



CINEMA

HAS LEFT THE BUILDING



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Cinema has left the building

Years ago, I found myself in a cold and smoke-filled kitchen with a pirated movie. It was late at night, I was visiting someone, couldn't sleep so I picked up her laptop, and clicked on the title: *Enter the void (2009)*. All the crazy circumstances got locked out in a second. *Barthes* says in *Leaving the Movie Theatre (1975)* to embrace the illusion of cinema, to get in to the state of hypnosis, you need "twilight reverie". My mind was keen to be in a pre-hypnotic state to let myself occupied. I lost the real world, and the screen of the laptop became everything. I know, I know, a decent person who appreciate the profession and the artform would say, no, no, no, you can't do that, it is not the way it was intended to be seen. And I know that, but let me jump back for a second here, to explain something.

I was quite young, less than ten, when I first heard *The Doors*. It was the late eighties and I was sitting in my dad's car, a second (more like fourth or fifth) hand car that constantly made a sound like someone was trying to pull a fridge on the pavement without emptying it first. In this screaming silence he put on a cassette, a copy of a copy that was recorded from the radio. Something came through. The soul of that music, that was all the sound I could hear and it immediately managed to carve itself into my young mind. The song was *People are strange*. With all the noise coming from the engine and from the car itself, I don't even know how we were ever able to listen to any music in there. I guess when you hit the road your options are limited. And when you are a kid it's even more limited. It was also the time when your main source of music was a tape or the radio. These days you can have the best noise cancelling headphones, lock out the smell on the train, close your eyes and you can truly embrace the sound the way it meant to be. But I guess as a kid I just wanted that tune to talk to me, to be able to hear something that I didn't need to understand, anything but the noise of the world that I couldn't understand.

I was doing the noise cancelling myself, blocking out everything and just focusing on the song. It was like being an antenna, when it's turned in the right direction it's going to receive that signal no matter how weak it is. Now, have I received the song the way it was meant to be, doubt it. But I also doubt that there is a certain or specific way that an art should reach you. The

moment of *connection*, the realisation that there is value under the surface can be seen or heard no matter how loud is the surrounding noise.

This connection during those defining years creates a core memory, that throughout your life will make you search for the best version of that song or movie. You finally will be able to hear and see the tiniest detail you previously missed, and you'll find that cinema that plays *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) in 70mm and you can actually feel how enormous the desert is. These art works are deserved to be seen in the best possible way, in a way that you can hear and see and appreciate the work of every person that took part in the making. That is how it is intended to be seen. No argument there. And yet the appreciation of the art work comes from *connection* not from presentation. Presentation can help establish the *connection* but can't replace the human element. That comes from the audience.

Now back to that cold kitchen. *Enter the void* (2009) is best watched on a big screen, preferably in a cinema. It is visually captivating. I wish I was lucky enough to have seen it on the big screen first. I had to have the perfect mindset back in that smoke filled kitchen to take the movie in. There was no *twilight reverie*, no pre-hypnotic state that could've prepared me for the adventure. I could have easily misunderstood or missed some layers of it. I had to be able to lock out everything, just as a kid is able to cancel out the noise around him. It is not an old movie, but let's not forget, when it came out, we only had Iphone 3 with a 3.5-inch screen with a 480x320-pixel resolution. We weren't that obsessed with our pocket tv. Where we are now, we are less and less capable to find that mind set at the end of the day that wants to watch a movie that is a bit challenging.

We can get everything, everywhere all at once, but it feels like someone just turned up the volume and our tolerance level with it. People who grew up before the internet or let's be more precise, say you had your first kiss before 1995, are aware of this shift, we know how the tone changed from MTV to no tv. How the option of searching and finding things online actually changed the content we'd found. We were suddenly able to find things without the experience of a real life searching, and by this creating satisfaction only in the result without embracing the journey. People born around 2000, their lullaby was the dial-up tone of the internet. And now as grown-ups they won't try to hide or escape from reality in the cinema. For them reality is gone, so there's nothing to escape from. Everyday life has turned into a movie that you can watch or create from your pocket 24/7. I'm a director

and you are a star, and in the next minute it's the other way around. I have a camera in my pocket. Really, that's great, because I have a tv in my pocket. 15 minutes of fame? Forget it. More like one reel of fame.

To keep cinema alive only on movies that are busting the block is clearly not possible. Barbenheimer could not save Fulham rd. cinema.



Are we going to pray for another load of fast and furious superhero movies to save cinema? Doubt it. We have to have cinemas as an option, to look at movies as spectacular illusions in a sanctuary. Meanwhile *Paul Thomas Anderson* has curated his own mixtape of 23 songs he suggests you listen to before watching *Phantom Thread* (2017). Some movie theatres were playing from this playlist before screening the movie. How beautiful is that. To set the mood for the audience. To guide them in the dark of the matinee.

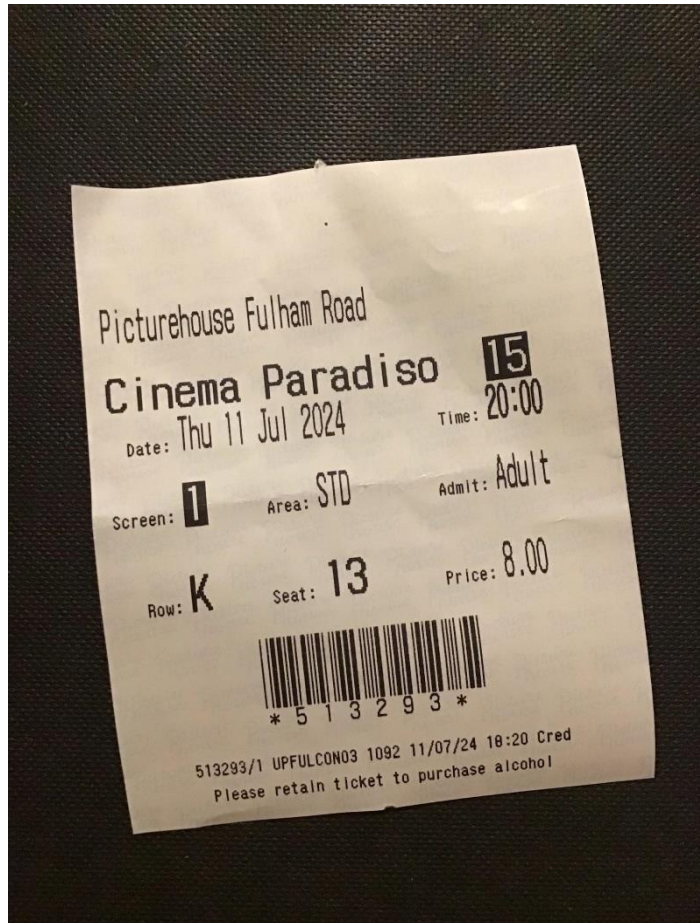
These are the tools the cinema has to pick up the fight with, to create the atmosphere for today's detached audience. And hope to find *connection*.

We would think that this shift has already happened, that since this technological change, the internet, the smart phones, the streaming and social media have been with us for a while now, we know what is going on. But it only started peeking. The ones never had a day without internet are just reaching their mid-20s, and they are not only the audience but they are the *new* creators. They just reached the moment in their lives when they gained enough strength to move mountains but not enough knowledge to know their limits. If this industry created safe swamp narrows down their path, they could lose the next 10-15 years to corporate mediocrity. Their most explosive ones. As *Holden Caulfield* once said: "*It'd be entirely different. We'd have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff. We'd have to phone up everybody and tell'em good-bye and send'em postcards from hotels and all.*" Less and less original creators are able to find their audience that are willing to invest their time in unconventional products.

In the age of fake individualism, people don't want to leave the house, they like to run their own cinema at home. They spent a lot of time and money to mimic the atmosphere of a cinema. And if they can't, they just stay in the comfort of their phones, locking out the world, creating the *darkness of the matinee* in their head, while enjoying the absence of worldliness. Streaming services and all social media algorithms have created the real-life equivalent of the Room from *Stalker (1979)*. They know your true desire, you don't. You might have it on your playlist because you want to watch *The Seventh Seal (1957)* or *The Godfather (1972)*, but based on your watch history it will recommend you *Red Notice (2021)* and *The Office (2005-2013)*, some comfort and nostalgia after your long hard-working day, you know you deserve it.

Studying film should be compulsory from a young age, it is as important as to learn to read or write. People from outside of the business usually think studying media is all about being part of showbusiness, getting a bit of spotlight and fame. And they couldn't be more wrong. Teaching how to understand film in this ai ridden, fake news infiltrated world, for a second screen obsessed generation that ego has been depleted by their decision

fatigue goes far beyond our beloved film industry. There's a lot more at stake. An educated viewer must see the difference between manipulation in a movie or in a news report. The first generation that has been visually overstimulated since the day they were born has just arrived and is ready to create. They will bring freshness to the next film era, but with the flood of mediocracy, comfort and nostalgia from the streaming services it is questionable if they get enough support from this worn-out audience. A24 can only take on so many projects. When we are fighting



with quantity, buying one ticket for Cinema Paradiso on a cinema's very last day won't make a difference either.

It's the audience's responsibility what they've been given but they need to have the tools to make responsible choices. The dullness of streaming services keeps them in a child state. As the great *Bela Balazs* said in *Early Film Theory* a hundred years ago: "... the films you will get depend on you, on your needs. More than any other art, film is a social art, one that in a sense is created by the audience. Every other art is shaped in its essentials by the artist's taste and talent. In the case of film, the audience's taste and talent will be the decisive factors. Your great mission lies in this collaboration. The destiny of a new art, one that contains great, indeed immeasurable, potential has been placed in your hands. If you desire good films, you will have to learn something about the nature of good film art; you will have to learn to perceive their beauty for that beauty to emerge at all. And, when we have learnt to understand the art of film, we, the audience, with our ability to experience enjoyment, shall have become its maker."

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