

A woman with blonde hair in a bun, wearing a dark sweater, is sitting on a log in a field. She is holding a cigarette. The scene is reflected in a pond in the foreground. The background shows a line of trees and a fence.

**REEL**

**WESTMINSTER  
FILM MAGAZINE**

**REEL**

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# MULHOLLAND DRIVE

## OBSESSION, DENIAL AND THE FLAWS OF THE HOLLYWOOD DREAM

When I first wrote this article over a year ago, *Mulholland Drive* to me was a chimeric synthesis of art-house cinema's history – a love letter to the noir of *Chinatown* and the romance of *Vertigo* that Lynch loved so dearly – a condemnation of the ugliness and misogyny of their creators. Indeed, as pretentious as it sounds, to me it seemed to be the closest a human has gotten to expressing their subjective vision of the human condition as a static work of art. In the time since, my admiration of the film hasn't changed, though my interpretation is now much different. What was once "a love story in the city of dreams", as Lynch himself described it, now seems to me to be a film about suicide and human inability to escape regret and pain through reality. Indeed, *Mulholland Drive* at its core is about cinema (and by extension art) being cathartic necessities in a world of subjectivity and contradictions – the need to live in an illusion because reality is too painful. For Lynch, cinema is his therapy. Unlike any other director, he tries to solve his personal life issues by creating art, from addressing his fear of fatherhood in *Eraserhead* to his discontent with his self-image in *The Elephant Man*. The second half of *Mulholland Drive* was made shortly after the suicide of his close friend Richard Farnsworth. Perhaps much more than a play on the art-house cliché of setting up a mystery without a conclusion, *Mulholland Drive* is about the inability to explain a suicide expressed through the chaotic miasma of regret, grief and confusion that preoccupied Lynch's mind at the time.

The following article explores a much more traditional interpretation of the film – that it is about unrequited love, jealousy and fantasy.

*Mulholland Drive* (2001) holds an interesting place in Lynch's filmography, being one of only a few of his films that has a commonly accepted structural interpretation. For the purposes of this article, I'm going to follow the interpretation that the first two hours of the film are a dream and that only the final twenty minutes are reality. It should be noted, however, that like all David Lynch films the plot is hardly important, and instead our focus should be on the surreal ambiance he creates and the way he expresses our strangest emotions through symbolism and absurdist visuals. One could write for ever on all the surreal details, underlying meanings and hilarious idiosyncrasies of *Mulholland Drive*, so instead I will simply be explaining how the film works on a basic level and discussing some of the film's underlying themes.

The key to understanding the brilliance of *Mulholland Drive* is to recognise that at its core it's about the medium of film itself. This is hinted at firstly on a literal level. For example, we see Rita's (Laura Harring) name coming from a poster of *Gilda* (1946) starring Rita Hayworth and there are constant allusions to *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Vertigo* (1958) throughout the duration of the film. On a deeper level, however, the very way that the film is constructed is a commentary on how we as humans experience film. *Mulholland Drive* is largely about dreams and the subconscious and, given how Lynch often insinuates that films themselves are like dreams, what we in turn get with *Mulholland Drive* is a demonstration of how much stranger the real world is than both dreams and movies. This interpretation is largely inferred from how the first two hours of the film (the dream) are shot somewhat traditionally, yet the final twenty minutes (reality) feel like a dreamlike stream of consciousness. Essentially, Lynch is trying to portray real life as absurd and the part that seems normal as a movie, highlighting this notion of real life in fact being stranger than fiction. This concept may initially feel alien and perhaps unintentional but the genius of the film will start to make perfect sense.

**'IT'S ALL RECORDED.  
IT'S ALL A TAPE.  
IT'S... AN ILLUSION.'**

**TREY MILLER**

Secondly, we must look at the symbolic nature of Lynch's film and what each vignette in Diane's dream represents in her psyche, allowing us to understand what happens in the final twenty minutes and analyse the underlying themes of the film. After the surreal title sequence with the jitterbug dance, the film opens with a shot of a pillow, indicating that the dream has begun. We then witness various seemingly unrelated scenes: a car crash with an amnesiac; a terrifying homeless man behind a restaurant; a bizarre conspiracy of Hollywood elite; a cowboy; a hit gone wrong and far more, all surrounding our central plot line following Betty, a newcomer to LA who's trying to make it in the film industry. Each of these vignettes represents something in her real life. For example, the conspiracy represents how she is still in denial about her failing Hollywood career, so blames it on a fantasised conspiracy instead of herself to cope. Similarly, the terrifying man behind the diner is a manifestation of her guilt, as this is where she ordered the hit on Camilla.

Diane's dreams let us delve further into her emotions regarding her failed relationship with fellow actress Camilla Rhodes. In her dreams, Rita represents everything about Camilla that Diane loves without her flaws that exist in reality. For instance, in her dreams, Rita is entirely dependent upon Betty, yet in reality it is clearly the inverse. This idealized version of Camilla is what Diane is still holding on to in her mind and why she is unable to let go of a clearly failed relationship. Diane is obsessed with Camilla and wants to change her into a perfect partner – perhaps shown most clearly when Betty puts a wig on Rita, making them look almost the same, a clear reference to *Vertigo*, a film that discusses many of the same themes. The parts of the real Camilla's personality that Diane despises become Camilla Rhodes in her dream, a talentless actress propelled to the top only by a strange Hollywood conspiracy. Moreover, Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux), the man that stole Diane's beloved Camilla in real life, is in turn cheated on in the dream and is part of this conspiracy that boosts Camilla to stardom while leaving Diane behind.

Over time, the dream starts to unravel as Diane's subconscious starts to awake, in scenes reminiscent of *Inception* (2010). This period culminates at Club Silencio, in perhaps the most memorable scene in the film and one that is certainly emblematic of Diane's struggles with heartbreak. The presenter declares "It's all recorded... It's an illusion. Listen", a metaphor for the illusion that Betty and Rita are living in, an illusion that Diane's mind is desperately trying to maintain. It's also a commentary on film itself and the magic it possesses. You get lost in such a surreal scene that you don't even question it.

The illusion works on us just like it does on Diane. A strange and rarely noted reference is the clarinet playing the theme from *Chungking Express* (1994), my favourite film, and one that portrays many of the same themes as *Mulholland Drive*, but through a dynamic sense of being in the present instead of complex symbolism. Perhaps the more obvious reference in this scene is to David Lynch's very own *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) through the red curtains in the background, a reference that comes at an appropriate time in the film as the duality of dream and reality is about to be revealed to the audience.

The cowboy appears again, saying: "Hey, pretty girl. Time for you to wake up", and the dream is now over. The final twenty minutes now provide enough context for the previous two hours of surrealist confusion to explain Diane's repressed guilt and the life that she dreamed she had. Upon rewatching the film, this makes her inevitable suicide even more depressing, as we the viewers understand every piece of her mind that leads to her taking her own life. We see the great lie of the Hollywood Dream and watch all its seductive allure come crashing down. The parallels to *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) are countless, and the critiques of Hollywood are equally potent. Norma and Diane are similar in how they've been ostracised by the film industry and they're both obsessed with things they are unwilling to let go of. However, Diane's fate is certainly more tragic. She has none of the past successes of Norma and instead never manages to live out her dreams of being an actress. The film ends perfectly – a surrealist sequence in the same vein as Bergman's *Persona* (1967), ending simply with 'silencio'.

As to why *Mulholland Drive* has stayed firmly imprinted in my mind since I first saw it, it is hard to express. It opened my eyes to the possibilities of the cinematic medium and exposed me to a huge canon of art-house cinema. I think, more than anything, it acted as a puzzle I could never quite solve – something so distant yet so relatable – that perplexes me still to this day.





## SCHINDLER'S LIST

*Schindler's List* (1993) is fundamentally a consideration of character set during the Holocaust: the murderers, the saviours, and the victims. We follow Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson) as he ascends from newcomer to business owner to saviour of Jewish lives. And as we follow his life, we see the atrocities of man, the horrors of the Nazis as the Holocaust unfolds, and the leadership of a concentration camp by a man called Amon Goeth (Ralph Fiennes).

One of the posters for the film depicts a young girl dressed in red amongst a sea of darkness. At one point, during a rounding up and slaughtering of Jews, this girl wanders the streets, looking for safety amidst death. We see her find that security underneath a bed in a ramshackle apartment. And looking on from above, saddled on a white horse, is Oskar Schindler. He stares and tears, seeing that his actions to that point – bringing Jews from the ghetto to be essential workers in his factory – have done little to help their condition. This girl, the one main departure from a colourless film (except for the very end), depicts a modicum of hope and innocence in a world of chaos; a desire, by Schindler and the Jews, that perhaps things will get

better and not worse, that there is still some dream of defence and not danger for these targeted Jews.

Later on, this girl makes another appearance – on a cart of murdered Jews. Schindler looks on in horror and sadness as the last depiction of colour and flicker of hope is wheeled away. Spielberg's use of black and white in this scene and throughout this movie serves to exemplify the atrocities that are carried out and the mounting despair. It emphasises a sense of moral objectivity – an obvious one – to the actions portrayed within the film. Yet within the black and white are many different shades, used in various ways, for example, to express the difference between Schindler and the military officers. He may wear the Nazi badge just as they do, but the pale-coloured suit he wears when he meets with them (in one scene in particular), compared to the military officers' darkened and indifferent attire, shows his compassion as opposed to their cruelty.

What for me takes this film above most others is not just the use of colour or context but character, particularly that of Schindler and Goeth. It is not simply a portrayal of virtue

versus evil, but rather a victory of principle over insecurity. Schindler, as he himself admits at the end of the film, makes his wealth from the “slave labour” of the Jews. He shakes hands, shares drinks, and sells goods to the Nazis. He does this with a nearly impeccable façade of confidence and charisma, enough to appear rich before he is such, and to start businesses from nothing. Yet we see the true Schindler come through when he needs to. We see him tell Goeth that power is pardoning when one could punish. We see him when he vows to his wife to remain faithful – and when he earlier refuses to make such a promise. We see him when he gives away his fortune, his life's work and his own ambitions so that he may save Jews from the Final Solution. In all these examples, we see him act without a mask, on principle – a man bound by his values. When the layers are peeled away, he does what is truly right, not because he is forced to, but because his morals make him believe he must.

Similarly, with Goeth, we see an imperfect man, but one who fails and falls when tested. We see this after Schindler's aforementioned exhortation of the power of pardoning. After this, Goeth attempts to be forgiving: he excuses the stable worker, forgives a small girl, and initially pardons his cleaner. In short, he attempts to be the better, more just man that Schindler has compelled him to be. Yet when he looks in the mirror, he sees his own dissatisfaction and we see, through the use of angle and light, a more wrinkled and ugly face of his than we see at any other time. Dropping his terror has not absolved him, but rather has shown him the scars he must confront to become

better. In the face of this test, in the face of the lack of fulfillment he so dearly sought, in the face of his imperfection, he turns to his insecurity, and confides and comforts himself in the identity that gives him strength: Nazism. He lets an identity have power over him, for at least then he can justify himself. Here, we see his weakness pervade just as we saw Schindler's strength prevail.

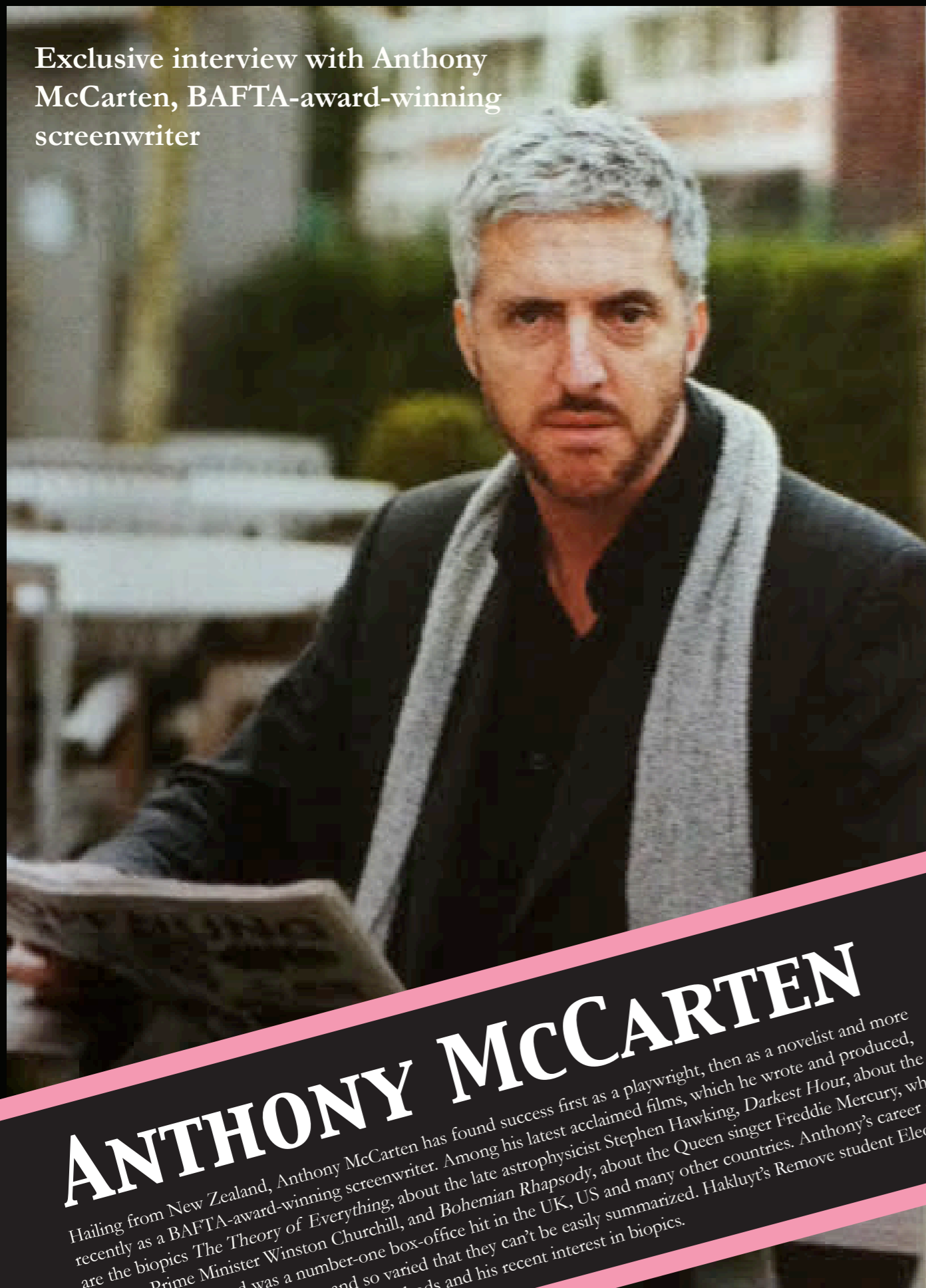
This dichotomy of character is where the narrative truly lies. The film questions how men could act so cruel whilst answering its own question with a portrayal of their character – a character of both an insecure inhibition and a despotic disposition. It acknowledges the difficulty of breaking free from this fragility, to act as a saviour rather than a tyrant, and it does so in the context of the most horrific act in the history of mankind: the Holocaust.

There is a common Jewish saying from older times, “next year in Jerusalem”. It is an expression of the weary weight of hope that burns through the hearts of many Jews. Spielberg, Jewish himself, places this sense of hope at the forefront of scenes throughout the movie, where Jews justify their ghetto life, discuss, argue and cry whilst held in concentration camps, and celebrate being saved. The centrality of this hope is also seen through the young girl's red coat. And Spielberg ends with the idea of hope, gratitude, and perseverance when he shows the Jews, which Schindler saved, visiting the grave of the civilian whose character liberated them. Spielberg shows us how one man, in his quest to save many, even if not enough, can help to preserve the undying continuity of Jewish culture and community. He shows us that the principle and power of Oskar Schindler should be a reminder to us all of the moral basis we should seek to live up to in our lives – if not for ourselves, then for the millions that perished before us, who held with hope the desires of a next year in Jerusalem. In doing so, Spielberg ensures that the horror of the Holocaust is remembered eternally, and therein has created something more than a film: a message to us and to future generations.



## WYLIE BRUNMAN

Exclusive interview with Anthony McCarten, BAFTA-award-winning screenwriter



# ANTHONY MCCARTEN

Hailing from New Zealand, Anthony McCarten has found success first as a playwright, then as a novelist and more recently as a BAFTA-award-winning screenwriter. Among his latest acclaimed films, which he wrote and produced, are the biopics *The Theory of Everything*, about the late astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, *Darkest Hour*, about the wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and *Bohemian Rhapsody*, about the Queen singer Freddie Mercury, which won four Oscars and was a number-one box-office hit in the UK, US and many other countries. Anthony's career and achievements are so impressive and so varied that they can't be easily summarized. Hakluyt's Remove student Eleonora Gallenzi asked him about his writing methods and his recent interest in biopics.

**Anthony, you have written scripts for both theatre and films. Is there much of a difference between the two?**

I started professional life as a playwright and screenwriter, and then progressed to movies. The screenplay and stage play offer a variety of technical and emotional challenges for the writer. The skills you learn from each are in part transferable between the mediums. Playwriting taught me how much of the action could be contained purely in what is said. Also, I learnt the dramatic importance of making characters speak in a distinctive way that is unique to them. Lastly, a play needs to be built around a strong unifying premise and three questions: what does this character want, how do they try to get it, and what do they actually end up with? I find myself asking the same questions of all my characters in all my stories.

Screenplays, on the other hand, are more about action than dialogue – and from this you learn how character can also be revealed by what a character does, rather than what they say.

**And you have written novels too. What suits you better – writing on your own or collaboratively – and which medium do you like best?**

Film work, for me, is an antidote to the monastic privations of solitary life that a novelist must live. I like people, enjoy collaboration, and film-making gives me this outlet, as does working with actors and directors in the theatre. Writing a novel is like holding your breath for two or more years.

**Is there a script you have written that is your favourite or you are particularly proud of?**

My favourite script is always the next one I write.

**How do you approach writing a script in terms of research? Do you write a treatment first, and how many drafts does it usually take to reach a final version?**

I do just enough research to begin writing, but not too much. I find that too much research can overwhelm me. It can restrict my imagination, and even in a work based on real events the imagination is vital, because all history has much in it that is unknown. You have to allow the magic to happen. After I have finished I am happy to learn even more and make changes to the script, correct the mistakes of the imagination, but I have

often written things from my own imagination that I find actually happened.

**Do you have particular actors in mind when writing a script? Have you ever had to change a script to suit an actor's personality better?**

No, I don't write with actors in mind, but I have often changed lines to suit the character an actor has created.

**You have been nominated and won many awards both as a scriptwriter and as a producer. What is it like attending awards ceremonies?**

The first time is the best. After that it loses its glamour, and starts to feel like work.

**How does it feel watching a film that you wrote the script for?**

When the film is very good, I am usually astonished that I wrote it. It seems a miracle that these projects ever work out. I am proud of many of things I have written, perhaps too proud.

**Why do you think there has been an increased interest in biopics in recent times?**

There is an interest in good biopics, but no more than there is an interest in good films. Biopics are often easier to get made because there is already an interest in the character. But the biopic form is a very difficult one to master, as you are denied the freedom to create that other genres enjoy.

**I've heard you are working on a Whitney Houston biopic. Why did you choose her?**

I was offered the opportunity to work on it. I watched videos of her most famous performances and I knew I had to do it: she is just so remarkable a talent, and her story is a powerful one.

**Is there a particular figure you would like to write a script about?**

Yes, Napoleon. I think he probably had the most remarkable life anyone ever lived.

## ELEONORA GALLENZI

# HUMANITY AND MORALITY

## IN A CLOCKWORK ORANGE AND DEAD POETS SOCIETY

*A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Dead Poets Society* (1989) are two films in which free will, or lack thereof, plays a substantial role. The notion itself is presented to be essential to the characters' humanity and morality. They show the grave consequences that arise when we lose our freedom of choice and our agency, leading to suicide in the instance of both films' protagonists.

The theme of freedom at the heart of what it means to be human is a central concept in Anthony Burgess' story adapted by Stanley Kubrick to the big screen. Depicting a broken society in which violence and disorder run rampant, a corrupt government introduces a new form of morally questionable psychological therapy as a means of reducing crime rates and gaining political power. The first victim of this therapy is our protagonist, Alex DeLarge, a conniving yet self-aware delinquent. His villainous demeanour does finally catch up to him and he is imprisoned for his actions. Yet he is no villain. In a peculiar and perverse fashion, he is an anti-hero, a figure we sympathise with despite his despicable conduct: a pivotal reason as to why many viewers find this film disturbing – we ourselves feel wrong in rooting for such a malignant force. This is a direct result of his self-awareness, accentuated by his agency in the beginning and end of the film. Alex realises that he is evil and does not shy away from his nature but embraces it. This distinct sincerity, contrasted with the concealment of complexity found in most other characters of the film, highlights the honesty within Alex and portrays him as likeable in comparison. Their spite is hidden under a thin veil of 'benevolent intent' (for example, the police officers who are unnecessarily brutal in their treatment of Alex, who enjoy seeing him suffer under their misuse of power). They seem to believe that Alex's crimes can excuse their nastiness since his were inherently more vindictive, therefore the punishment is deserved. Even they themselves are convinced that they are doing good for the world. Despite most of the characters within the film being evil in nature, Alex seems to be the only one whose actions do get punished, highlighting the injustice of this dystopia, and strengthening our pity for our protagonist.

However, the one thing that allows Alex to stay true to himself is his instrumentality, something which he loses after the treatment. Once he can no longer choose to act the way he

wishes, he loses this sincerity: his actions no longer reflect his fundamental intentions, which are still to commit crimes. As Dr. Brodsky, the mastermind of the newfound therapy, says, Alex is "impelled towards the good by, paradoxically, being impelled towards evil." His new, law-abiding self is only as a result of his inability to do anything else. His intentions are still malicious, but his conviction has been stripped from him. Here Burgess emphasises the government's prioritisation of stability over ethics. They would prefer a docile, unremarkable society lacking any morality over a society that is reprobate because its people chose for it to be that way. The freedom of choice is what separates the man from the machine; when Alex is left with none, he is not far removed from the machine. He is a mechanical creature with a fake human-like façade: a clockwork orange. In carrying out these treatments, the government is abandoning humanity and fabricating morality. Alex would now be perceived to be morally correct, although it is forced and not actually genuine since he is still inclined towards depravity.

At the end of the film, we see what this deficiency of humanity can lead to: in his darkest hour, being tortured by the sound of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Alex unsuccessfully attempts suicide. Freed from prison, but stripped of the hobbies he loves most and his capacity to act on his desires, he sees little point in continuing – existing but not actually living.

A similar reaction to the absence of freedom of choice is seen through the principal figure of *Dead Poets Society*, Neil Perry. In place of a broken society in the instance of *A Clockwork Orange*, there is the presence of a broken institution: the school which the boys attend. Welton Academy at its surface is a prestigious boarding school with a formidable reputation of getting students through to the higher education they desire, or in many students' cases, the higher education that their parents desire. Here we see the fundamental lack of freedom at the heart of many of the boys' lives, especially Neil's: they are not working for their own betterment, but for their parents' long-lost goals, which have been pressured onto their offspring, and the furthering of the school's outdated traditions. The school's reputation, headlined by professionalism and its moral values – the 'four pillars' of 'tradition, honour, discipline and excellence' – is preserved by any means necessary, even at the expense of its students' welfare. This dominant rule-enfor-

cing is opposed by a strong affection for the free spirit in the form of a professor, John Keating. His classes encourage the students to break free from the status quo and fight conformity. They do in fact break free, to some extent, forming the secret underground society where they can collectively share their passion for the arts, not just their forced-upon professions such as medicine. And, as Mr Keating says: "Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits that are necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for". The society gives them a fresh purpose to live. The society allows them to dream like never before and 'only in their dreams can man be free'. Whilst somewhat short-lived, Mr Keating and the Dead Poets Society grant the Welton students their freedom.

Neil is the student most affected by Keating's teachings. The burning passion for theatre is discovered within, with Keating's admonishments of 'carpe diem' serving as the spark with which the flame is ignited. After learning of Neil's budding acting career, born in secrecy, his father puts an end to it: military school enrolment as a final resort, much to Neil's dismay. His fleeting period of freedom is what ultimately becomes his downfall. He garners a taste of what it is finally like to express himself and hereafter cannot live without it when it is once again taken. The desire within him is now too great to be muted, and a stark decision is made: to end his own life. Similarly to Alex, he simply cannot continue to just exist as a shell of what he could be, incapable of 'living unapologetically'. As Mr. Keating says, 'the human race is filled with passion' – passion which, when given no means of expression, can deprive us of our own humanity. Having lost his, Neil's final undertaking is a supreme enactment of Keating's preaching: he has now achieved his ultimate dream – that of being truly free.

In conclusion, these two films masterfully illustrate the importance of free will in the development of our identity. We are shown the calamitous ramifications that occur when it is confiscated; the dereliction of humanity and the forging of a pseudo-morality. In any case, the outcomes are not enviable. Whilst Alex does get cured and can return to his old self, the government remains in control and thus the corrupt society remains constant. However, *Dead Poets Society* does end on a rather upbeat and hopeful note. The students come together to show their solidarity for their now-fired pro-

fessor, exhibiting true understanding and application of what he tried to convey, breaking away from conformity and becoming free-thinkers over all else. Their gravitation towards the latter trumps their fear of any school sanction. Professor Keating's efforts did not go to waste, and Neil Perry did not die in vain.

## ALEXANDER TRAUTMAN



In a bout of arrogance at the premier for his film *The Irishman* (2019), Martin Scorsese infamously proclaimed that “Marvel movies aren’t cinema.” While on many fronts I have very little respect for Scorsese’s efforts as a filmmaker, there is something begrudgingly true about his conclusions. In a follow-up article for *The New York Times* justifying his claims, Scorsese touched upon the elephant in the room, causing distress for film lovers across the globe: that is, the great divide between “mainstream” and “art-house” traditions. One of the key principles explored by Scorsese is temporality, and the trend in many modern blockbusters is to drastically manipulate the timeline of their story. Film theorist David Bordwell conducted extensive research into the average shot length of a variety of Hollywood productions between the Seventies and the present day. He found that today the average film shot lasts less than one second, eight seconds shorter than those of the seventies. Film critic Phillip Lopate argued in an article for *The New York Times* that, in contemporary American movies, “a scene is no longer, properly speaking, a scene; a shot is less than an image.” By contrast, many art films are finding increasing solace in slowing down their takes, often utilising a filmmaking technique pioneered in the fifties and sixties: contemplative, or slow, cinema. But if the primary goal of film is to entertain and to inform, what is the problem with these trends developing in Hollywood?

In his earliest work, *Poetics*, Aristotle tackles a series of important questions concerning what we might now call “ancient literary theory.” One such question is that of catharsis: the ability for art to purge us of our emotions by mirroring such emotions in art. Aristotle argues that, for empathy to be aroused in an audience, there must be some sort of distinguishable barrier separating the artwork and the consumer, allowing for a human connection to so-called “emblematic fiction.” There is a great deal of counteracting nuance to the debate surrounding this principle, but by taking Aristotle’s concept as one of the defining features for art as a whole, we arrive at our first argument for slow cinema. When a director manipulates his footage using fast-paced editing with the intent of creating a hyper-realistic feel in his narrative, he is sacrificing the ability for the audience to form an emotional bond with his characters. *Landscape in the Mist* (1988), by Theo Angelopoulos, exemplifies exactly why we need

to slow down just a little bit. As Angelopoulos tells the tale of two young children in a fruitless search for their father across Greece, the audience becomes overwhelmed with sympathy for the protagonists’ plight. The director relies heavily on long shots with very slow pans, always suitably distanced from each of the characters. In a scene where Voula, one of the children, is sexually assaulted by a passing lorry driver, everything that happens is obscured by a tarpaulin at the back of the truck. As she emerges from behind it, Voula sits at the back, slowly painting the walls of the lorry with blood from her injuries. Instead of an explicitly violent scene to depict such atrocities, Angelopoulos trusts his audience to draw their own conclusions, handling the situation with such delicacy as to play on our emotional facets. When permitted distance from a scene and its action, an audience can more easily reflect upon the psychological and emotional significance of an auteur’s creation.

Perhaps one of the more obvious reasons that contemplative cinema holds such importance even today is that it allows filmmakers to demonstrate the fundamental principles of their craft. British film critic Nick James has theorised a cyclical conspiracy between art filmmakers and critics of high cinema, saying that art film is intended to make life easy for both parties. He suggests that the current speculation of “slow cinema” being artful cinema, beautiful cinema, provides an excuse for directors to put little thought into the storyboarding of their films, and critics to wallow in a pit of meaninglessly deep reflection. I disagree completely with James, to the extent that I would take his argument and use it for slow cinema’s very own case. When a shot lasts less than a second, it is easy for a director to get away with almost any level of laziness, without it having any impact on the finished product. But when a shot takes place over ten minutes, every little detail must be accounted for. Composition, lighting and stage direction have always been key throughout cinema’s relatively brief history, not least highlighted in Chantal Akerman’s 1975 masterpiece, *Jeanne Dielman*. The film runs in classic parallel with “slow cinema’s labouring body.” At first, it seems that not a great deal is happening. However, subtle details in composition, the dropping of a freshly washed spoon, which would never happen on a regular day in Jeanne’s life, or the slight tilt that seems to creep into every shot, prepare the audience for the film’s bloody and shocking climax. As such, a story is told in the minute changes that occur in the screenplay and composition: a far more effective way of garnering the audience’s interest than fast-paced shot changes.

## PHOTOGRAPHY OR FILM: WHY SLOW CINEMA STILL MATTERS

JOSHUA NATHAN



There exists one essential factor which I believe, above all others, secures slow cinema's key role in maintaining modern cinematic standards. I note from a recent school talk the Rhizomatic thinking of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Put succinctly, his principle states that time cannot be defined linearly. Instead, we must consider all events that have happened throughout history as interlinked in one giant cause-and-effect chain, where each event corresponds to another. Deleuze was known to be greatly interested in cinema, and wrote extensively on the works of Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, to me the greatest ever to tackle the art form. Much of Tarkovsky's work dealt with man's place in time and the feeling of time sickness. The time inhabited by a character on screen represents only a small chunk of their existence; a director's job is to make clear all the interlocking circumstances that happen outside of both the physical and temporal frames. As Tarkovsky puts it in his book *Sculpting in Time*: "the author takes millions of metres of film of a man's life, and out of all that come two and a half thousand metres, or an hour and a half of screen time." Rhizomatic thinking is perhaps most prominent in his fourth film, *Mirror* (1975). Although by no means my favourite of his works, *Mirror* is a good place to start with Tarkovsky to train the mind to appreciate his complex temporal structures. The film is largely autobiographical, flitting between three seemingly incoherent streams of time, which he claims to have influenced his life the most. On top of impeccably sequenced takes, often haunting in nature, Tarkovsky reads poems written by his poet father. The sequencing isn't tasked with chopping the film into a single linear projection; instead, it admits freely to restricting Tarkovsky's narrative, allowing us to conjure up an entirely unspoken cinematic universe that exists outside of the frame. The picture is painted by deconstructing it first. This kind of manipulation of time also encourages active viewership on the part of an audience. Slow cinema wants us to think outside what we see by not using fleeting images that give us no space to breathe.

My arguments thus far imply that slow cinema has never had a place in mainstream cinema. This is far from the case. Elements of slow cinema are subtly incorporated into many modern masterpieces. The works of Francis Ford Coppola are prime examples of the fragmented use of slow cinema, and how it can be applied without dictating an entire narrative. Coppola loved the use of a slow opening take in many of his films. *The Godfather: Part II* (1974) opens with a funeral procession for Vito Corleone's father, in which his brother is also killed. It sets a precedent for the entirety of Vito's story, with

the raw emotional sequence of a mourning mother painting a stunning tableau vivant from which the rest of the movie feeds. *The Conversation* (1974) is also well-known for its opening take, where the audience assumes the role of an omniscient presence exposed to strange occurrences of the very "conversation" from which the film draws its title.

Another movie which shows this is the recently proclaimed cult classic *Nightcrawler* (2014). Dan Gilroy had previously directed *The Bourne Legacy* (2012), a prime example of fast-paced action constricting the plot into one boring narrative arc. Gilroy atoned for those sins in *Nightcrawler*, a realistic and chilling portrayal of a highly skilled and dangerous sociopath. When the story needs it, Gilroy does not resist, and uses quick sequencing in order to keep the audience on edge for the blandest parts of the film. But the story really flourishes when the two starkly contrasted protagonists, somehow so similar in nature, are presented with more delayed use of the camera. One of the final shots springs to mind, where Lou and Nina lustfully coo over the success that the most recently procured footage will bring them. All this as Ricky's maimed image haunts the shadows of our screen. Gilroy knows exactly when he needs to slow it down, something which I believe needs to be better understood as Hollywood keeps taking a turn for the worse.

It is undoubtedly true that slow cinema has its limits. Nobody wants to sit through an action-packed car chase if it's filmed in the same style as Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997), where the car moves slowly and the camera even more so. But without time for reflection, a cinematic experience becomes more of a theme-park ride, where twenty minutes after the ride you forget about it because you're boarding the next one. By contrast, I find myself revisiting the storyline weeks, even months after I have finished watching a Tarkovsky. Perhaps most importantly, something I know from my own experience, slow cinema is a great medium through which aspiring filmmakers can show off their talents, because the brilliance lies in how the film is theorised, not how it is executed. Budget no longer becomes an issue. Huge franchise films undoubtedly deserve credit for the dedication put into creating them, but they will never reach their full potential without incorporating elements of slow cinema.



## NIKHIL SINGH

### Man With A Movie Camera - Dziga Vertov

Dziga bought a brand new camera  
And went frolicking 'round Soviet Russia.  
Though Kyiv was quite hectic  
He expressed with dialectics  
And changed documentary's grammar.

### The End of Evangelion - Hideaki Anno

Shinji please get in the robot,  
Don't whine about how you have no pops.  
Seele's gonna turn you to Fanta,  
You have to make choices, this isn't just banter  
Or else you'll kill more than Pol Pot.

### Breathless - Jean Luc Godard

It's Queen and Slim with white folk  
Alas, murder is not a joke  
He courts an American  
She gets hysterical  
The ending was her bloody fault.

### Do The Right Thing - Spike Lee

Brooklyn in summertime - isn't it swell?  
Except Afros and Italians do not mix well.  
'We want brothers on the wall!'  
But soon the police get a call  
And the neighbourhood turns to hell.

### The Koker Trilogy - Abbas Kiarostami

Kiarostami films in Iranian Slough  
But it's artsy enough to remain highbrow  
It starts off with a child doing prep  
But an earthquake comes, causes some deaths  
And it gets metafictional now.

### Parasite - Bong Joon Ho

Some poor people hatch a scheme:  
To infiltrate the rich is their dream.  
But when it won an Oscar  
The message was lost on  
The Yanks who caused their poverty.

## ROY ANDERSSON



Born in Gothenburg in 1943. Film director, trained at the Swedish Film Institute's Film School in Stockholm at the end of the 1960s. Feature-length film debut in 1970 with *A Swedish Love Story*, followed by *Giliap* in 1975. After this, numerous award-winning commercials. In 1989, the unfinished AIDS film *Something Happened*. In 1991 he started the Gothenburg Film Festival's relay film project *90 minuter 90-tal* with the short *World of Glory*. Co-editor of the anthology *Successful Freezing of Mr Moro* in 1992. Contributing editor of the exhibition *Sweden and the Holocaust*. Honorary doctor at the University of Gothenburg. Honorary chairman of the Gothenburg International Film Festival since 2009.

With the multiple award-winning *Songs from the Second Floor*, 2000, Roy returned to the feature-length film format. The next film, *You, the Living*, premiered at the film festival in Cannes in 2007. The final part of the trilogy, *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, premiered at the 71st Venice Film Festival, where it was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Film.

**'I'M TRYING TO SHOW WE HAVE TO CARE FOR THE LITTLE WE HAVE LEFT. I WANT TO SHOW THE VULNERABILITY, AND THE WEAKNESS WE CARRY.'**



**1** **Love and Monsters (2020)** – Follow a great storyline in a simply hilarious journey through a post-apocalyptic world!

**2** **Hocus Pocus (1993)** – This family-friendly Disney film turned millennial cult classic features infanticide, a triple hanging, and a seventeen-year-old boy who is shamed for being a virgin throughout the 96-minute runtime... and it's an unbridled, fabulous, camp masterpiece.

**3** **Ali G Indahouse (2002)** – Sacha Baron Cohen's work tackles issues in politics using lowbrow, crude humour to create a social commentary wrapped up in a thick sugarcoat of comedy.

**4** **Hidden (2005)** – A savage, shattering exposé of the West's lack of empathy and its propensity to turn a blind eye on racism and discrimination.

**5** **Dumbo (1941)** – Perhaps the fact that the best sequence in this film is an alcohol-fuelled musical fever dream about insidiously marching pink elephants might come as a bit of a surprise, but it is a testament to the unfiltered (and occasionally rather confusing) ideas and creativity of early Disney animation.

**6** **In Bruges (2008)** – Don't let the immaturity fool you... the highs and lows of cinema, in the same line of sight.

**7** **Leviathan (2014)** – Themes of corruption, betrayal and human morality perfectly intertwined here... there's no way Zvyagintsev didn't read the Book of Job.

**8** **Top Gun: Maverick (2022)** – Hugely ambitious, *Top Gun: Maverick* shoots for the skies and soars even further than the original film; it's packed with incredible stunts, a compelling plot, captivating performances, and just the right amount of homoerotic beach volleyball.

**9** **Finding Vivian Maier (2013)** – A poignant documentary about an obscure, complex woman who might be one of last century's greatest photographers.

**10** **Nope (2022)** – Initially apprehensive about this movie, but wasn't a 'nope' for me in the end – more of a 'maybe'.

**11** **Thor: Love and Thunder (2022)** – Flashy, colourful and silly, this film doubles down on what set *Ragnarok* apart from previous generic Thor movies, and features some powerful acting from Christian Bale and Natalie Portman, yet ends up falling victim to its own zaniness and is still nowhere near as smart as its predecessor.

**12** **Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)** – It's overwhelmingly chaotic with a paper-thin and often contrived plot, but you'd be lying if there weren't a plethora of gags in this film that made you cackle (especially if watching it in black-tie suits and sunglasses).

**ONE-SENTENCE  
REVIEWS**





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