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As a rule, I do not read film reviews of movies I have not seen. Honestly, I've never quite understood why anyone would want to be informed about the supposed value of a film before they actually experience it. Somewhat paradoxically, I used to earn my living reviewing films, and it always made me angry when people at dinner parties would try to make conversation by asking if they should (or shouldn't) see a specific film; I never wanted to affect the choices those people made. When writing reviews, I actively avoided anything that could be perceived as an attempt at persuasion. Moreover, I never liked explaining the plot of a movie, nor did I think it was remotely interesting to comment on the quality of the acting or the innovation of the special effects.

Perhaps this is why many people did not appreciate my film reviews.

However, the one thing I *did* like discussing was the "idea" of a given film, assuming it actually had one. This is also why I prefer reading film reviews of movies I've already seen; I'm always more interested in seeing if what I philosophically absorbed from a motion picture was conventional or atypical, and that can usually be deduced from what details the critic focuses on in his or her piece. This was particularly true on the morning of my cataclysmic tummy ache, when I stumbled across *EW*'s January 4, 2002, review of *Vanilla Sky*.

I am keenly aware that I am the only person in America who thought *Vanilla Sky* was a decent movie. This was made utterly lucid just forty-five seconds after it ended: As I walked out of the theater during the closing credits, other members of the audience actually seemed angry at what they had just experienced (in the parking lot outside the theater, I overheard one guy tell his girlfriend he was going to *beat her* for making him watch this picture!). Over the next few days, everything I heard about *Vanilla Sky* was about how it was nothing but a vanity project for Tom Cruise and that the story didn't make any sense; the overwhelming consensus was that this was an overlong, underthought abomination. This being the case, I was not surprised to see *EW*'s Owen Gleiberman give *Vanilla Sky* a grade of D+. His take seemed in-step with most of North America. However, I found myself perturbed with one specific phrase in O.G.'s review:



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The way that the film has been edited, none of the fake-outs and reversals have any weight; the more that they pile up, the less we hold on to any of them. We're left with a cracked hall of mirrors taped together by a *What is reality?* cryogenics plot and scored to [director] Cameron Crowe's record collection.

The phrase I take issue with is the prototypically snarky "*What is reality?*" remark, which strikes me as a profoundly misguided criticism. That particular question is precisely why I think *Vanilla Sky* was one of the more worthwhile movies I've seen in the past ten years, along with *Memento*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Waking Life*, *Fight Club*, *Being John Malkovich*, *The Matrix*, *Donnie Darko*, *eXistenZ*, and a scant handful of other films, all of which tangentially ask the only relevant question available for contemporary filmmakers: "*What is reality?*" It's insane of Gleiberman to suggest that posing this query could somehow be a justification for hating *Vanilla Sky*. It might be the only valid reason for loving it.

By now, almost everyone seems to agree that the number of transcendent mass-consumer films shrinks almost every year, almost to the point of their nonexistence. In fact, I'm not sure I've heard anyone suggest otherwise. Granted, there remains a preponderance of low-budget, deeply interesting movies that never play outside of major U.S. cities; Todd Solondz's twisted troika of *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Happiness*, and *Storytelling* is an obvious example, as are mildly subversive minor films like *Pi* and *Ghost World*. P. T. Anderson and Wes Anderson make great films that get press and flirt with commerce. However, the idea of making a sophisticated movie that could be brilliant and commercially massive is almost unthinkable, and that schism is relatively new. In the early seventies, *The Godfather* films made tons of money, won bushels of Academy Awards, and—most notably—were anecdotally

regarded as damn-near perfect by every non-Italian tier of society, both intellectually and emotionally. They succeed in every dimension. That could never happen today; interesting movies rarely earn money, and Oscar-winning movies are rarely better than good. *Titanic* was the highest-grossing film of all time and the 1998 winner for Best Picture, so you'd think that might be an exception—but I've never met an intelligent person who honestly loved it. *Titanic* might have been the least watchable movie of the 1990s.



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I realize citing the first two *Godfather* films is something of a cheap argument, since those two pictures are the pinnacle of the cinematic art form. But even if we discount Francis Ford Coppola's entire body of work, it's impossible to deny that the chances of seeing an über-fantastic film in a conventional movie house are growing maddeningly rare, which wasn't always the case. It wasn't long ago that movies like *Cool Hand Luke* or *The Last Picture Show* or *Nashville* would show up everywhere, and everyone would see them collectively, and everybody would have their consciousness shaken at the same time and in the same way. That never happens anymore (*Pulp Fiction* was arguably the last instance). This is mostly due to the structure of the Hollywood system; especially in the early 1970s, everybody was consumed with the auteur concept, which gave directors the ability to completely (and autonomously) construct a movie's vision; for roughly a decade, film was a director's medium. Today, film is a producer's medium (the only director with complete control over his product is George Lucas, and he elects to make kids' movies). Producers want to develop movies they can refer to as "high concept," which—somewhat ironically—is industry slang for "no concept": It describes a movie where the human element is secondary to an episodic collection of action sequences. It's "conceptual" because there is no emphasis on details. Capitalistically, those projects work very well; they can be constructed as "vehicles" for particular celebrities, which is the only thing most audiences care about, anyway. In a weird way, film studios are almost *requiring* movies to be bad, because they tend to be more efficient.

However, there's also a second reason we see fewer important adult films in the twenty-first century, and this one is nobody's fault. Culturally, there's an important cinematic difference between 1973 and 2003—and it has to do with the purpose movies serve. In the past, film validated social evolution. Look at Jack Nicholson: From 1969 to 1975, Nicholson portrayed an amazing array of characters—this was the stretch where he made *Easy Rider*, *Five Easy Pieces*, *Carnal Knowledge*, *The Last Detail*, *The King of Marvin Gardens*, *Chinatown*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It might be the strongest half decade any actor ever had (or at least the strongest five-year jag since the fall of the studio system). And what's most compelling is that all the people he played during that run were vaguely unified by a singular quality. For a long time, I could never put my finger on what that was. I finally figured it out when I came across a late-eighties profile on Nicholson in *The New York Times Magazine*: "I like to play people who haven't existed yet," Jack said. "A future something."

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Nicholson was particularly adroit at embodying those future somethings, but he was not alone. This was what good movies did during that period—they were visions of a present tense that was just around the corner. When people talk about the seventies as a Golden Era, they tend to talk about cinematic techniques and artistic risks. What they should be discussing is sociology. The filmmaking process is slow and expensive, so movies are always the last idiom to respond to social evolution; the finest films from the seventies were really just the manifestation of how art and life had changed in the sixties. After a generation of being entertained by an illusion of simplicity and the clarity of good vs. evil, a film like *Five Easy Pieces* offered the kind of psychological complexity people were suddenly relating to in a very personal way. What people like Nicholson were doing was *introducing* audiences to the new American reality: counterculture as the dominant culture.

Unfortunately, that kind of introduction can't happen in 2003. It can't happen because reality is more transient and less concrete. It's more difficult for a film to define and validate the current of popular culture, because that once linear current has been splintered; it's become a cracked Volvo windshield, spider-webbing itself in a manner that's generally predictable but specifically chaotic (in other words, we all *sort of* know where the national ethos is going, but never *exactly* how or *exactly* why or *exactly* when). Cinematically, this creates a problem. Traditional character models like "The Everyman" and "The Antihero" and "The Wrongly Accused" are no longer useful, because nobody can agree on what those designations are supposed to mean anymore (in Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, all three of those labels could simultaneously be applied to the same person). Modern movies can no longer introduce impending realities; they can't even explain the ones we currently have. Consequently, there's only one important question a culturally significant film can still ask: What is reality?

I'll concede that *Vanilla Sky* poses that question a little too literally at times, inasmuch as I vaguely recall one scene where Tom Cruise is riding in an elevator and someone looks at him and literally asks, "What is reality?" The cryogenics subplot is also a tad silly, since it sometimes seems like an infomercial for Scientology and/or an homage to Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Total Recall*. But fuck it—I'm not going to overcompensate and list a bunch of criticisms about a movie I honestly liked, and I *did* like *Vanilla Sky*. And what I liked was the way it presented the idea of objectivity vs. perception, which is ultimately what the "What is reality" quandary comes down to. In *Vanilla Sky*, Cruise plays a dashing magazine publisher. He likes to casually bang Cameron Diaz, but he falls in love with the less attainable Penelope Cruz (it is a

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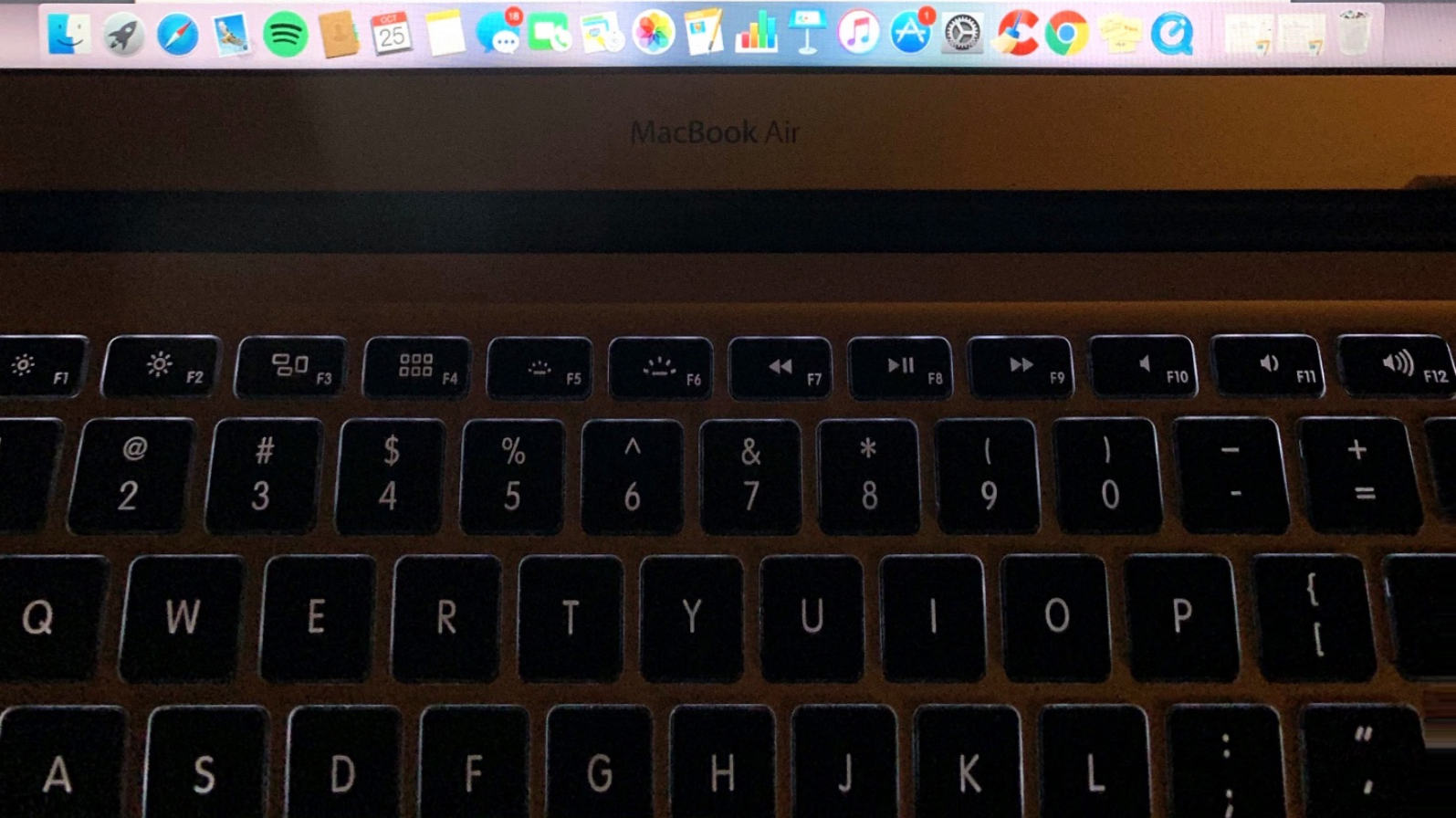
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credit to Cruz that she makes this situation seem plausible; Penelope is so cute in this film that I found myself siding with Cruise and thinking, "Why the hell would anyone want to have sex with a repulsive hosebag like Cameron Diaz?"). When Diaz figures out that Cruise has been unfaithful, she goes bonkers and tries to kill them both by driving a car off a bridge. She dies, but Cruise escapes—with a horribly disfigured face. Despite his grotesque appearance, he still pursues a satisfying relationship with Cruz and intends to repair his mangled grill through a series of plastic surgeries. Against all odds, his life (and his face) improves. But then it turns out that the diabolical Diaz is still alive...or maybe not...maybe she and Cruz are actually the same person...or maybe neither exists, because this is all a fantasy. Frankly, whatever answer Crowe wanted us to deduce is irrelevant. What matters is that Cruise ultimately has to decide between a fake world that feels real and a real world that feels like torture.

Cruise chooses the latter, although I'm not sure why. Keanu Reeves makes the same choice in *The Matrix*, electing to live in a realm that is dismal but genuine. Like *Vanilla Sky*, the plot of *The Matrix* hinges on the premise that everything we think we're experiencing is a computer-generated illusion: In a postapocalyptic world, a band of kung fu terrorists wage war against a society of self-actualized machines who derive their power from human batteries, all of whom unknowingly exist in a virtual universe referred to as "the matrix." *The Matrix* would suggest that everything you're feeling and experiencing is just a collective dream the whole world is sharing; nobody is actually living, but nobody's aware that they aren't.

For Reeves's character, Neo, choosing to live in the colorless light of hard reality is an easy decision, mostly because *The Matrix* makes the distinction between those two options very clear: reality may be a difficult brand of freedom, but unreality is nothing more than comfortable slavery. Cruise's decision in *Vanilla Sky* is similar, although less sweeping; his choice has more to do with the "credibility" of his happiness (his fake life would be good, but not *satisfying*). Both men prefer unconditional reality. This is possibly due to the fact that both films are really just sci-fi stories, and science fiction tends to be philosophy for stupid people.¹ Every protagonist in a sci-fi story is ultimately a moral creature who does the right thing, often resulting in his own valiant destruction (think Spock in *The Wrath of Khan*). But what's intriguing about Keanu and Cruise is that I'm not sure I agree that choosing hard reality is the "right thing." *The Matrix* and *Vanilla Sky* both pose that question—which I appreciate—but their conclusions don't necessarily make logical (or emotional) sense. And that doesn't mean these are bad movies; it just forces us to see a different reflection than the director may have intended. It probably makes them *more* intriguing.

The reason I think Cruise and Reeves make flawed decisions is because they are not dealing with specific, case-by-case situations. They are dealing with the entire scope of their being, which changes the rules. I would never support the suggestion that ignorance is bliss, but that cliché takes on a totally different meaning when the definition of "ignorance" becomes the same as the definition for "existence."

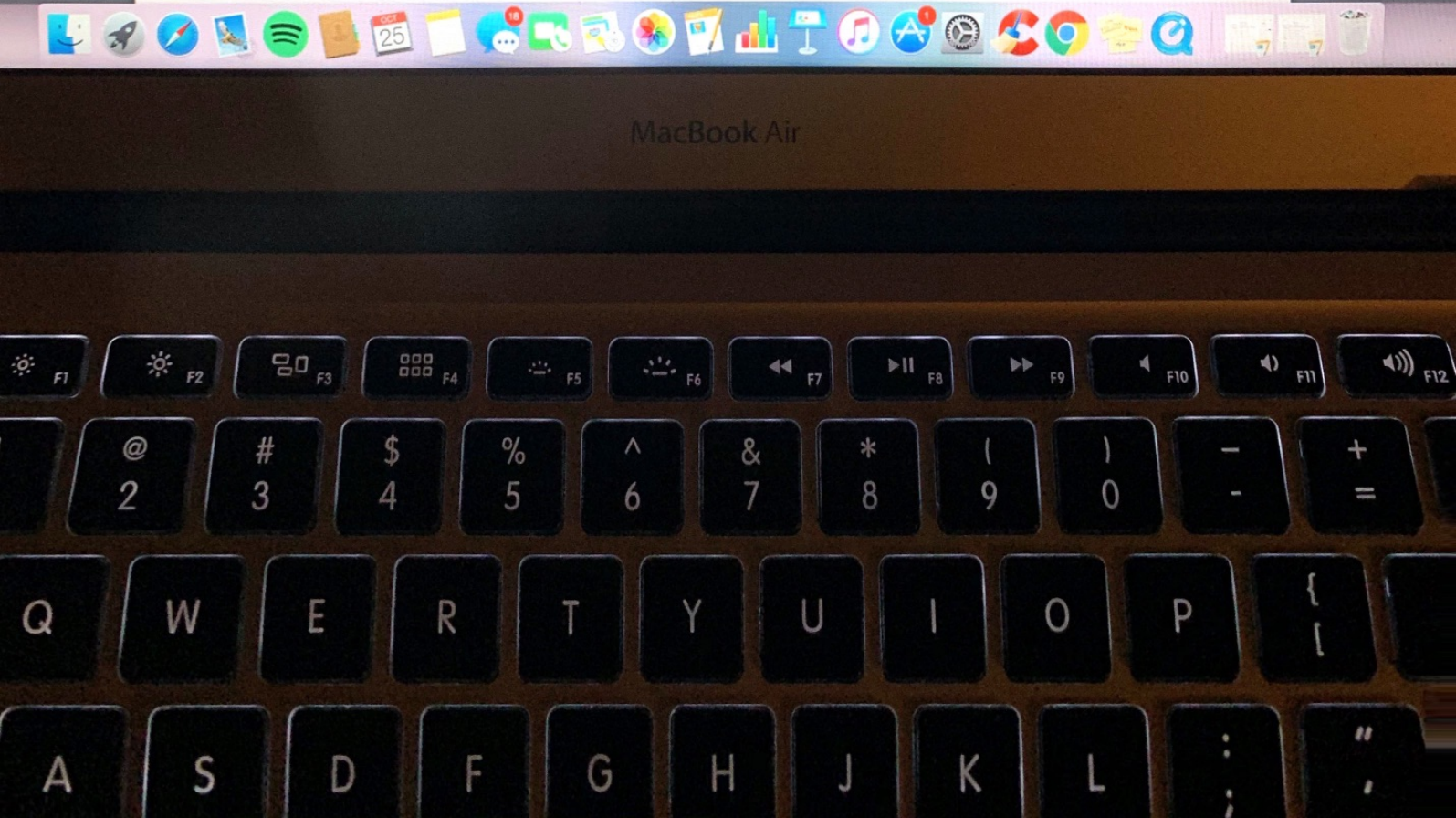


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LOOK at it this way: Let's assume you're a married woman, and your husband is having an affair. If this is the only lie in your life, it's something you need to know. As a singular deceit, it's a problem, because it invalidates every other truth of your relationship. However, let's say *everyone* is lying to you *all the time*—your husband, your family, your coworkers, total strangers, etc. Let's assume that no one has ever been honest with you since the day you started kindergarten, and you've never suspected a thing. In this scenario, there is absolutely no value to learning the truth about anything; if everyone expresses the same construction of lies, those lies *are* the truth, or at least a kind of truth. But the operative word in this scenario is *everyone*. Objective reality is not situational; it doesn't evolve along with you. If you were raised as a strict Mormon and converted into an acid-eating Wiccan during college, it would seem like your reality had completely evolved—but the only thing that would be different is your perception of a world that's still exactly the same. That's not the situation Cruise and Reeves face in these movies. They are not looking for the true answer to one important question; they are choosing between two unilateral truths that apply to absolutely everything. And all the things we want out of life—pleasure, love, enlightenment, self-actualization, whatever—can be attained *within either realm*. They both choose the "harder" reality, but only because the men who made *The Matrix* and *Vanilla Sky* assume that option is more optimistic. In truth, both options are exactly the same. Living as an immaterial cog in the matrix would be no better or worse than living as a fully-aware human; existing in a cryogenic dream world would be no less credible than existing in corporeal Manhattan.

The dream world in Richard Linklater's staggering *Waking Life* illustrates this point beautifully, perhaps because that idea is central to its whole intention. *Waking Life* is an animated film about a guy (voiced by Wiley Wiggins) who finds himself inside a dream he cannot wake from. As the disjointed story progresses, both the character and the audience conclude that Wiggins is actually dead. And what's cool about *Waking Life* is that this realization is not the least bit disturbing. Wiggins's response is a virtual nonreaction, and that's because he knows he is not merely in a weird situation; he is walking through an alternative reality. Instead of freaking out, he tries to understand how his new surroundings compare to his old ones.

There are lots of mind-expanding moments in *Waking Life*, and it's able to get away with a lot of shit that would normally seem pretentious (it's completely plotless, its characters lecture about oblique



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LOOK at it this way: Let's assume you're a married woman, and your husband is having an affair. If this is the only lie in your life, it's something you need to know. As a singular deceit, it's a problem, because it invalidates every other truth of your relationship. However, let's say *everyone* is lying to you *all the time*—your husband, your family, your coworkers, total strangers, etc. Let's assume that no one has ever been honest with you since the day you started kindergarten, and you've never suspected a thing. In this scenario, there is absolutely no value to learning the truth about anything; if everyone expresses the same construction of lies, those lies *are* the truth, or at least a kind of truth. But the operative word in this scenario is *everyone*. Objective reality is not situational; it doesn't evolve along with you. If you were raised as a strict Mormon and converted into an acid-eating Wiccan during college, it would seem like your reality had completely evolved—but the only thing that would be different is your perception of a world that's still exactly the same. That's not the situation Cruise and Reeves face in these movies. They are not looking for the true answer to one important question; they are choosing between two unilateral truths that apply to absolutely everything. And all the things we want out of life—pleasure, love, enlightenment, self-actualization, whatever—can be attained *within either realm*. They both choose the "harder" reality, but only because the men who made *The Matrix* and *Vanilla Sky* assume that option is more optimistic. In truth, both options are exactly the same. Living as an immaterial cog in the matrix would be no better or worse than living as a fully-aware human; existing in a cryogenic dream world would be no less credible than existing in corporeal Manhattan.

The dream world in Richard Linklater's staggering *Waking Life* illustrates this point beautifully, perhaps because that idea is central to its whole intention. *Waking Life* is an animated film about a guy (voiced by Wiley Wiggins) who finds himself inside a dream he cannot wake from. As the disjointed story progresses, both the character and the audience conclude that Wiggins is actually dead. And what's cool about *Waking Life* is that this realization is not the least bit disturbing. Wiggins's response is a virtual nonreaction, and that's because he knows he is not merely in a weird situation; he is walking through an alternative reality. Instead of freaking out, he tries to understand how his new surroundings compare to his old ones.

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philosophical concepts at length, and much of the action is based on people and situations from Linklater's 1991 debut film, *Slacker*). There are on-screen conversations in *Waking Life* that would be difficult to watch in a live-action picture. But *Waking Life* doesn't feel self-indulgent or affected, and that's because it's a cartoon: Since we're not seeing real people, we can handle the static image of an old man discussing the flaws of predestination. Moreover, we can accept the film's most challenging dialogue exchange, which involves the reality of our own interiority.

The scene I'm referring to is where Wiggins's character meets a girl and goes back to her apartment, and the girl begins explaining her idea for a surrealistic sitcom. She asks if Wiggins would like to be involved. He says he would, but then asks a much harder question in return: "What does it feel like to be a character in someone else's dream?" Because that's who Wiggins realizes this person is; he is having a lucid dream, and this woman is his own subconscious construction. But the paradox is that this woman is able to express thoughts and ideas that Wiggins himself could never create. Wiggins mentions that her idea for the TV show is great, and it's the kind of thing he could never have come up with—but since this is *his* dream, he must have done exactly that. And this forces the question that lies behind "What is reality?": "How do we know what we know?"

This second query in what brings us to *Memento*, probably the most practical reality study I've ever seen on film. The reason I say "practical" is because it poses these same abstract questions as the other films I've already mentioned, but it does so without relying on an imaginary universe. Usually, playing with the question of reality requires some kind of *Through the Looking Glass* trope: In *Waking Life*, Wiggins's confusion derives from his sudden placement into a dream. Both *The Matrix* and *Vanilla Sky* take place in nonexistent realms. *Being John Malkovich* is founded on the ability to crawl into someone's brain through a portal in an office building; *Fight Club* is ultimately about a man who isn't real; *eXistenZ* is set inside a video game that could never actually exist. However, *Memento* takes place in a tangible place and merely requires an implausible—but still entirely *possible*—medical ailment.

Memento is about a fellow named Leonard (Guy Pearce) who suffers a whack to the head and can no longer create new memories; he still has the long-term memories from before his accident, but absolutely no short-term recall. He forgets everything that happens to him three minutes after the specific event occurs.² This makes life wildly complicated, especially since his singular goal is to hunt down the men who bonked him on the skull before proceeding to rape and murder his wife.

Since the theme of *Memento* is revenge and the narrative construction is so wonderfully unconventional (the scenes are shown in reverse order, so the audience—like Leonard—never knows what just happened), it would be easy to find a lot of things in this movie that might appear to define it. However, the concept that's most vital is the way it presents memory as its own kind of reality. When *Memento* asks the "What is reality?" question, it actually provides an answer: Reality is a paradigm that always seems different and personal and unique, yet never really is. Its reality is autonomous.

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I'm not sure if anyone who's not a soap opera character truly gets amnesia; it might be one of those fictional TV diseases, like environmental illness or gum disease. However, we all experience intermittent amnesia, sometimes from drinking Ketel One vodka³ but usually from the rudimentary passage of time. We refer to this phenomenon as "forgetting stuff." (*Reader's note: I realize I'm not exactly introducing ground-breaking medical data right now, but bear with me.*) Most people consider forgetting stuff to be a normal part of living. However, I see it as a huge problem; in a way, there's nothing I fear more. The strength of your memory dictates the size of your reality. And since objective reality is fixed, all we can do is try to experience—to consume—as much of that fixed reality as possible. This can only be done by living in the moment (which I never do) or by exhaustively filing away former moments for later recall (which I do all the time).

Taoists constantly tell me to embrace the present, but I only live in the past and the future; my existence is solely devoted to (a) thinking about what will happen next and (b) thinking back to what's happened before. The present seems useless, because it has no extension beyond my senses. To me, living a carpe diem philosophy would make me like Leonard. His reality is based almost entirely on faith: Leonard believes his actions have meaning, but he can't experience those meanings (or even recall the actions that caused them). He knows hard reality is vast, but his soft reality is minuscule. And in the film's final sequence, we realize that he understands that all too well; ultimately, he lies to himself to expand it. In a sense, he was right all along; his actions do have meaning, even if he doesn't remember them. But

that meaning only applies to an objective reality he's not part of, and that's the only game in town.

It's significant that the character of Rita in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* is a woman with total amnesia, and that we're eventually forced to conclude that she might be nothing but a figment of another character's imagination.⁴ It's almost like Lynch is saying that someone who can't remember who they are really doesn't exist. Once your reality closes down to zero, you're no longer part of it. So maybe that's the bottom line with all of these films. Maybe the answer to "What is reality?" is this: Reality is both reflexive and inflexible. It's not that we all create our own reality, because we don't; it's not that there is no hard reality, because there is. We can't alter reality—but reality can't exist unless we know it's there. It depends on us as much as we depend on it.



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We're all in this together, people.

Semidepressing side note: Eight months after reading Owen Gleiberman's review in *EW*, I woke up with another tummy ache in the middle of the night (this time at a Days Inn in Chicago). The only thing I had to read was the July 15 issue of *Time* magazine that came with the hotel room, so I started looking at the "letters" page. All the letters were about Tom Cruise (*Time* had just done a cover story on Cruise after the release of Steven Spielberg's film version of Philip K. Dick's *Minority Report*). These are two of them:

I was glad to see Tom Cruise, the most respected person in show biz, on the cover of *Time*. In general, Hollywood actors contribute little to society, other than mere amusement. Cruise, however, is different. He isn't simply another mindless entertainer. He is a role model who overcame his childhood problems by being confident and motivated.

—Daniel Liao, Calgary

Was this article intended to help Tom Cruise regain his clean-cut image? He lost so much of it when he left his wife and children. Most alpha males need to control the women in their lives, and since Nicole Kidman has come into her own, it appears that Cruise moved on to a woman he had more control over. Are you going to be doing a cover on Kidman? She is the one who has had to go through the humiliation of being dumped by a famous husband and deal with being a single mom. She is a much more interesting person.

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11 Being Zack Morris 1:27

Sometimes I'm a bad guy, but I still do good things. Ironically, those good things are often a direct extension of my badness. And this makes me even worse, because it means my sinister nature is making people unknowingly smile.

Here's one example: I was once dating a girl in a major American city, and I was also kind of pursuing another girl in another major American city. I had just received one of those nifty "CD burners" for my computer, so I started making compilation albums for friends and particularly for lady friends. Like most uncreative intellectual men, almost all of my previous relationships had been based on my ability to make incredibly moving mix cassettes; though I cannot prove it, I would estimate that magnetic audiotape directly influenced 66 percent of my career sexual encounters. However, the explosion of CD burning technology has forced people like me to create CDs instead of cassettes, which is somewhat disheartening. The great thing about mix tapes was that you could anticipate the listener would have to listen to the entire thing at least once (and you could guarantee this by not giving them a track listing). Sequencing was very important. The strategy was to place specific "message" songs in-between semimeaningless "rocking" songs; this would transfix, compliment, and confuse the listener, which was always sort of the goal. However, once people starting making their own CDs, the mix tape suddenly seemed cheap and archaic. I had no choice but to start making CDs, even though they're not as effective: People tend to be more impressed by the packaging of the jewel case than the songs themselves, and they end up experiencing the music no differently than if they had thoughtlessly purchased the disc at Best Buy (i.e., they skip from track to track without really studying the larger concept behind the artistic whole).

ANYWAY, I was making a mix disc for one of these women (I will never admit which), and it was my intention to find eighteen songs that reflected key elements of our relationship, which I thought I did. But as I looked at the track selection, it suddenly dawned on me that these songs were just as applicable to my *other* relationship. My feelings for "Woman A" were completely different than my feelings for "Woman B," but the musical messages would make emotional sense to both, despite the fact that these two women were wildly dissimilar. So I ended up making two copies of this album and sending one to each woman, using all the same songs and identical cover art (computers make this entirely too easy). I expressed identical romantic overtures to two different people with one singular movement. And they both received



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their discs on the same day, and they both loved them.¹

Part of me will always know this was a diabolical thing to do. However, I'm mostly struck by the fact that all my deepest, most sincere feelings are so totally stereotypical that they pretty much apply to every girl I find even vaguely attractive. My feelings toward every woman I've ever loved can be completely explained by Paul McCartney's "Maybe I'm Amazed," Rod Stewart's "You're in My Heart," and either Matthew Sweet's "Girlfriend" or Liz Phair's "Divorce Song" (depending on how long we've known each other). My feelings about politics and literature and mathematics and the rest of life's minutiae can only be described through a labyrinthine of six-sided questions, but everything that actually matters can be explained by Lindsey fucking Buckingham and Stevie fucking Nicks in four fucking minutes. Important things are inevitably cliché, but nobody wants to admit that. And that's why nobody is deconstructing *Saved by the Bell*.

Saved by the Bell is like this little generational secret that's hyperfamiliar to people born between 1970 and 1977, yet generally unremarkable to anyone born after (and completely alien to all those born before). It was an NBC sitcom that ran for four years (1989 to 1993) after an initial thirteen-episode season on the Disney Channel (where it was originally titled *Good Morning, Miss Bliss*). The show spawned two spin-offs—*Saved by the Bell: The College Years* and *Saved by the Bell: The New Class*—and also included a six-episode summer run (usually referred to as the "Malibu Sands" miniseason) and two made-for-TV movies (one set in Hawaii, the other in Las Vegas).

It was a program about high school kids.

I realize that is not much expository information. Typically, one tries to explain TV shows in terms of "context"—if someone asked me to describe *The X-Files*, for example, I would seem like a moron if I said, "It was a program about two people who mostly looked for aliens." That would never qualify as a significant description. I would have to write about how the supernatural religiosity of *The X-Files* personified a philosophical extension of its audience, and how the characters represented two distinct perspectives on modern reality, and how the sexual chemistry between Mulder and Scully was electrified by their lack of physical intimacy. All this abstract deconstruction is necessary, and it's necessary because *The X-Files* was artful. However, I have never watched even one episode of *The X-Files*, because I'm not



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