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Enlightening Cinema

By Jed McKenna

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"Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know, you can't explain. But you feel it. You felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there. Like a splinter in your mind -- driving you mad." --Morpheus, The Matrix

This isn't a movie review list and it's not comprehensive. It's just some notes about a few movies I think are useful for the purposes of awakening and why, or that aren't and why not. With tools of understanding, bad is often better than good.

Major themes represented on this list seem to be these:

- Heresy
- Captive/Captor
- Teacher/Student
- Nature of self/man.
- Death/rebirth. Cataclysm/epiphany.
- Untrustworthiness of mind/memories.

The only thing I might advise with regard to movies and books is to raise the material up to the level where it becomes of value to you. Orwell might have been writing an anti-communist manifesto, but Nineteen Eighty-Four is much more interesting viewed as the struggle between man and his confinement. Apocalypse Now is about something more than Viet Nam, How to Get Ahead In Advertising is about something more than rampant commercialism, etc.

::: American Beauty

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"I feel like I've been in a coma for the past twenty years. And I'm just now waking up."

I've included American Beauty mainly for what's wrong with it. Lester's major death/rebirth transition shows promise, but what does he transition to? Backward to teenage crap, not forward in any sense. A fear-based regression. Stupid car, stupid drugs, stupid vanity, stupid skirt chasing. Not at all redeemed when Lester sees his own folly near the end or by sappy/smarmy dead guy voice-over.

The movie is slightly redeemed by the presence of the quasi-mystical neighbor kid and his video footage of a windblown bag:

"That's the day I realized that there was this entire life behind things, and this incredibly benevolent force that wanted me to know there was no reason to be afraid, ever."

::: Apocalypse Now

"In a war there are many moments for compassion and tender action. There are many moments for ruthless action — what is often called ruthless — what may in many circumstances be only clarity, seeing clearly what there is to be done and doing it, directly, quickly, awake, looking at it."

You'd think that Apocalypse Now Redux, the director's cut, would be the version to watch, but all the stuff that was rightly cut from the original has been wrongly replaced. (Raising the interesting point that directors and authors often don't understand the higher applications of the stories they're telling.) Stick with the original over both Redux and Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

Apocalypse Now is all about the Horror. A journey of discovery, into the heart of darkness, arriving at this horror. What's the horror? How do you get there? Why would anyone make such a journey? Should you make such a journey? Why or why not?

Note the powerful epiphanies that drive the film. The first assassin's letter home, ("Sell the house, sell the car, sell the kids..."), Dennis Hopper's youthful exuberance, Kurtz's diamond bullet, Willard's "...I wasn't even in their army any more."

::: Being There

"Spring, summer, autumn, winter... then spring again."

A lovely film ruined by a foolish walking-on-water stunt tacked on to the end. Without that nonsense the viewer would be free to think, to decide, to wonder. Instead, the movie zips itself up tight with its clever little dumb-it-down twist. Hit the stop button when Chauncey is straightening the sapling, before the ruinous denouement, and it's a fun, lovely film.

::: Blade Runner

"I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I've

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watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain. Time to die."

Were you born five minutes ago? Of course not, and you have the memories to prove it. You'd know if they were artificial implants, because, uh...

::: Cast Away

"I couldn't even kill myself the way I wanted to. I had power over nothing."

If a man screams on a deserted island and there's no one to hear him, does he make a sound? Is it enough that he hears it himself? What if not? What's left when you take away everything?

Self stripped bare.

This movie raises many intriguing questions about the substance of self, or lack thereof, and includes a very Zen eulogy.

::: Dead Poets Society

Heresy.

::: Harold and Maude

"Vice, virtue. It's best not to be too moral... Aim above morality."

American Zen, master and disciple.

::: Harvey

"For years I was smart... I recommend pleasant."

Elwood P. Dowd, wise fool. A sweet depiction of a higher order of being misinterpreted as a lower order of being. Would we know the Superior Man when we saw him?

::: How to Get Ahead In Advertising

"Everything I do now makes perfect sense."

A thwarted bid for freedom. A failed attempt to overthrow Maya. Enjoy the insanity of the epiphany.

::: Joe vs the Volcano

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"Nobody knows anything, Joe. We'll take this leap, and we'll see. We'll jump, and we'll see. That's life, right?"

Death and Rebirth. Unlike American Beauty, this is all about moving forward, "away from the things of man."

::: Man Facing Southeast (Hombre Mirando Al Sudeste)

Watch especially for the visual poem of a man crumbling a human brain into a sink while looking for the soul.

::: The Matrix

"Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, born inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind."

Plato's Cave for the people. As allegorically lucid as Joe vs Volcano, Pleasantville and Star Wars.

::: Monty Python's Life of Brian

"No, no! It is a sign that, like Him, we must think not of the things of the body, but of the face and head!"

Sacred Cow—tipping at its best.

"Meaning of Life" also belongs on this list.

::: Nineteen Eighty-Four

"If you want a vision of the future, Winston, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever."

This movie is unique in the sense that it's as good as the book, which is an extremely intimate portrait of the captor/captive, Maya/man relationship. Compare this to Moby-Dick or One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest which are superb books but useless movies.

::: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

As with Moby-Dick, Hollywood castrated the book. They stripped it of its archetypal dimensions and reduced it to a meaningless pissing match between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched. Great entertainment, but for meaningful insight, read the book.

::: Pleasantville

"There are some places where the road doesn't go in a circle. There are some places where it keeps

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on going."

A cheerful tale of heresy in which no one is burned at the stake and the new paradigm is, eventually, embraced by all.

::: The Razor's Edge

"The dead look so terribly dead."

The razor's edge is what makes it interesting; seeing Larry shakily balanced on the fine line between what he was and what he's becoming. He is walking the edge between two lives. The Bill Murray version is a bit unfocused... stick with Tyrone Power or read the book.

Maugham supposedly used Ramana Maharshi as the model for the novel's holy man.

::: Star Wars

"The force will be with you, always."

The first one, where Luke makes the transition from flesh to spirit.

The Hero's Journey.

::: The Thin Red Line

"Maybe all men got one big soul everybody's a part of, all faces are the same man."

A sublime inquiry into the spiritual nature of man. More a sad/sweet song than a narrative film.

::: The Thirteenth Floor

"So what're you saying? You're saying that there's another world on top of this one?"

Layer after layer. Turtles on top of turtles.

::: Vanilla Sky/Abre Los Ojos

"Open your eyes."

If you like Vanilla Sky, check out the original, the Spanish film Abre Los Ojos (Open Your Eyes). These two films may be the best of the bunch for our purposes; the closest to an enlightenment allegory.

Of course, the interesting thing about enlightenment is getting there, not being there, and that's what

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these films are about; awakening from a false reality, opening your eyes. They're not so much about what's real as what's not.

It's the story of the journey one takes to get to the place where anything, even jumping off a tall building, would be better than continuing to live a lie, even a beautiful, blissful lie.

Note the presence of the true guru, explaining in clear terms why leaping off the building is the best thing to do, and waiting patiently for it to be done.

::: Waking Life

"They say that dreams are only real as long as they last. Couldn't you say the same thing about life?"

Wide-ranging philosophical inquiry. Provocative. Amusing. Potentially disruptive.

::: Wings of Desire

"When the child was a child, it was the time of these questions: Why am I me, and why not you? Why am I here, and why not there? When did time begin and where does space end?"

A lovely, intelligent, thought-provoking film. Can the awakened being return to the dreamstate? Would he want to?

::: Others

Some other films that reward thoughtful viewing are *The Wizard of Oz*, *About Schmidt*, *What Dreams May Come*, *Total Recall*, *All the Mornings Of the World (Tous les Matins du Monde)*, and, of course, many more.

–Jed McKenna

::: About the Author "Jed McKenna is an American original." –Lama Surya Das
Jed McKenna is the author of "Spiritual Enlightenment: The Damnedest Thing" and "Spiritually Incorrect Enlightenment", published by Wisefool Press. Coming in 2005: "Spirituality X" and "Jed McKenna's Notebook". Visit WisefoolPress.com to learn more.

Home Cinema Room Setup

By Matthew Seigneur

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The best home theater experience is achieved with proper home cinema room setup. A home theater

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cannot be setup like any regular living room or den – it has special requirements so you can get the full experience from the sight and sound of the movies you watch. There are very specific things you can do to make your viewing experience the best it can be.

While it may be tempting to put your seating and equipment at interesting angles and your speakers on whatever is handy, this will degrade the sound and view of your home theater. The best set up, of course, is one much like that of a full sized movie theater. The room should be carpeted or have an area rug to give the best acoustics, and the walls should be decorated with non-reflective items – blankets, tapestries, and other similar wall hangings are good for absorbing sound.

The seating in your home theater room setup should be thick and comfortable, with thick upholstery to absorb sound waves. It should be positioned in the rear center of the cinema facing the center of the screen.

The display itself should be centered and facing the viewing area. The center speaker should be either above or below the display and aimed at the center of the seating. Left and right speakers should be to the side of the display, and the left and right surround speakers should be alongside and just behind the seating, elevated a few feet above the viewer's head.

Light should be as controllable as possible. Use opaque curtains to block all incoming light, and make sure all lights can be turned off. If nothing else, view only at night. Blocking out all light is essential to getting the best picture. Also try to minimize noise in your home theater room setup – it should be as close to completely quiet as possible when no movies are playing.

Good home theater room setup will give you the best most full size theater-like experience.

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