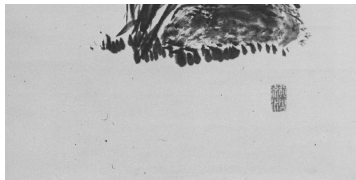
## **Stereo Total (2)**

This band rocks. I mean, they are ridiculously good. I thought I would die. Stereo Total is basically what would happen if you took the sheer enthusiasm of \_\_\_\_\_, dotted it with the melancholy merry-go-round of \_\_\_\_\_, and injected about a half a key of crystal meth. But most of all, it's just good old-fashioned Gernpop (Neupop). The same goes for Deerhoof, only minus the German part.

Imbedded in thorns and brambles  
Yet in no way stained with dust,  
Its pure fragrance known only to itself,  
In the secluded valley it is like a beautiful woman.

— Murase Taiitsu







*I will wear women's clothing when the job is done.*

Okay, let me tell it to you straight. Harvard Square (and much of Cambridge, particularly along Mass Ave) is the biggest joke ever perpetrated on the food going public in the history of the world. The only places worth going to in Harvard Square (even to just use the restroom, let alone feed) would be Rialto (great restroom), Tamarind Bay, Tanjore, Finale, Hi-Rise, Cafe Algiers (which is funnily not rated in Zagat, obviously because no one will pay \$6 for a cappuccino, and so no one has actually been there). I have not tried the Burger Cottage, Upstairs on the Square, Harvest or Veggie Planet but they too are rated highly in Zagat. Craigie Street Bistrot is not in Harvard Square.

2:07:32 What you said was true.

2:07:38 So what if I said it then?

2:07:41 You are wrong now, I was wrong then.

## **Casablanca** (Harvard Sq)

*Me: Well. That worst Manhattan I've ever paid \$8 for.*

*Companion: Do you even know what a Manhattan is supposed to taste like?*

*Me: No.*

There is a long bar at the end where I can meet you and your friend, but it does nothing for me. The light-brown wood paneling, fake palm bushes and ample wicker suggests 80's pool house, but the clientele says first half of *Scarface*.

Okay, as much as it hurts me to say this, which is not much, this place sucks. The food is bad at these prices. And the wait staff is as dubious as the number of people wearing diagonal striped shirts. Two things I will not tolerate. One, diagonal stripes for shirts. Two, people wearing shirts un-tucked that were clearly meant to be tucked in. I'm sorry but if you can't afford a real shirt, then FRACKING STAY AT HOME, or wear your shirt *in* like you did three years ago when you bought it.

There is a second bar in the middle for sitting and eating. It has plenty of bar stools, but they don't have foot rests? This reviewer does not, in fact, remember the last time he was expected to eat on bar stools with no foot rest. Two legs just dangling off the edge of a stool, like some ass-skewered frog, with brie and an apple slice. \$9.

As for the seared tuna starter, let me offer some free advice for the cooks at Casablanca. First, there is something called sushi. Then, there is something else, called gently cooking a piece of fish. But note that neither of these options included "take ordinary piece of Star Market tuna, sear the carp out of each side leaving 1 mm layer of raw center." I've seen washing machines cook fish better than this. Just wrap in tinfoil and push the first button you push. Boyee. Rating: C+ So where will I go after my next Brattle date, when Tiki Three's Company isn't quite what I'm after? Two words. Diet. Pills.

## **Chez Henri** (Mass Ave)

Chef and owner Tony Montana really has done a fabulous job renovating what once

was one of Cambridge's most notorious brothels. The Castro sliders are out of this league. The Estrellos d'Areitos are made with real pluck. And the Bay of Pigs foot is to die for—or from. Darkly lit. 1.33:1 aspect ratio. Okay, seriously, this place is bullshit. They charge \_way\_ too much for what is essentially fancy-looking, but mediocre food. Oh, and what about this glorious Cuban sandwich I keep hearing about? Yes, well, it's good, but it's certainly not worth \$12. If it were, you can bet it would cost \$14. Because this place will get theirs. Anyway, it's just a muffuletta minus olives. It's not like real pulled pork or ropa veija or anything. And for \$20 you can even get the real thing shipped directly to you (on dry ice) from Central Grocery in New Orleans. Now that's cool. 7/05 Rating: **B+**

2:09:02 Wait.

2:09:08 Don't go. Don't you like being with me; are you bored?

## **Blue Ginger (Wellesley, MA)**

I must say I was completely startled by the size of Ming Tsai's penis, from which the restaurant takes its name. Many say it "defies all stereotypes" and "is truly worth the trip." Sounds like! Ming (as seen on television) is kind of a closet nerd though, although clearly his handlers have gone a long way in undoing that perception. Either way, nerd or sex god, his restaurant is PD good. Rating: **A**

2:34:05 Honestly, I can make everything very well for you.

2:34:08 You won't find anyone better than me; they're all dead.

## **Andre's Tea Room** (River Oaks, Houston)

Okay, I didn't actually visit this restaurant. But I feel that sometimes, you can get a good idea about a place just from driving by a few times. Anyway, so this place, right on the south edge of River Oaks, like Ouisie's Table (also on the edge if not smack in), has been around since, well, since I was a little kid. And that's saying a lot in the restaurant business. And plus, just the whole concept of a Tea Room seems to impart quality. What town has enough of those? Their pastries have to be delicious, mouth-watering concoctions, and their chocolate mousse shots, to die for—how to they get it to be so rich and moist? The service is good, perhaps too good? The décor a bit played down. No matter. This is a great establishment, and I demand that you stop in some time (next week) for breakfast and pastries. Rating: **A**



2:34:22 I know the secret. My father knew the secret of bell-making.

2:34:26 Before he died, he passed it to me. No one else knows, except me.

## Tête de Moine (cow's milk)



Note: The following tale is based on my experience with a very well ripened sample of this cheese. I have since come to learn that the intensity of this cheese varies widely from totally unmemorable to the account which here follows.

Wow, this is really strong flavored. I don't know as I've ever had a Switzlandic cheese this strong. My god. It also has an eternal (read: very long) and slightly astringent finish. (Now I'm not saying it's dry, but it does suck every last iota of saliva right out of your mouth and laugh directly at you.) Also the intense, earthy (think monastic dirt) flavor builds so much that by the end it begins to simply overpower (for lack of a better term) you. (Think Friar Tuck and a big club.)

Food: apples, cured meat, cornichons (I don't know what this is either), salami (which one though?)

Facts: 800+ years old (older than Switzerland), made in just 9 dairies.

Official: Old monastery-style mountain cheese. Traditionally sliced horizontally with a girolle to create very thin rosettes. The firm, dense texture, makes it perfect for paper-thin slices. Flavor said to range from (fruity/earthy/beefy/almond-like) and rich to pungent and very sharp.

Here is a much shorter review than all of that: Tête de Moine is basically what if a good, strong gruyere all-the-sudden decided to just go postal. Although somehow I don't think all-the-sudden has much to do with it.

<http://www.google.com/search?q=oh my god what the fuck is lambic>

## What the Thunder Said

The thing about a very strong blue cheese, when eaten by itself—the reason to do that at all—is for the dramatic experience of the attack and the long chew. This is where the full onslaught of salty, sweet and creamy can be felt in one same moment. The blue (because of the mold and what the mold has done) is different than other cheeses in that it possesses unmatched suasiveness (turns on so many different types of taste buds in so many places). But the problem is, when eaten alone, the mold does rather a number on your throat going down (I mean, seriously, look at it—those little mold pockets—do they look like they want to be nice to you? Anyway, this is why you have to chase a (very strong) blue with something. Sweet if you have it (Port, Sauternes), and if you don't, well you better have something.

2:39:32 It's the end of August, and we have not found the clay yet.

2:39:37 Think about yourself. I'm sorry for you.

## **Valdeon and Honey (One Man's Tale)**

Valdeon: For people with an interest in Cabrales but who aren't totally friggin' crazy.

Honey: Made from bees.

- Chestnut Honey (very strong, very peculiar flavor) → okay but too damn peculiar (didn't overpower the cheese per se, but just sidestepped it, like a politician who answers your question about bees with a speech about his plan for the retaking of Corfu)
- Sardinian Corbellozo (very bitter, strong) → see note, which will say, no. This honey is meant for whole wheat grain (in isolation).
- Acacia honey (very mild) → okay, but the cheese was a shade too much for it, and by shade I mean, it blew it away.
- Meleze (medium-strong honey from Provencal equivalent of high-altitude "fir" trees) → perfection?

3:04:44 Is everyone ready?

## Montgomery's Cheddar

The story is this (and it's possibly true), I wanted to know if artisanal cheddar could possibly be worth as much as it costs (I dare not provide actual numbers but suffice to say, it's a lot). So I went down the street and bought samples of all these different cheddars: Keen's, Lincolnshire Poacher, Montgomery's, others.

Now, before I go on any further, let me say if you plan to eat your cheddar in a hotdog or hamburger, then actually you do want Cracker Barrel. Not only will its piquant, malt-vinegar made-to-receive-ketchup (and to survive it) quality come through, but it's cheap. So you can pile it right on. Easy. But if you actually plan to sit down for a while and nibble and want something you can contemplate, well then now is the time for artisanal cheddar.

Ok never mind what anyone out there may try to sell you. You want Montgomery's. Montgomery's cheddar has perhaps one of the most special flavors of any cheese in existence: more grassy than earthy, more elegant than forceful (regular cheddar is forceful; parents are forceful). You start by getting a piece with rind. Make sure the actual outer cloth is peeled off (you'll figure it out). Then you eat some of the (be prepared for) very grassy tasting part at or near the rind. Going straight for the outer layer gives you a crash-start on the unique flavor. And then you know. One reason Montgomery's is better, in my experience, than all its rivals is that it maintains the high high level of flavor throughout the entire wedge, whereas others tends to only get really strong toward the outer circle.

Wine with cheddar is difficult. With grocery store cheddar, please do not even try, and if you do, please do not tell me about your successes. With a serious (and by serious I mean expensive) cheddar, I've personally found a nice, strong Chinon Rouge (Loire Valley) does well. The juvenile (and by that I mean about 3-5 years) Chinon Rouge may possess an ever-so-slightly unripe cherry flavor, which seems to play well off a good cheddar of similar temperament. As for other ideas, some say Syrah. I haven't yet tried that, but I must say I've never voted against Syrah in anything, and I don't imagine I ever will. I've heard Cabernet, but I don't believe it.



The wine should be in balance (so you enjoy it), but should have sufficient tannins to be able to “cut through” the ample fat of the cheese. This creates that balance we want (I want) in your mouth. When a cheese is dry, you need an acidic wine to stimulate your saliva glands to overcome the dryness. But here this is not the case. So never mind. (“Mrs. Peel, you’re not needed.”)

Alternatively, you could use various chutneys to try to steer your cheddar in a certain direction. This might open the door to new wine pairings, which I still don’t want to hear about. An apple chutney could lead you to the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region in Germany. A pineapple chutney could lead you to a Marsanne, Roussanne blend from the Northern Rhone. A sweet plum and raisin chutney could work with a nice sherry or a tawny port. If your chutney is hot, you should have a beer. In fact, beer is my drink of choice with cheddar. Crisp English (or Scottish) ales are the way to go for sure. St. Peter’s, Traquair House, or even a Samuel Smith’s old-style porter will not let you down.

For bread, I only know a little, half of which Rob just told me. Rob runs a cheese shop (if you weren’t paying attention). Wheat offers a reliable non-reactive platform which allows the cheddar flavor itself to keep center stage. The other trick is to use a bit of sourdough to play off the malt vinegary flavor of the cheddar. The result is an entirely different creation, different from the sum of the parts. Both partners give up something, and give you a new taste for it. I got this from Rob. I wonder if he’s seen *Ghost in the Shell*? I doubt it.

But seriously. Montgomery’s Cheddar—is worth it.

Note: If it doesn’t seem to have a special (what I call) grassy flavor, it’s because the people you bought the cheese from (in America) don’t have the right relationship with Neal’s Yard (in England). Seasonal variation can affect the way a lot of cheeses taste (e.g. cow’s eating hay instead of grass). I still say blame your cheese monger. My experience has been large retailers are hit or miss. Whereas some great cheese shops always seem to have a goodly representation. The point I’m trying to make is—relationships matter.

Okay, so obviously life is about matching one thing with another. And some films simply go better with certain foods and beverages. In the big cinema, this is not really an issue because the food is popcorn and the beverage is soft. Okay, but what about at home? Aha, well, yes. This is where you can sometimes enhance your overall experience by matching your film with various solid and liquid comestibles. Now one thing you may notice is I often suggest foods which hail from the same place of origin as the film itself. This may seem like a too facile or unmeritorious association. It's not.

### **Fellini**

*La Dolce Vita* and *8 ½* – firm Italian Barolo. The Barolo reveals its secrets layer by layer just as Fellini's two films reveal theirs. Both wine and film hypnotize you into a state of deeper pleasure. And in the case of *La Dolce Vita*, you actually do need a wine that can continue to evolve for the two plus.

*Amarcord* and *Juliet of the Spirits* - a lighter-style, fruit-forward (but not cheap) Italian red such as a Barbera, Dolcetto or any number of Tuscan choices. *Satyricon* - God knows.

**Antonioni** – see Fellini

### **Renoir**

*La Grand Illusion* – many possibilities. Officers drink German Riesling or crisp

Chablis or Sancerre. Enlisted men can have a vin de table such as a Côtes du Rhône or any Loire red.

*Rules of the Game* – something good, red. Probably.

*The Golden Coach* – rough Portuguese red or smoother Tempranillo. Your choice.

*French Cancan* – light-bodied French red such as Chinon Rouge and even a villages Burgundy. Also the film cries out for a baguette with a soft-rind brie or camembert.

### **Jacques Becker**

*Casque d'Or*, , *Le Trou* – soft, white cheese (French) and a crusty bread.  
And wine. Red or white. You won't be sorry.

*Touchez Pas au Grisbi* – pâté (or even Langres), champagne, and crackers.

**Godard** – varies; for most Godard, coffee; it is best to watch in between meals and/or with coffee, possibly even a midday viewing is best; with early Godard, it is perfectly acceptable to view in parts (that's how the Laertians did it; and if it's good enough for them, it's good enough for you); and in fact, all breakfast foods are right for most Godard (coffee, tea, eggs, toast, sugar measured by a tiny spoon).

### **Ozu**

*Good Morning* – rice cakes or rice balls

*Floating Weeds* – warm sake (or cold beer), udon noodles, shrimp

*A True Story of Floating Weeds* – 2x the sake (you're going to need it)

**Cassavetes** – American beer if you can stand it. If not, substitute with your favorite medium-bodied imported beer. (I won't tell.) Or Jello shots.

**Tarkovsky** – whatever you feel like.

**Bresson** – just watch the film.

**Herzog** – depends. Manioc beer? Beer? You decide.

**Fassbinder** - some kind of pain medication.

**Bergman** – Vodka (and plenty).

**Kubrick** – also depends.

**Wong Kar-Wai** – beer mostly.

**Kurosawa, Suzuki** – beer or sake.

**Welles, Leone** – popcorn and soda. Buy me a soda?

“Do you think you’re in the vanguard of the film world?”

### **Glide Floss**

This is the only dental floss anyone should use. My life has been leading up to this floss.

### **Cuticle Scissors**

Talk about don't leave home without them. More like don't even leave the room without them. These could be the single most important items in my terrorist arsenal.

### **Opcon A (or any eye drop ending in -A)**

For itchy eyes. The shit works.

### **Dove Face Cream**

The delightful opaque glass jars make the perfect addition to any sink top. Comes in two choices of top, a beautiful mint green (sensitive skin) or stately blue (normal skin). [full disclosure: it's Neutrogena now for me, but that's just me, everything I said and didn't say is still 100% true.]

### **Sonicare Elite Power Toothbrush**

Oh my. This is new technology you can't live without.

### **Verbatim Blank CD's**

Stylish, retro. Always cool. By itself, orange is the best. But the variety colors can be good for purposeful color coordinating. For example, if you give someone four burned CD's from one particular artist, and you want them to easily distinguish among them. Because otherwise, how would they?

### **CD Cases (Jewel Cases)**

What about slim jewel cases? In a word, no. In three more words, no, no, no. Used to be cool. Now they're not. They just break. Clear? No. Colored? No. Just get standard regular, full-sized black CD cases. You should also always have some double disc cases on hand as well for those two CD sets. Nothing so gauche as two CD's in separate cases labeled one and two. A rubber band? Please. Get out of my face.



“Do you think today’s films will be forgotten in 20 years?”



## Pilot Precise Rolling Ball V5 (or V7)

*You Cannot Hurt Me  
For I Am One Who Is Already Gone*

Oh, I've tried them all  
From boy to man,  
From Bic to Paper Mate and more,

Have known them all.  
From the grips that promised to not let go  
To Uniballs that somehow always seemed to know,  
There were eleven others willing  
Ready to go.

I have held the precious gels that clicked, and flowed,  
Until they stopped.

And after all the tea and cakes and ices,  
The departures of a thousand other new devices.  
Because I flung them. *Had to*.  
There was nothing left to do.

And would it have been worth it after all,  
If shuffling off, unbuckled from the chair,  
Moving slowly downward, aft,  
To wipe my forehead cold with dubious draft.  
The Captain sited me, head down and weak  
And in his tense, unflinching torso  
Felt pity  
On such a tender morsel.

And if he grabbed me by my slack coat,  
And led me past The Door  
And sat me down upon his navy knee,

Put his chiseled lips to my still ear  
And holding up the gleaming object in plain view.  
And then said, "*Look*,  
This is what we meant by rolling ball—  
No, no, *this* is what we meant by rolling ball!"

*Colored mermaids singing: doo do doo do doo do do doo...*

“Do you feel alone?”

## **Box in Your Car**

This isn't really a product, but everyone should have a cardboard box in the back seat of their car. You can put into it whatever bits of trash you accumulate along life's big journey and then empty it periodically. This will free up space in your car for clothes, the wrong CD cases, a useless Canadian nickel.

## Bag in Your Car

Okay, maybe not quite as cool as the box. But it's better than nothing.

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1. Every time I see a coelacanth about to die, brother or no brother to me, I die a little too.
2. An example of a very good morality play would be George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, although the film version is a bit awkward, to say the least.
3. Or not, as in the case of Bertrand Tavernier's wonderfully fucked up *Coup de Torchon* (1981). Same audience manipulation. Just more to it than that. By the way, when you do see this film, it must be projected. Must be. Otherwise I don't want to hear about it.
4. I actually just went ahead and lost the whole thing. I thought it would be simpler.
5. "Turtles all the way down!"
6. You didn't hear it from me, but the antidote for *Gosford Park* is *Tristram Shandy*.
7. "The film shows, it doesn't argue. It convinces by the sensitivity and accuracy of its observation, not by heavy signals to the audience to think this, that, or the other."  
— Geoffrey Nowell-Smith on Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1961)
8. I feel like I've made this joke before—oh yes, I remember.
9. Dear Web Master,  
  
"just wanted to let you know that there is a small error in the "With a Friend Like Harry" review, in the movie, the car dealer actually does speak, Harry asks him if there are any other colours available, and the dealer replies that he would have to order it, Harry then says that he wants it right away." — Alex Firth
10. I am not denigrating. I'm sorry but I am just calling it like it is.
11. Okay, okay. Remind to buy Ridley something on the way home.
12. "Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all." — Suzanne Summers

13. Yeah, I know.
14. “Palomo Linares, who was one of the most successful matadors in the 60’s and 70’s has returned to the ring a couple years ago. He is in his 50’s and is still in great physical shape. He has fought very well cutting many ears, but not in important rings. He is a multimillionaire and I feel he is back just to recover the passion of his youth. The audience has not seemed to be clamoring for him to stay... he might definitely retire this year or next.”  
– coloquio.com
15. Spanish websites: So bad it just makes you respect them even more.
16. I have *got* to pick Ridley up something. Damn. Okay, okay.
17. God, can I shut up about that?
18. I’ve just learned from my editors that I’m not supposed to keep saying that. In fact, according to one noted art magazine, other good things to come out of the 80’s include Jeff Koons, David Salle, Jeff Wall, Julian Schnabel, Anselm Kiefer, Cologne, and a few selected “Truth of Steel” films.
19. This was in the theatre. I mean I saw it upon release in the theatre, which is something I do less and less. In the context the letter was written, it would have been obvious I meant “in the theatre.” I think it’s funny I just called what I wrote a letter.
20. Lars Von Trier take note.
21. Oh, and probably Chris Peachment too.
22. Oh, you can buy the toy, alright.
23. Cronos is as far back as I know, but they probably got it from yet an earlier film still, which is always the way. And if you’re interested, take a look at the back of Frylock in your next Aqua Teen Hunger Force episode. Like I said. All good.
24. I cannot tell a lie. Okay, I can. But I will acknowledge there has been some small controversy over this line. People disagreeing over the shape of a pebble.
25. That was their advertising slogan at one point. I don’t know what it is now.
26. Note: They didn’t show it. Everything is the same.