

## 50 MPH: EPISODE 47

### “THE BEST DIRECTORIAL DEBUTS OF THE ‘90s”

(with Owen Gleiberman)

Transcript (02:07:11)



---

**KRIS TAPLEY**

This is *50 MPH*!

[INTRO MUSIC]

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Pop quiz, hotshot!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

There’s a bomb on a bus.

**JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)**

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

If it drops below fifty...

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

...it blows up.

**ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)**

Oh, darn.

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?!

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

What do you do?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I’m your host, Kris Tapley, and you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I hope you like the ‘90s because we are in the middle of a few very ‘90s-specific episodes of *50 MPH*. Not that this isn’t a weekly dedication to the greatest decade of all time, but anyway, today we are going to be discussing the greatest directorial debuts of the ‘90s. *Speed*, lest you forget, given director Jan de Bont’s credentials, is after all a directorial debut. But how does it measure up against the cream of that particular ‘90s crop? It was indeed an electric time for new voices in cinema, and to chew on all of that today, I’ve invited another of our top film critics onto the show, and he’s a special one because he is the only critic we’ve had on the podcast who was writing about film contemporaneously with *Speed*’s release. I know it was on his top 10 films of 1994, but we’ll see if it ranks as one of his top 10 debuts of the decade as well. I’m talking about Owen Gleiberman, chief film critic for *Variety*, an old colleague of mine over there. But in the ‘90s, Owen was one of the two film critics at *Entertainment Weekly*, along with Lisa Schwarzbaum, who helped shape the interests of a lot of budding film enthusiasts at that time. So, he’s perfect for this. And I’m so happy to have him. Owen, thanks for being here, man.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Kris, thanks for having me on, and, you know, it’s funny, when you were introducing me and talking about how, yeah, I was writing back in the ‘90s, I felt like you were getting ready to introduce Gabby Hayes there.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

But yes, long time ago.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It’s good to have context. Historical context is sorely needed today.

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, absolutely. And I'll tell you something, I mean, of all the things in my career that I've been incredibly lucky to be writing about, film in the '90s, at *Entertainment Weekly* – a magazine that almost karmically started in the last week of February 1990, and I think a lot of people associated that magazine with the '90s – it was just such an incredible thing to be covering. Because, of course, that era, in hindsight, I think it's like the '70s. It just gains and gains and gains. You look at the '90s, you look at all the filmmakers that came out of it, and clearly, I mean, it was a Renaissance. It's a Renaissance era that – I mean, I've thought about this a lot – that I would absolutely put up against the '70s.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

You're preaching to the choir on that. And I should note, not the only film writer we've had on the show who was writing about movies at the time, because we did have Anne Thompson, your old *EW* colleague, on here a few weeks ago to talk about the Oscars of 1995. That was a lot of fun. But the first film critic from that time, and still doing it, which says a lot. So, I'm excited to talk to you about *Speed* if it comes up. No spoilers, we'll see. But yeah, I agree. I mean, it's such an incredible time. And you say in hindsight, just at the top here, let me ask you. At the time, did it feel that way?

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It totally did. This isn't really a hindsight view. Part of what was so exciting about the '90s – and I think that I was a little too young to have covered '70s, so, I don't know what it was like then, but I think people knew they were in the middle of an incredibly rich era. But maybe because we had already gone through that, when the '90s happened, and because it was so demarcated by this idea of independent film, namely independent film having crossed over and become mainstream film, this was so written about. We knew this to find the era. And you just look at the filmmakers, and boom, boom, boom, they were there. And we knew they were great. So, no, this didn't demand a hindsight view at all, but I do think that, in hindsight, the era looms even larger, especially as the industry is going through the upheavals and a lot of the people who are creative in film are facing challenges that are much more daunting than they faced back then.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, as I do, I asked Owen to come up with his top 10. I came up with mine. We did this separately, and when we looked at our lists – this was unusual compared to the other listicle kind of episodes I've done – we have five shared films on our lists. And, you know, great minds and all of that, but I think that just means you can look at this discussion as the definitive account of the best directorial debuts of the '90s. So, I'm all for it.

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Absolutely. And when I looked at your list, and I saw this number of overlaps, my first thought was, "Oh, is this a little, you know – are we thinking too alike? Is this a little boring?" And then I looked at the five overlaps, and every one of those films, there's no way it couldn't be on my list.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I'm sure you feel the same way.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Absolutely.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So like, you know, yeah. And plus, we have also a lot of difference. Five other films, some of which I don't even like.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, we'll get there. We'll get there. And this was hard, by the way, Harder than some of the others I've done, because I feel like this is the most slippery list that I've published here. Catch me on another day, the ranking might be different. I might pull in one or two other ones, jettison a couple. It's, again, a really potent era for new voices, so.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Absolutely. There are films that it killed me – debut films that it killed me to leave off.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, let's dig in. I'm going to start with you. We'll start with your number 10.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

OK, my number 10 is *Clerks*, Kevin Smith's film. I think this was – it was 1994. It was a real announcement of something. You know, Martin Scorsese has said about watching the films of John Cassavetes, apart from the fact that they're great, that they showed him, they showed a whole generation in the late-60s, that they could make a film. They didn't need the studios. They could just go out there with the camera and do it, because that's what Cassavetes did. And Kevin Smith kind of did that on an even more impoverished level. He went out there and made a film by saying, "I'm going to make a movie just by using this convenience store as my set and just having these two guys talking for 90 minutes."

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And saying that I love about the film – since I'm not, in the end, if I look at all of Kevin Smith's films, I'm not, like, the ultimate Kevin Smith fan or anything like that. But there's this wonderful form-follows-function quality of *Clerks*, which is that because he had such limited means and just had to make a movie about these two guys shooting the shit in a convenience – in a grungy convenience store, these just absolute kind of bottom

feeders, the film does have a certain documentary-like quality. You really feel like it's capturing something real, something true about just kind of how desperate and empty and badly lit their lives are. So, I just think that, you know, *Clerks*, in its very knowingly tiny way, is a landmark movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. No, you certainly feel like a fly on that wall, or like a surveillance camera on that wall or something, you know? It's shoestring cinema at its sort of most extreme. I mean, what was it, like, 20 grand he made this for? Just something-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

-ridiculous. And to that point about Scorsese, yeah, it really made anyone think they could go out there and make a movie, you know? "My daily mundanity is enough, you know, to fill a film."

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

That's right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And that's kind of a big kind of mission statement, unintended or not, just of that film, and just the kind of – I don't know, I read some blurb that was talking about the unity of time and place that's represented by the film. I mean, there's interesting qualities to what's going on with the movie itself just as a piece of cinema. I was looking at one of your blurbs. You gave this movie a B, by the way. So, has it has it grown in estimation, or-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

You know, I'd probably give it, like, a B-plus now. I mean, I think my qualification, when I wrote on *Clerks*, is I said I love the grungy realism of this movie. And in many ways, Kevin Smith's writing – I mean, the whole movie, really, once you get used to the setting – it's his dialogue that sustains it. You could easily do this movie as a play. And some of it is really great dialogue. I mean, I think it's a real act of dialogue writing, but there are any number of moments in the movie where I wanted his dialogue to be a little more kind of low-level realistic, a little less punchy, sometimes. "Look at me," the way that Kevin Smith can be. And, in fact, it's that side of his writing that I think kind of took over more as he became a filmmaker. And I like some of his films a lot, like *Dogma*, which isn't pretending to be a realistic movie or anything. But I think that in this movie, you know, that was my qualification. And yet, I don't know, the truth is I haven't seen *Clerks* for a while. If I went back, it might even grow a little more. There is something about it. I think it would play now as such an amazing time capsule that it might, you know – I think it just probably looks all the more exotic and compelling now than it did then.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's a movie where you feel like the filmmaker is talking to you.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yes.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That's an unusual quality for the kind of voices that are going to be on this list, because there's a lot of just stylish voices, directors with eyes, you know, things like that. But this was a movie that very much just felt like a guy talking to you and it was still compelling.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's also a movie about dudes talking to you about how they are. I think the movie is, you know – it's not in any portentous way holding up these two characters and saying “all young men are like this,” but it's saying, implicitly, these guys represent how a lot of young men are. And I think here we are 30 years later, in the internet era, when there's a real sense of a lot of people in general, and maybe a lot of dudes out there who have sort of empty, broken, wasted lives. And I think *Clerks* kind of captures that. That's part of the, you know – there's economic desperation. I mean, part of it, it's already making a statement without really coming out and making a statement and saying, you know – this is what one part of middle-class life in America has come to, is, these go-nowhere lives. And it's not just that they're working a cruddy job or something in the video store or the convenience store, it's that they don't have the imagination to want something more. And, you know, all of that is kind of encoded in the movie and the comedy of it. It's all sort of there, I just think Kevin Smith, captured something very real and kind of meaningful.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And I'm struck now, as I look at it, how utterly on the other side of the spectrum, my number 10 is. But, you know, I just want to caveat this, too, because this is my wild card sort of out of the gate. I'm not even sure if I actually love this movie or if I even know fully what happens in it, if I understand it narratively. I do find it just so utterly compelling and as I was looking at everything, I just felt compelled to put it on here. I'm going with *Daughters of the Dust* from Julie Dash in 1991. You know, you hear things like fever dream and tone poem all the time. This is certainly that. I wish we could have seen more out of her because the voice is so, just, intriguing to me. And, you know, she ended up on TV for the most part with her career, but to have such a strong vision and confident debut. I mean, it's this early-20th Century, former West African slaves who have adopted, you know, culture and traditions from their ancestors, and it somehow feels both historical and epic, but deeply personal as well, and you just get lost in what she's crafted. And I just thought – I find myself taken by it every time I come back to it. I don't watch it a lot of times, and I watched it again for this just out of curiosity, if it would be on the list, and I was, like, “You know, I kind of have to give it to her.” I just think this is a really amazing debut.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, I mean, the whole story of the film is as compelling as the film itself. There was a lot of attention paid to it, when it came out in '91 because it was – I believe I'm getting this right – the first film directed by an African American woman to be released theatrically.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, there was a lot of attention paid to it. The film did not perform well, and it's obvious when you see it why not, because it is beyond sort of bold and experimental. It's almost kind of avant garde, in a certain way. I mean, it's a very radical film, very fragmentary, in terms of giving you these little moments of this community that don't necessarily add up in a, you know, narratively conventional way, to put it mildly. And so, Julie Dash really never had another chance after that to make a feature film. I think what was really lost about that is, she went on to direct some television, but I would have liked to see someone like Julie Dash make a film like this that won acclaim, and then if it didn't perform well, continue to work in movies and bring this kind of vision, maybe in a more modified way, maybe not as radical, but not necessarily going over to television. She didn't get the chance to do that. I will tell you that there are moments in this movie that are powerful. There are moments when you feel almost like you're watching, you're eavesdropping on a documentary. But having said that, it's not really my kind of movie. I mean, I have a real streak of sort of aesthetic conservatism in me. It's just part of my DNA. I'm glad you put it on your list because I think it is, in its way, an early-90s landmark.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. And these kind of movies, when they work for me, they really work for me, like *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* I consider that kind of a movie. *The Thin Red Line* I consider that kind of a movie.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

These sort of wandering, potent, again, fever dreams, tone poems, I guess. Just hackneyed phrases, but it's kind of the best thing to say in this case.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, right. I've always struggled to come up with phrases for movies like this because they are – for lack of a better word, they're poetic. You know, it's a movie whose reputation has totally grown with the years. Of course, it made the *Sight and Sound* list of top 100 films ever made.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, did it? I forgot about that. Did it? Good.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

In the last in the last one, in – it was 2022.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Cool.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, it's a film that has earned its place in film history.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Very good. Well, let's go to number nine. I can't wait to hear you defend this one.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Let's go to my number nine, and I am proud to say – I guess I am proud to say this – that my number nine is a film that I love and no one else does. No one else even likes. It's a movie I wrote a review of at *Entertainment Weekly*, a rave review, and everybody else trashed it. And that is *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, David Fincher's-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Wow.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-debut film. I want to be clear on something. David Fincher is a fantastic filmmaker. I love a lot of his films. Not all of them. But, no, David Fincher is a major artist. But that's not why I put this on the list, because I only want it to go with actual films that I love. And I think I'm right about *Alien*<sup>3</sup> and that the whole world is wrong. Here's what happened. Here's the story of that film, as I see it. The first *Alien* comes out in 1979. Great movie. Just absolutely kind of tears your head off. One of the greatest horror films ever made. I am not as wild about *Aliens*, James Cameron's sequel in 1986, as a lot of people. I think it's a real achievement, but for me, it was a little bit too much of an action film. Talk about poetry, it lacked, I thought, some of the sort of psychosexual dread and poetic nightmare quality that the first *Alien* had. It had less of that. And that was OK, because Cameron was doing his own thing and he did it better than anybody else could. So, what was anybody going to do for an encore? I thought David Fincher in *Alien*<sup>3</sup> made a remarkable choice. He went back to the mood to the first film, and I think it is suffused with this real horror and kind of shivery dread, but it's less of a kind of propulsive horror ride than either of the first two. It is a real art film. Slow, brooding, quiet. And I thought, "Yeah, why not? Why not make an *Alien* film that's like that?" Especially when it gets into the plot where Ripley is now pregnant with an alien inside her. I thought, "Whoa, that is really – that's kind of a great premise." And it's kind of about her showdown with the alien that is taken to even kind of deeper psychological levels than it was in the first film. Killer ending to me. I won't spoil it in case anybody listens to this and decides to watch it. But basically, *Alien*<sup>3</sup> is the horror film as art film, and I've been surprised over the years that there hasn't been a movement to kind of resurrect it and say, "Oh, this was unfairly maligned," because I think the whole reason



it was maligned is that it performed disappointingly at the box office. *Alien* was seen by that point as a killer franchise, and because Fincher had made this slow – had turned *Alien* into a slow, brooding art film, he was seen as a franchise killer. And they didn't like that in Hollywood. And I thought the media sort of echoed that line, rather than what I thought they should have done, which is just accept that someone had made an incredibly adventurous, rather than commercial, horror film.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, I mean, I wonder how much of that has to do with his own sort of quasi-disavowal of it all. I mean – because a question I had here was, are we talking about the theatrical cut or are we talking about the assembly cut, so to speak, or what he more intended? And I know he's had sharp words about it in the past. I'm actually not sure where all that ended up with him and how he feels about the movie, but-

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, I've only seen the commercial cut that played. My own take on directors and their cuts is that, and I think Fincher is a good example of this, I think they get way, way too obsessed with this. You know, I don't – the director's cuts of films that I've seen, I haven't tended to like, although I do have to say one of the few that I think actually is better, and that earns it, is a Fincher's *Zodiac*. I think that, the version that is like 15 minutes longer – but most of the time, I don't think director's cuts come to much. And when they have a film that's been tampered with at all by the studio, they tend to get really upset and sometimes they disown it. And, you know, there are times when a film really will get butchered. I don't think that happened with *Alien*. I think that, you know – I think that David Fincher was upset that he didn't get the cut exactly that he wanted, and he's kind of a perfectionist, so – and the film was not greeted well, and he's kind of a player. So, he sort of, you know – he joined the mob and piled on his own film, but I actually think that when he directed that film, he was coming from music video. He was one of those people. I think he made the film he wanted to make, and I think it has this marvelous, haunting quality to it. It takes place on this colony where everybody has a shaved head and I think that that look is great on Sigourney Weaver. It sort of makes her look like Falconetti in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. There is this real quality of female perseverance and feminine suffering in this movie and I think it's a real drama about that. So, anyway. And I do think that it's made with remarkable style and control. For me, it was the film that announced a new talent, and clearly, that's what David Fincher went on to be.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Absolutely, I was just going to say, it's certainly a showcase for Fincher's eye, and him coming out of music videos and advertising and just finally applying that to cinema, I mean, that quality is obvious whether one thinks the final product is all that or not. I mean, just, his shots are in the movie, you know? His vision is in the movie. And we had not seen a filmmaker like that before *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, so.

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I do think the film is ripe for rediscovery in that, you know, there were so many movies now that get the revisionist treatment. Granddaddy of them all, I suppose, is *Heaven's Gate*. There are people who believe that that movie is a masterpiece. I've seen every version of that. I've gone back and watched the super long version of *Heaven's Gate* again. I think *Heaven's Gate* remains, you know, to put it – to call it flawed would be an understatement. I think it's actually a pretty bad movie that's interesting for a while and then just sort of loses its grip. I think most of the movies that get rediscovered and everyone says, "Oh, you know, the critics missed this the first time." Usually, I find I don't agree with that. I really think that should happen with *Alien*<sup>3</sup>. I could see how if the Criterion Collection decided to put out a version of that everybody would give it another look, and I also think that people might be much more accepting of the fact that – the basic fact that this movie simply does not move in a commercial way. It's slow. It's not a funhouse horror movie, which almost every horror film is. I think if people just watched it and said, "Oh, well, actually, this was an elevated horror movie," and saw it in that context, they might be more open to it. But, enough said.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. OK, number nine for me is *Bound* from the Wachowskis, 1996. There's something economical and taut that feels like such a rarity today when I look at this movie, I watched it again earlier this week in preparation for this, and I was sort of mad at myself for not coming back to it sooner. The whole movie takes place in an apartment, but the visual storytelling is really alive. Like, it's so cool to see all the style that they're going to apply to *The Matrix* applied to something this boiled-down-

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

-because all of their kind of, you know, shots are in there. They're just – the way they like to see cinema is in there. And, you know, the sex of it all is sort of a Trojan horse. Like, that gets you in there and then you get to see this banger of a movie. And you really just never know what's going to happen next. So, like, in a screenplay way, like, to make something that compelling where you're just, like, "Where's this going to go? What's going to happen?" And you're just on the edge of your seat the whole time. And then there's just a thematic strength to it as well about feeling trapped that I kind of respond to. The performances are great. Joe Pantoliano is so good. Jennifer Tilly is fantastic. I love the movie and, again, I have not seen it, probably, in close to 20 years until this week, and recently it was announced, I think – speaking of Criterion – I think they're going to put this on Criterion. And I'm glad, because I think it's a fantastic debut.

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, I couldn't agree more, and it's one of the films that it killed me to leave off, because it really is an amazing movie, and on all fronts. I mean, on the one hand, yes, you are seeing – what the Wachowskis do visually in this movie is amazing. They really do show you that extraordinary imagination they have, but it's not sci-fi. It's just a kind of realistic film noir. But what they do with the camera, it's so compelling. At the same

time, it is a really, really terrific story. I love a good film noir, and I think most modern-day noirs – very few modern-day noirs connect, but when they do, it's the best kind of storytelling where you are just held by it. There's something at stake. You really feel you're in this position of, "Oh, what would I do if I were there?" You know, it's about lust and murder and all that good stuff. At the same time, where I think the Wachowskis were truly ahead of their time with this movie is that, you know, there's a movie out now, *Love Lies Bleeding* with Kristen Stewart, which I think is a terrific movie, and it feels very up-to-the-minute in that it is also a film noir, the two central characters are women, and so, myself and a lot of other critics who reviewed it put the word "queer" in our headlines. We're sort of, you know, still doing that. It's, like, "It's a queer noir," which, when you think about it, is kind of retrograde. We should just say it's a film noir. Who cares what gender or whatever that the characters are? But we still do that. We still put movies in boxes in a certain way. But what's good about *Love Lies Bleeding* is that it is just a film noir, and you're watching – it doesn't matter whether the characters are lesbians or whatever. It's just a good story about two people who fall in love. I think the Wachowskis got there, where *Love Lies Bleeding* is, 30 years ago, in that it is a lesbian love story, but it somehow made that incidental. I'm not quite sure how it did that, but it was just, like, this is a story about two people who happen to be women, and let's not – you know, let's not put it in some category. And the film is so exciting as a drama that it just transcended all the politics of that, and I thought that was really kind of great about it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, totally. I mean, to be a debut, it's just, that's what's so electric about it, that you've got this much command over your visual storytelling right out of the gate. Yeah, I love that movie. I could watch it again right now. I mean, it's just so good.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Number eight, it looks like-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, this is fun. We share our number eight, so, we can talk about this in tandem. So, go for it.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Our number eight is *Menace II Society* by the Hughes brothers, and this came out in 1993. When I went back and read a couple things about this movie, I was startled all over again to be reminded that when the Hughes brothers made this – they were twins – they were 21.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Wow.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I mean, this is unheard of. Anybody who makes a movie, a pretty good movie, if they're 21, that's insane.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I mean, I get mad when I think about Orson Welles making *Citizen Kane* at 25, so, that's just infuriating.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Exactly. I mean, this was nuts, because it had almost some of those kinds of visual qualities that the Wachowskis bring. I mean, the Hughes brothers were, from the beginning, master stylists, masters of visual storytelling, working in a very realistic genre telling a story of people in the inner city involved in crime, feeling like that is their only context for how to survive. At the same time, the Hughes brothers had such a mature and unsentimental view of this particular world, because at the time that this was becoming sort of a genre, the hood movie, most famously *Boyz n the Hood*, and *Boyz n the Hood*, I always thought, was a good movie, really enjoyable, a lot of truth to it. But a little bit – I felt, when I watched it, I thought there is a kind of good old Hollywood quality to this movie. It's about the hero kind of saving himself in a certain way. And that's fine. That's what movies should do, but *Menace II Society* really went beyond that. It's a much darker vision where the hero isn't just going to be saved because he's the hero of the movie. This is a movie about people who become very comfortable with committing murder just for the hell of it, and the film was willing to take you inside their consciousness. And I thought there was an incredible humanity to that. I thought that was cathartic and, as I said, humane and an amazing achievement.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, the fact that it foregrounded that is the thing, because, you know, it's not fair to say one or the other. I was thinking about *Boyz n the Hood* for this, but this one has always, *Menace II Society*, been such a stronger debut to me. *Boyz n the Hood* felt like a filmmaker just wanting to tell you where he came from, right?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And he told a sort of traditional narrative, in a sense, like you say, of the hero kind of saving himself. *Menace II Society* felt like the same thing, a filmmaker wanting to tell you where he came from, but it's so unapologetic and willing to give you these sort of irredeemable characters to tell its story through that lens. It's not a lens of, you know, "these characters are justified." It's a lens of, "these characters are people and this is the world we come from," and, again to do that at 21, Jesus, I mean, it's just so fierce and unflinching,

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's beautifully acted by-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Larenz Tate?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Larenz Tate.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh my God.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, just creating characters who are scarily real, and who touch you because they just – as I said, you're kind of just – you're drawn into their whole psychology, and the fact that, growing up in this world, you understand how you will be drawn into crime, because it's not just it's, like, the only option. It seems if you start hanging out with a certain crowd, it seems like the only thing that really exists. You know, everything else is just kind of, like, for suckers. This is the only way you're going to make some money, you're going to gain some power and autonomy. It's just a world with a severe lack of options, and I think the Hughes brothers did not want to preach about that. That was part of the power that they brought as filmmakers. They weren't going to wring their hands about it. They were just going to say – they were going to just show you a snapshot. "This is how it is." And they went on to have, you know – make some very, very interesting films after that, although I would say nothing that match the power of *Menace II Society*. I would say, easily, one of the most remarkable film debuts in the history of the medium. No question.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

You know what's great about it, too? There's nothing about it that feels influenced. I can't see another filmmaker's aesthetic in there. I can't see them influenced by X, Y, or Z. I don't see them saying, "I like Scorsese movies, so, I'm going to do a Scorsese kind of shot here." It feels like their aesthetic.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I think that's really true. I thought of, when I saw it, Scorsese, a little bit, because he's the only – I mean, he's the one who went out into the streets in a very realistic way. But right, their visual style isn't really like his. Their visual style just expressed something of themselves. Right. It's their own language. That's part of the excitement of it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Alright, number seven. That was our number eight, shared.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

OK.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

So, you're number seven.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Alright, so I'm up. Here's another movie that I think is not disliked, but that kind of got lost. People don't talk about it. People don't really think about it. I have my own little personal connection to it. And that's *Buffalo '66*, Vincent Gallo's first film. Vincent Gallo went on to become, you know, sort of a famously disreputable figure, and he already was, by the time he made this film, a kind of controversial person. He's been in the news recently for some, you know – something that, you know, went on during a casting session that he was questioned about. There's a lot of issues any time Vincent Gallo's name came up. But I think one of the things that's remarkable about *Buffalo '66* is that having been an actor and an artist and dabbled in various other fields, Vincent Gallo, who had made a lot of short films before this, turned out to be an absolutely natural filmmaker, basically telling his own life story or a version of it. It's a kind of realistic, but in some ways fanciful version of it, about this guy who goes home to see his parents and kidnaps – I think it's – I haven't seen the movie for a while. I think it is-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

She's a dancer.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-a dancer, right, played by Christina Ricci. So that she can be the girl he's bringing home to meet his parents. But it is told with so much quiet authority, and Gallo gives such an extraordinary performance that the whole movie has this feel of a psychodrama where you are just going deeper and deeper into this person's life, into their soul. I felt at the time that it really had the quality of a 1970s movie, in that it's very low-key, but it's made with this freedom. You don't know where it's going, but you go with it. It's not a film noir. It's kind of, as I said, this cracked family drama. But you just – you follow it, every twist and turn, and by the end, what you come to is a sense of the truth of this character. And Vincent Gallo, when it comes to telling his own story or a version of it, is pretty unsparing of himself. It's really about this character who has all these kinds of qualities of too much bravado and cockiness and socio-pathology and this and that, and the movie is about Gallo, as a director, calling this character on the carpet. So, there's a bizarre kind of confessional truth-telling aspect of it that I think is quite cathartic.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, he does give an incredible performance in it. I don't have a ton to say about this one. I mean, this is one of those movies where I kind of say, you know, "it's interesting," and then I move on, because I didn't engage with it much. You know, some of it I find a little ridiculous, like the way the kind of image will come, you know – how do I describe this? Like, where the image will get big. It'll kind of start small and get big, and then it'll take you into this memory in that way, and it's just, like, experimental in a way that I don't know if it really works, but it's interesting. There is definitely a voice there, and almost a voice that's just, like, desperate, like, desperate to be a voice, desperate to say

something. And that's compelling when it shows up, you know, as a filmmaker. So, I did enjoy that aspect of it. The visual aesthetic is fantastic. You know, he shot it on this reversal stock. So, it has this look that's very unusual. I think I read something that said he wanted it to look like – given where the plot goes, this is funny – to look like old NFL Films footage. But, you know, the table scene, for instance, is so bizarre. It goes on for so long. Do you remember this, whenever-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

-they're sitting around the table, and he basically positions the camera in each position. There's four people at the table, and he'll cut between these positions, and it's unsettling. It's weird. You would never think to cover a scene this way. And it works for what it's doing.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's very strange, but I think it's an example of great squirm cinema.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

There you go.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

He wants you to squirm. There's definitely something in Vincent Gallo's sensibility that I jibe with. He didn't go on to make, like, a lot of other films, but for instance, I even liked – I will confess this – I liked *The Brown Bunny*, his much-reviled follow-up. Although, all the critics who sort of piled on it, to be fair, that was after seeing this very long version of it at Cannes, which I didn't see. Then the movie, when it finally opened and I saw it, they had – you know, there were these long sequences and him just driving with music playing and stuff like that, and they cut all that way down. But I thought even *The Brown Bunny* had these kind of soulful qualities. You know, anyway, I understand, though, that as I said, I don't think *Buffalo '66* is a movie that has some wildly great reputation now. I think it's a movie that mostly people haven't seen or they don't remember that well. I will tell you my funny story about it, which was that it played at the Sundance Film Festival. It premiered there in 1998. I was on the dramatic jury that year along with Paul Schrader and a few other people. That same year, one of the other films that was in the dramatic competition was Darren Aronofsky's first film, *Pi*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And Paul Schrader and I, who are friends – he won't mind me telling this story – we got in a real clash about those two films.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He loved *Buffalo '66*, didn't he?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

No, he loved *Pi*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, really? I'm surprised.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

He very much wanted Darren Aronofsky to get the best director award. I thought *Pi* was interesting but a little bit – I don't know, cerebral. It sort of looked like a kind of experimental student film stretched out to 80 minutes. I thought *Buffalo '66* was much more of an achievement, more of a kind of human achievement. He and I clashed over that. Ultimately, Darren Aronofsky won that award, because more of the jurors agreed with Paul. After Darren Aronofsky went on to make *Requiem for a Dream*, which I thought was remarkable, and I think that Darren is an extraordinary filmmaker, the next time I ran into Paul, I said something like, "Well, I owe you a mea culpa. You saw something in *Pi* that I did not." Having said that, I do – and the reason *Pi* is not on my list, is that I do think *Buffalo '66* really was the standout movie of that slate at Sundance that year and I do think that Vincent Gallo, had he been a different kind of person and he had stayed more interested in filmmaking and been a little more disciplined about it, I think he could have been a remarkable filmmaker.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Alright, my number seven, again, could not be any more different than that film: *The Shawshank Redemption* from Frank Darabont, 1994. Just this Capra-esque sort of sentimentality and filmmaking, but applied to a '90s audience mindset, I just find is interesting. It's a darker story. He's adapting Stephen King. But I'm not sure if I read King's novella if I would have necessarily thought to film the movie in the way he does. I just think it's a really handsome handling of that material. It went on to get a Best Picture nomination. He should have been nominated for Best Director I find it to be one of those interesting snubs. But yeah, I just I love *The Shawshank Redemption*. I always have always will. I think it's classical filmmaking really wrought in such a beautiful way, and I find that – and I've said this before – that there are haters for this movie, and I never quite get it. It's, like, they think it's too basic or something. But I just think there's something beautiful in the classicism of the movie, so.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, look, I mean, you know, you say there are haters, but there's a lot of people out there who would say that *The Shawshank Redemption* is their favorite movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Absolutely. That's what's crazy to me.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**



I mean, and I think partly, when you say there are haters – because I am not in the super enthusiastic camp, but I'm not a hater by any means – I think the haters are in part reacting to that reputation the film has. Where I will join them a little bit is I think *The Shawshank Redemption* starts out as this kind of dark prison movie, and then it does turn almost into a Frank Capra movie. I think you could make the case that maybe Morgan Freeman is playing – Morgan Freeman transcends this as an actor, but on some level there may be encoded in the film that that character is kind of the magical Negro a little bit. I think that was certainly true in Frank Darabont's next film when he made a three-hour prison drama, *The Green Mile*, and the Michael Clarke Duncan character was almost explicitly that. But that's not really the point. My point is that I experienced *Shawshank* as kind of a real cornball movie-movie. It starts out very dark. It turns almost surprisingly warm and feel-good, and a movie can do that and I accept that. It's decent night out. That's why I don't get the haters. But to me, it is one of the great mysteries in all of film history, that so many people love this movie the way they do, because the way I see it is, I do think it is an overly sentimental kind of cornball, it works but I'm not really buying it on the ultimate level of reality and truth kind of thing. I don't think Tim Robbins is that appealing as the lead. He's fine. But I just don't – I'm not powerfully moved. I don't see some great universal thing in that friendship or everything about where the movie lands. I'm saying that as someone, you know – I did kind of respond to it. I felt I was sort of manipulated watching it, and sometimes, movies can do that, like Frank Capra movies. I don't understand what it is that speaks to people so powerfully about this movie.

#### **KRIS TAPLEY**

I think I do. I think it's just, frankly, the ending. I think it's where the movie leaves you. I think people are so uplifted by where the movie goes. I mean, there's that really compelling final sequence where he escapes and they're trying to find them and you see how he escaped and you start to put all those pieces together. It's kind of like the ending of *The Usual Suspects*, you know? Where you're just, like, "Whoa!" Not that this is like a twist ending, but it kind of is. And then just leaving you with that final shot of Red walking on the beach and going to see his friend Andy again. I think that that just leaves people in such a warm place. I don't know, man. I guess the cornball worked for me.

#### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I'm not even saying it doesn't work. I think that ending and the movie does work, but to me it works just the way a thousand decently made crowd-pleasers that are basically cornball movie-movies, rather than works of art, work.

#### **KRIS TAPLEY**

You know think this has more craft going for it than that? Roger Deakins, Thomas Newman. I mean, it's, like, really well mounted.

#### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I think it has some real craft, and I think Darabont is a good director. I think it has all of that. And it's well-acted. I mean, there are many, many things about it that are quite

good. But I can say that about a lot of studio system films or – I just once, again, so many people talk about this movie as if – I mean, I don't think it's exaggerating to say this. They will say, "Forget every other movie ever made. This is my favorite movie." And I don't get why someone would feel that way about *The Shawshank Redemption*. I just don't.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

To the point where I don't – you know, it's not on my it's not on my list, although I respect that it's on yours. I mean, it does have this incredible reputation. Always been a head-scratcher to me.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Alright, we're on to number six.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

OK, my number six is, as they used to say, a little movie called *Speed*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Hey. There it is. We get to talk about *Speed*!

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I felt I wouldn't be allowed on the show unless I had *Speed* on my list.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Prerequisite.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Exactly. But the truth is that I'm seriously joking, because *Speed* had to be on this list, because *Speed* is – forget about debuts. *Speed* is one of the most remarkable movies of the '90s. It is singular I remember Anthony Lane wrote a review of it where he said something, like, you know – you've probably read

**KRIS TAPLEY**

We've read it many times on the air here.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

OK. Enough about that-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

The movie of the year lede?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

The movie of the year.

## KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah. So good.

## OWEN GLEIBERMAN

But it is. It is a perfect – it is a work of art. Let me say something about where I think *Speed* stands in relation to action films, and this is one of the reasons that I love it so much. Unlike a lot of critics, I'm somebody who on some level has a major, major problem with action films, action cinema. The whole idea of it, it bothers me. I'm capable of enjoying a good action film and I've enjoyed any number of them, but there's something about the genre that I think really hurt the culture and I think it's even connected to the rise of Donald Trump. Yes, I actually think that. Let me try to explain this. I think when you talk about Trump's rise and where he is now, I don't think it's possible to talk about it and why it really happened without talking about the rise of our fantasy movie culture over the last 45 years, I don't mean fantasy, I mean our fantasy culture in general, which was led by movies. I think we now have a culture in a way that we didn't in 1965 or 1975. We now have a culture that is swimming in fantasy, swimming metaphysically in fantasy. I think that started with movies. You could see the turn happen with *Star Wars*. I was first a critic in the early-80s when – the '80s were just, movies were suddenly inundated in the blockbuster era with, we are watching the beginnings of comic-book culture, we are watching slasher films and other bad horror films, we are watching Sly and Arnold and all this stuff. And so, our fantasy culture, yes, is about *Star Wars* and superheroes, but it's also about action, because the thing about all these action movies is that they're so unreal. And I think a lot of people think they are real. I think a lot of people go, you know, went to see movies like *Commando* or go to see Jason Statham movies now, and they feel like that's a version of reality. And of course, someone like Donald Trump is a strongman and all action movies are always about, are almost always about, a strongman hero. I think action films have helped to take our culture away from reality, and the result of that is that I often find them exhausting, because I do like to go to the movies to see a version of reality. I think the greatest action films are the ones that convince you of their reality, convince you that they're really happening. I'm perfectly capable of watching a Jason Statham movie and kind of enjoying its outrageousness, but like I said, a little of that goes a long way. I think our culture is drowning in overwrought, unreal action that has just played with people's heads, played with people's minds, and to me, the antidote to that, the greatest action films ever made, are films where I believe on a moment-to-moment level in the reality I'm watching. The greatest example of that – I would put this as number one on my list of the greatest action films of all time – would probably be one of the *Mad Max* films. I think the *Mad Max* films are just transcendent. I mean, the first two and then *Fury Road*. The way George Miller stages the action, you believe in a pinpoint way at what is happening in every second. And he never cheats. You see this character jump off a motorcycle and onto a truck and it all happens as if it is really happening. That, to me, is what a great action film is. That's what almost no action films are like. But that's what *Speed* has. That's the beauty of *Speed*, is that you believe this crazy premise, but you believe at every moment that it is happening exactly in this way. And, to me, that stands

the movie in such contrast to all of action cinema, and that's what I absolutely cherish about it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I mean, obviously, I agree with you. Jan de Bont would be bowled over by all of that, because that's his mission statement, right? Is to capture reality on camera. You know, his whole thing was, "I wanted it to be like these things were just happening and a camera just happened to be there."

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And, you know, he's got, at that point, decades of experience as a DP, and so, the fact that it is a debut – you know, it's a debut of a very seasoned filmmaker, right?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But still, to be at the helm of that and to pull all those threads together at the center of that chaos, he did it with such aplomb. It's phenomenal, and the realism is the thing, the tangible, practical quality where you feel like you can touch it is just so good.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's miraculous. He did it with such aplomb that I developed a conspiracy theory. Tell me if this is wrong or if I'm even getting the personnel wrong, but, as you pointed out, he was a very seasoned cinematographer and a great one. And am I wrong in thinking – I mean, he shot *Die Hard*, right?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yes, he did.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

OK. And then, of course, famously, in the '80s – excuse me, in the '90s, action cinema really did become, for a while – I know you did one show on this? Every movie was "*Die Hard* on a whatever". *Die Hard* became, it's no exaggeration to say, the kind of template for all action cinema. My conspiracy theory is that *Die Hard*, which is also – I mean, it's not as great a movie as *Speed*, but if you go back and you watch *Die Hard* now, that is a movie that really seriously holds up. It's a movie that's very different from the way that a lot of people remember it. People remember it as, you know, Bruce Willis jumping off the building and all this crazy stuff. It's actually a very slow, quiet movie. It also has that quality, in a different way, of reality. My conspiracy theory is that Jan de Bont really directed *Die Hard*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, whoa.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Where it was almost – because when did John McTiernan, the director of *Die Hard*, ever make a movie that was half as good? And yet Jan de Bont did. He went and made *Speed*. So, my point is – and I'm half kidding – that my feeling is that, wow, I wonder if Jan de Bont, in shooting, in being the cinematographer on *Die Hard*, in effect almost became the co-director, and I wonder if a lot of the qualities of that film come down to things that he did. It's just a fun idea, but-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I think Jan might agree with you. No, I mean, you know, I like a number of McTiernan movies, I guess. I like *The Hunt for Red October*. I like *Die Hard with a Vengeance* quite a bit, although *Die Hard with a Vengeance* has more in common with *Speed*, I've said, than it does with *Die Hard*.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

But I think *Die Hard* actually has something really huge in common with *Speed*, which is that once you – *Speed* has a preposterous, only-in-the-movies premise, just like *Die Hard* does, but you get past that and you get to the sort of extraordinary realism of the staging. Well, *Die Hard* is the same way. It has such a verisimilitude. It doesn't cheat. It kind of sticks with – I mean, you know, a movie like *The Hunt for Red October* is a fun movie but, you know, McTiernan just kind of shoots that script. It's a, you know, cornball thing. I don't know. There's just something about – Jan de Bont definitely had a moment there. On the other hand, he did not exactly follow up on it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No, although I love *Twister*, but no, you know-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

No, I love *Twister*, too. I love *Twister*, too, yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

-it didn't go well after – *Speed 2* is the one that did him in, unfortunately.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, *Speed 2* totally-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And that's its own sad story. But, I don't know, *Speed* might come up again in this podcast, what can I say? Alright, my number six is *Reservoir Dogs*, Quentin Tarantino, 1992. And what else can you say? I'm sure we'll say more shortly. But he was such a well-defined voice from the outset, and to me, that is a key thing about all of the movies on my list, is just people that had such a well-defined voice from the start. It's not something they had to spend time crafting and go through a bunch of movies before they finally got there. Like, right out of the gate, they had their vision. It was such a fresh

and electric voice at that time, and vital, to say the least, and more to the point, influential. I don't think it's, like, out of bounds to say that Tarantino is probably one of the most influential filmmakers of all time. And what came after him in that decade, everybody was chasing what Tarantino did.

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

He changed film culture overnight. And there's a lot to say about this movie, and yes, I suspect we will be talking about it at another point in the program as well. The first point I wanted to make about *Reservoir Dogs* does go to the question of influence, and something I read recently that was very interesting to me, and it may be that Tarantino was just being sneaky about this. First of all, let me just say that I stand next to no one in my reverence for Quentin Tarantino. I mean, I think he's truly a genius. I think he changed film culture. I think his greatest films are just – they're magical works of art, and I think *Reservoir Dogs* is one of them. I've had to do that thing at places like *Variety* of, you know, doing a list of Quentin's films, where you list them in order of greatness, and people have different opinions about this. A lot of people, a lot of Quentin fans, like, prize *Jackie Brown* much higher than I do. I'm not really that big of a *Jackie Brown* fan. I'm just saying. But when I do my list of Quentin's films, I think his greatest film is *Pulp Fiction*, and for me, number two is *Reservoir*. I think it is almost his greatest film and totally holds up. But what I wanted to say about the question of influence is, Quentin was asked about that recently and he was saying something about, well, this influenced me and this influenced me, and he might have even said something about not feeling the influence of Scorsese very much, something like that. It was my feeling at the time, and I've seen *Reservoir Dogs* many, many times, that, though I think Quentin is a total original – so, I'm not in any way saying that he, you know, is not – I think *Reservoir Dogs* is totally son of Scorsese on some level. I don't think it's the only thing it is, and I think what it does with narrative in terms of the way it plays with narrative, presaging *Pulp Fiction*, that's very Quentin. But just the atmosphere of – I mean, it's not just because Harvey Keitel is in it or something – just these guys in that sort of bunker, with the guns, the way they're yelling at each other. It's so much, to me – so much of that descends from what Scorsese did in *Mean Streets* or *Raging Bull*, and it's almost like – I'm not accusing Quentin of, you know, ripping off Scorsese. It's kind of like saying if you were a musician in the '60s and '70s, you were going to be influenced by the Beatles, you know? It's not saying anything out of school. But I do think that Scorsese loomed over Quentin. I think if there had never been a Scorsese, you would not have the kind of raucous, fighting, street poetry that you have in *Reservoir Dogs*. I think it's just – I think of Quentin in that film as kind of son of Scorsese, and I think – I just feel a huge dollop of that in that movie, in the acting and in the way he wrote it.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

I think a lot of Tarantino's career has been a little bit about pastiche, but not in any cheap or bad way. Just, he's influenced by what he's influenced by.

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, look, I think that we live in a time when art is so influenced by other art and music. Here's another example, an obvious one, from movies. I would have liked to have been

able to have Paul Thomas Anderson on this list, but couldn't, because as much as I like his first film, *Hard Eight*, it just didn't quite make the list.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Same.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah. And I ended up, in the end – we don't need to get into this. I'm not such a PTA person as a lot of people are. I kind of broke with him. But I was somebody who was religious about *Boogie Nights*. I think *Boogie Nights* is just an extraordinary film, one of the great films of the of the '90s. And the thing about when *Boogie Nights* came out is that, there were two filmmakers it was clearly super influenced by. It was super influenced by Tarantino and it was super influenced by Scorsese, in that it's almost a kind of riff on *Goodfellas*-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-in a way. I mean, these movies hadn't been made that long beforehand.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

With a little dash of Robert Altman.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, with a dash of Altman. In other words, you know, more than any film Quentin has ever made, *Boogie Nights* was, in that sense, a pastiche. And yet, even as I can point that out and feel that when I'm watching the movie – and also Jonathan Demme – even though I can feel him almost absorbing the DNA of all those filmmakers, and literally the kind of structural form of *Goodfellas* and other things I can point to, you know, when I would watch *Boogie Nights* over and over again, I would feel, yeah, he's doing all that, but it's still totally Paul Thomas Anderson. And I think that, at the time when Quentin came along, *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* in '92 and '94, people became very obsessed with this idea of him as this postmodern pastiche artist doing these mashups of Hong Kong films or whatever, and my take was always, for every influence you could see in Quentin, you know, there was one part influence and nine parts Quentin. Such an original. Nobody wrote dialogue like him. The dialogue is such a huge part. Even the way he frames stuff. It is such pure cinema.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Your number five.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

My number five is *I Shot Andy Warhol*, Mary Harron's first film, which, I love Mary Harron's work. I think she has made some remarkable films over the years like *American Psycho*, *The Notorious Bettie Page*, but *I Shot Andy Warhol* I just think is a

singularly gripping and riveting film. And where that begins is just with the whole premise of making a film about Valerie Solanas, the woman who did try to assassinate Andy Warhol. In a way, it goes to – in the '90s, there was a genre that was invented, that we all know, by the screenwriters Larry Karaszewski and Scott Alexander, who wrote *Ed Wood* and *The People vs. Larry Flynt* and the Andy Kaufman movie, and I call this genre the biopic about people you wouldn't make biopics about. They kind of changed the game. I mean, they made it very conventional, but at the time, it's like, who would make a biopic about the worst filmmaker of all time? Or Larry Flynt? Who would make the movie in which the publisher of Hustler magazine is the hero? So, they were into this idea of taking characters who are about as far from the hero as you could get and making them the hero of the movie. Mary Harron, I think, kind of picked up on that vibe in that, you know, two years after *Ed Wood*. She makes this movie about this kind of half-crazy, scurrilous person from the late-60s, Valerie Solanas, who almost succeeded in killing Andy Warhol. He never really, truly recovered from the attack where she went into his studio and fired three bullets into him. He struggled with his health for the rest of his life and died when he did, young, at 58 or whatever, in large part because of that shooting, in all likelihood. So, how do you make this character empathetic or someone that audiences can empathize with? How do you make this character the center of a movie? Well, part of it is that Mary Harron saw that Valerie Solanas was crazy and indefensible, but at the same time, she had written something called the *SCUM Manifesto*. "SCUM" stands for the Society for Cutting Up Men, a society that I think Valerie Solanas was the one member of. But this manifesto that she wrote is a remarkable piece of work. It's very long. It's very literate and articulate and it's full of very well-articulated feminist anger that feels, if you read it now, quite a ahead of its time. It's sort of half-crazy and half-visionary, and in some ways, what the movie captures, through Lili Taylor's incredible performance, is that Valerie Solanas was this person who was crazy in part because she was ahead of her time. She had an anger that the times had no place for, and she didn't know what to do with it, and that's what she did with it.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. A couple of things I'll say about this one. First of all, it plays really interestingly today. You know, I don't know how it played in the '90s, but today, it just has a certain edge to it. The other thing is Lili is so good, because that's what it takes, too, is a performance like that, to really sell this character. Really unheralded for that work, I think.

### **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It is a remarkable performance because she really preserves the idea that Valerie Solanas was mentally ill, and yet, she makes her so bright, so compelling and so funny, in a certain way, because she's so much who she is, living as this sort of singular kind of Bohemian. The other thing is, let's talk a little bit about the incredible achievement that Mary Harron brought off in this film, which is that she tells this story in the most riveting fashion. It's an incredibly suspenseful film, and at a certain point – and I think this voyeuristic angle is huge for a lot of us who love the film – she takes you inside the Andy Warhol factory, and when I say that she does that, I don't just mean that some of



the movie is set there. I mean that I've seen any number of films try to dramatize Warhol and The Factory, and none of them ever work. David Bowie played Warhol in the *Basquiat* biopic and he just seemed like David Bowie in an Andy Warhol wig. But in this movie, Jared Harris, before any of us had ever heard of him, plays Andy Warhol and gives us absolutely definitive performance. You feel like Warhol is just coming to life before your eyes. All the details of what – like, Michael Imperioli plays Ondine, all the casting, all the way that everything that went on in The Factory, the way this movie brings that to you and shows you what it was about, it really was the cutting edge of kind of chic Bohemian culture in New York in the late-60s. And it was the party that everyone wanted to get into, and that was part of Valerie Solanas' whole thing. She was drawn into The Factory. She became a hang-around there. She became an integral part of Andy Warhol's crowd for a while, and then she was cut out, which is what Warhol would do to you. And she couldn't take the sting of that. So, the movie is, in part, about fame, and the way that a lot of us covet it, and that's another thing about it that I think also was very ahead of its time. It speaks to our time. It looks more prescient than ever now.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, that was the third thing I had here is the history of Andy Warhol portrayals, and Jared Harris is just, like, way up there. People portray him as such an alien often.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, I think what Jared Harris recognized is that the Andy Warhol personality that we know that was there in the media and that he plays, was itself a performance.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Right.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I mean, it really was. It was who he was, but at the same time, it was kind of a put-on. He was actually a much less stylized and much more aware person than he let on.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And you finally do see that level in Jared Harris' performance in this. So, it's just – it is a remarkable movie. I urge everyone to see it listening to this program.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And it's so entertaining. It's also such a great story, in the sense that I actually consider the attempt to assassinate Andy Warhol as – there was something in the air. It's one of those – it's one of the assassinations. I mean, they all happened in this period, starting

with Malcolm X and then – well, excuse me, starting with JFK, but then Malcolm X, RFK, Martin Luther King, and then – they were all politicians, but Andy Warhol was, you know, the preeminent artist of his time. There was some kind of collective American death wish being played out in all these crazy people almost channeling something that was out there to want to kill all these incredible people, and Warhol, I think, was one of them. And there is a, you know – it would have been quite a significant thing if he had been killed, and there is just something genuine and dramatic and chilling in all of that the movie really captures.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I also remember – I'm kind of am reminded of this movie that is forgotten by now, *The Assassination of Richard Nixon*. You remember that film?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Oh, yes.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Niels Mueller?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

With Sean Penn. That's right. Which is based on a true story.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Alright, number five for me: *Dances with Wolves*. How's that for a left field? Kevin Costner, 1990. *Kevin's Gate*, if you will. But I think he showed everyone on that score. I think it gets too much hate largely because of what it beat at the Oscars, I think. I mean, if you beat *Goodfellas* and you're inherently not as good a movie as *Goodfellas*, you're going to get a lot of hate going forward.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But I think it's just assured filmmaking. He was ready to handle this level of filmmaking. And I miss this kind of thing. This brand of prestige, when it works, it really works for me. And I'm, like, so excited for *Horizon*, his new movie this year, this two-parter.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I'm so excited. And I love this film. I love the director's cut, all four hours of it. Like, I just – I think he really went out there and did the thing and to marinate in the world he created and, again, just that assured level. I mean, he mortgaged his house to do this thing. Like, he really was just all-in on this movie and I think he really pulled it off. And I

have no problem with its Oscars, because I don't think the Oscars are the end all be all of film history. But there we are. *Dances with Wolves*. I had to put that on this list.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, listen, I mean, Kris, you're not alone. It won the Oscar, and I think it's a movie that is, was, at the time, certainly, you know, beloved by a lot of people, kind of the way that *Shawshank* was. I mean, it was, you know – let's recall. It was this huge gamble, Costner making this quirky, three-hour western. It was a huge hit. I mean, it was a real triumph for him.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Which is saying something. Can you imagine that today? I mean, we'll see what happens with *Horizon*, but, you know.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right. No, it was it was a different time. I feel – I was not, you know – I panned it. I have seen it since. I haven't changed my opinion. I think it's kind of a soft-headed movie, and the one thing about it that, you know – I don't even want to use this to sort of whip the movie with, but I might. I've seen it again, but I haven't seen it, like, in the last 10, 15 years. You know, I really wonder how it would play – maybe better, but I suspect maybe worse – in terms of the kind of sensitivities we're talking about now in filmmaking with something like *Killers of the Flower Moon*-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Sure.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-trying to capture the reality. I mean, *Killers of the Flower Moon* is not the first movie in history that tried to capture something genuine about the native experience. And, I don't know, to me, *Dances with Wolves* – it's trying in a certain way. I mean, the whole movie is about the interface between this, you know, white soldier and the tribe that sort of adopts him. I felt like – I didn't know. I wanted the native characters to be more richly drawn.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That's fair enough. I'm just going to say I'm unbothered by that. In fact, I think *Killers of the Flower Moon* is a mess for how just desperately it was running away from being a white savior movie. I think the first version of that screenplay would have been a much better film, but they made what they made and I'm obviously in a minority opinion there.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, no, I mean, I'm with you on that. I'm not – you know, I'm on record on this. I've written about it. I'm not a huge fan of *Killers of the Flower Moon*. I think that – I don't think it needed to be, you know, the white savior movie. But the problem is that if you're going to move over and make it about something else, you've got to do that better than it did.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

In terms of the portrayal of that marriage and making the Leo character – the Leo character just doesn't seem like a good-enough-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He doesn't make sense.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-center of gravity for the movie. No, and he doesn't make sense. *Dances with Wolves* is a very different kind of movie. It's being a sentimental, tear-jerky kind of thing. It didn't get me on that level. I thought there was something kind of New Age-y about it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Fair enough.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And at the time, I have to say, when I saw it and reviewed it – this is what happens when you're a critic – I remember I gave it a C in *Entertainment Weekly* and, you know, thought that it had some good qualities, but kind of mocked it in certain ways. It never occurred to me that this movie was going to take off and become the phenomenon that it did. And in a way, you could really get nostalgic for that. Because there's something very organic about that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

*Dances with Wolves*, which came out in 1990, before Harvey Weinstein had kind of changed the whole Oscar thing – *Dances with Wolves* is not a movie that came through the Oscar industrial complex.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Right. You can't say he was out there and fishing for an Oscar.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

No.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He was just fishing to make his movie.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

He was fishing to make his movie and he did and it connected with people and it won the Oscar in a very organic way.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, let's give it – let's give it props for that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I do miss that. I'll say that. Alright, your number four.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

My number four is *Being John Malkovich*, Spike Jonze's movie. I will say that I had not seen this movie since it came out in 1999, but I did see it again in the run-up to this-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

For this?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

For this podcast, yes. Partly because I had really, really been wanting to see it again for the longest time, and what I found is – 25 years later, what I found is, oh my God, did it hold up? And it's great when that happens. It's great when you see a movie that you loved, but you go, "How is this going to look now?" Especially when it's as strange a movie as *Being John Malkovich* is. Oh my God. It's a fantastic piece of storytelling. It had an incredible resonance then that I think has maybe almost grown now. And here's one thing I'll say about it just to kick things off. You know, there's been a lot of talk in the last few years about 1999. Brian Raftery, a former colleague of mine at *Entertainment Weekly*, wrote a whole book about-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I'm so mad about that book. I was going to write that book. But anyway.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

You were going to write-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He did a fantastic-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Oh, he stole your idea?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No, he didn't steal anything. He just did it way better than I ever would have. That's a great book.

## OWEN GLEIBERMAN

Well, Brian did a great job. It's called *Best. Movie. Ever*, uh, *Best. Year. Ever.*, and it was, you know – there's all this talk about, you know, "Was 1999 the best year ever?" I think the idea of calling it – I'm too old to think of 1999 as the best year, best movie year ever, but it was a remarkable year, and I think the real thing about 1999, what gets people excited about it, is that, at that turn of the millennium, it was the year when all these movies came out that were absorbing, that were reflecting things like digital consciousness in two ways. Basically, in a technological way, like *The Matrix*, or in what is, for me, a much more interesting way in terms of consciousness, in terms of the mentality, how was the internet going to be – I mean, not that they thought about it in terms of – but how was this century, how was this time that was coming up going to be different? How were our minds going to be changing? And I think that was ultimately sort of about the internet or would involve that. I think *Being John Malkovich* is really the visionary 1999 film, because it really does, in telling this crazy story of this puppeteer who goes to work as a file clerk and discovers a portal that lets him go into John Malkovich's head – but then you do it. We do it right along with him. We're in John Malkovich's head. We're looking out his eyes. We're seeing his life. This is this incredible parable, that Charlie Kaufman wrote and Spike Jonze directed, about identity. And it doesn't have some sort of literal meaning, but it's basically saying, in some fantastical, almost fairy tale way, our identities are up for grabs now. Who are we? We are who we are, or who we want to be, or who we imagine ourselves to be, or who we pretend we are on the internet, or who we really become on the internet. We are the gender that we feel we are. The movie actually plays with that.

## KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah.

## OWEN GLEIBERMAN

That's one of the layers of it. But none of this is very message-y or conscious. It's just Charlie Kaufman sort of channeling everything that was going on and coming up with this incredible story that I think ultimately is about what was going to become the more liquid nature of our identities as we entered this new era.

## KRIS TAPLEY

Absolutely. I went to film school in 1999. I've said before, that was my first year of film school. So, you imagine going to film school, and those are the movies in theaters. Like, oh my God, I revere 1999. My favorite movie from the year is *The Insider*. This is my number two, though. And *Being John Malkovich*, even looking at Spike Jonze's work as a music video director, I would not have expected this stunning of a leap beyond the confines of that kind of space, because there's way more going on here than a director who has an eye, than a director who has stylish flourishes or what have you. I mean, the depth and range of emotion on display here, and certainly, plenty of this is due to Charlie Kaufman's script – most of it. But that marriage, and then they would do it again with *Adaptation*. I don't know how you feel about that one, but I love *Adaptation*.

## OWEN GLEIBERMAN

I'm a big fan of *Adaptation*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Just that marriage of these two artists made for such a potent kind of combined voice in this movie.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, it totally did, and Charlie Kaufman really had a moment. Look, the one difference – I went back and I looked at my review of *Being John Malkovich*, where I treated it as essentially a Spike Jonze film. He'd gotten a lot of attention. He was this hot music video director. His direction of the film is beyond fantastic. And I think I said something in the review, like, you know, "very inventive screenplay by Charlie Kaufman." None of us had heard of Charlie Kaufman. But I think it's clear, it became clear pretty quickly that, in a way, as you said, as much as Spike Jonze is a great director and did a fantastic job, the vision of this film, what blows your mind about it, really did come from Charlie Kaufman. And I want to say something here about Charlie Kaufman and a place where I kind of got off the Charlie Kaufman train. I'm not a fan of Charlie Kaufman films like *Synecdoche, New York* or whatever that thing is called, or that movie he had a couple of years ago. I don't even remember the title of it, but-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*I'm Thinking of Ending Things* is probably what you're talking about.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

*I'm Thinking of Ending Things*. That was a movie that critics loved and that I had on my worst of the year list. I couldn't stand it. But here's my point, is not to relitigate that. For me, and this is because this is really about *Being John Malkovich* – for me, what a great Charlie Kaufman movie has is that it is going to take you to the wildest places, the way that certain David Lynch films did or whatever, and yet *Being John Malkovich* is such a great and, in its weird way, accessible piece of storytelling. Each step of the way, you go with it. It tells you, "We're going here," and you go with it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And that's what a great Charlie Kaufman movie is like, and that's why his movies were these sort of brainy rides. But I said earlier in the podcast that I have this streak of being a kind of aesthetic conservative, which I do. And one of the reasons I can go with Charlie Kaufman is that I think he obeys certain rules of classical storytelling in a movie like this, or in a movie like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* or *Adaptation*. You go with him, but there's a discipline to it. It all adds up. It all makes sense. When he started making these other kinds of movies, like the ones he directs, I'm not on board for that. And in a way, I'd like to see Charlie Kaufman get back together with Spike Jonze and make another movie like this, because I think – this may sound like a pedantic point, but I just think there is a huge, huge difference between the Charlie Kaufman who is just

disciplined enough to always take you along for the twists and turns, and the one where it just starts to seem obscure and weirdness for weirdness's sake, etc.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. And by the way, I actually quite loved *Synecdoche, New York*, and in 2010 or whatever, looking back at that decade, I was, like, "Who's been the filmmaker of this decade, the early aughts?" And really, just on the basis of *Adaptation*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Eternal Sunshine* and *Synecdoche*, I said Charlie Kaufman. I mean, it just – we hadn't had a voice like that, and I felt him to be just the filmmaker of that decade, in some sense. I quite liked *Anomalisa*, the animated film. I don't know how you felt about that one.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Oh, I liked that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That he did with Duke Johnson.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I liked that, too. I count that as one of the good Charlie Kaufman movies.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, totally. But there's nobody like him and you can't take that away from him

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

No, and I think your perception of calling him maybe the filmmaker of the decade, I get it. I think that's great. Because he was and is a visionary, and so there's just no question. I mean, *Being John Malkovich*, one of the one of the extraordinary debuts.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No doubt. My number four is a little movie called *Speed*. Here's where I come to Jan de Bont, and I pulled up the review, by the way, Anthony Lane's review. "*Speed* is set in Los Angeles." People have heard this before. "Most of it takes place on a bus. It is a film full of explosions but bare of emotional development. Its characters are no more than sketches. It addresses no social concerns. It is morally inert. It's the movie of the year." That's just one of the greatest ledes in a review I've ever read in my life.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Totally.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And I just – I kind of just – we've covered it, but I feel like the essence of my love for the movie is in that lede. Because, I've said this before, it's a movie that violates so much of the kind of classic storytelling rules. You've got this character who learns nothing. Over the course of two hours, you just watch him do his job. But it is the most riveting roller coaster. It's such an assured debut. I mean, he was ready to make a movie, clearly.



You know, I interviewed Guillermo del Toro for this and he said something along the lines of just the passion, the kind of fire, his blood pressure is clearly up, like, he's finally directing a movie and all of that makes its way into the movie. You know, it's just – what a hell of a debut.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's ordinary.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

So, that's my number four. Your number three.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

My number three is *Slacker*, Richard Linklater's first film.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I came close to putting this on my list, but I didn't in the end.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, I think that *Slacker* is another of those movies. You know, I was talking about *Being John Malkovich* anticipating so much of our world in 1999. Well, Richard Linklater did that in 1991. I think I have '90 here. It's always been a weird thing about the date of that movie. I guess maybe it was completed in '90.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It did a festival premiere in '90, but it opened in '91.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

But it opened in '91. And I loved it at the time, but here's a movie that I think really looks different now and looks almost greater now. At the time, here's this movie where the camera just sort of glides from one character to the next. And you see, like, you know, however many it is, 80 people in Austin, these kind of weird hangers-on, Bohemians, misfits, all of them in their own heads, each of them with a kind of little obsession. Here's what they like to talk about. And then the camera moves on to someone else. At the time, I felt Richard Linklater was really capturing something about where American culture was at and where kind of – you know, for lack of a better word. I hate using this word, but I don't know what other word to use. Where Bohemian culture was like. This was kind of the legacy of the 1960s. You know, people in a town like Austin, sort of dreamers, each one off on their own cloud with conspiracy theories, this and that. He kind of captured all that and made that a patchwork of what sort of young America was like, 20-something America and some older characters as well. But I think if you watch the movie now, you see that even though this was being made several years before the internet, he's capturing something about internet culture, or maybe more to the point, anticipating it. Because, of course, the world that *Slacker* creates, with each of the characters in their own head, inside their own obsession, and not necessarily connecting with anyone else. This increasingly is the fragmented world created by, you know, by our digital world, by us sitting in front of our computers all day and plugging

into this or that. I don't think – not to become a broken record on this, but I don't think we'd have Trump without this. Trump is all about people diving down rabbit holes to the point where they believe complete unreality.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I always think about the guy-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And that-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Sorry. I always think about the guy, like, walking along with folks and telling them his conspiracy theories about the moon landing and whatnot. I always think about that guy, and-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Totally.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's just that kind of thing. It's like the, movie is like watching your Twitter feed, like, unfold on your, you know – in real life or something.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It totally is, but the remarkable thing is that, you know – this is the condition of our lives now; we all know it – but Richard Linklater saw this in 1990.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

He saw what we were becoming as a culture, and the fact that he could see this before the internet, before Twitter, shows you that what we're talking about wasn't just caused by these technological inventions. It was already there in the culture.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And, you know, I'm interested in – I don't know, I'm interested in narcissism, in self-involvement, in all the stuff that has, in our society, taken us away from each other. There's political dimensions to that. There's personal and social dimensions. And I think Richard Linklater, in a very benign way, in capturing this in *Slacker* in 1990, what he shows you is that there was a spirit at loose in the land that wasn't just about, you know, what Twitter or social media does to people, because that didn't exist then. But it was already there. We were already crawling into our own heads. I do think, in some ways, this is the legacy of the 1960s. That's not like I'm piling onto the '60s. I just think that,

you know, people weren't like this in the 1950s. The '60s was the birth of kind of conspiracy culture, all that kind of stuff.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And counterculture.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And counterculture. And the idea that counterculture is cool., You want to be counterculture. And what is counterculture? Well, counterculture, by definition, has to be counter to the culture, and the more you're trying to be counter, the more you're going to go down some strange rabbit holes. That's kind of the nature of it. That's where it takes you. And somehow, Richard Linklater channeled all of this, anticipated it, probably didn't even entirely think it out, in this kind of cool, experimental, but accessible indie movie about 90 characters talking at you about who they are, and making that kind of fun. Wow, what an achievement. And when you see what Linklater went on to do, and he really became, I think, one of the great geniuses of cinema of his time. I think *Dazed and Confused* is one of the greatest films ever made.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I agree.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I call it – my line on *Dazed* for a long time has been, I think it is the greatest Robert Altman film that Robert Altman never made. I think it is absolutely – Robert Altman is my favorite director, and I think that *Dazed and Confused* is a film that is worthy of comparison to the greatest Altman films, like *Nashville*, and *Slacker*, in a way, is a sort of early version of that, because *Dazed* as well is about all these characters. They're involved in a narrative and stuff, but the movie has the perception that they are together. They form little relationships. They form a community. But they're also separate. That was Altman's great insight. *Nashville* is a movie about all these Americans who are trying to get together, but they're separate. All this was happening in the culture in the '70s, the '80s. I think Linklater carried on Altman's vision and, you know, also brought his own thing completely to it. And a lot of that's there in *Slacker*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, like I said, I came really close on this. I love *Slacker*. *Dazed and Confused* is one of my favorite movies of all time, though. And I do like that this is like the R&D for *Dazed and Confused*, just sort of in *Slacker*, you know?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Oh, yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But going back to *Clerks*, I think Kevin Smith has said that *Slacker* was a big influence on him. You can kind of see that. And I go back to the thing I said about *Clerks*, that I

feel like I feel a filmmaker talking to me in this movie. And just – there is no other movie like *Slacker*.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's very rare to get a filmmaker like Linklater who so leads with his humanity, where his craft is almost invisible. He's into the people. He's this extraordinarily humane filmmaker, and yet, wow, what film craft. He's almost like Spielberg in that way. And I think-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He makes you watch.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yes.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Like, your eyes are drawn.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I think you see that in *Slacker*, because it's this low-budget film about these people in Austin talking, and yet, what he does with the camera to draw you in, it's almost invisible. But you see his craft in that you. It's not even something you see, although there's some pretty amazing camera moves in it. It's just something you feel. There's just a way that he has thought this movie out kinesthetically, not just in terms of the script and the acting, and that is just – that's called natural born movie genius. And he just has it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Alright, my number three – my number three is your number two.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, this is easy. We can just talk about this in tandem. *Toy Story* from John Lasseter, 1995. And I also want to just mention in the same breath *The Iron Giant* from Brad Bird from 1999.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Another animated film that I love.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Fantastic.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Just, you know, that's a great debut, too. But *Toy Story* was sort of the debut of an entire ethos, because the Pixar brand and identity is sort of right there, like, fully-formed from the beginning, which is kind of incredible to look at. It's not like you go back to *Toy Story* and you see, like, early-grade versions of what the Pixar movies are today. I mean, it's all there from the beginning and such a leap beyond the short films.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It definitely was a film that, the second you saw it, this film was remaking film culture. No question about it. One thing about it is, people get obsessed with technology now and they get obsessed with films not aging well. So, if you talk about the technology of digital animation and Pixar, people love to say things like, "Oh, if you go back and you watch *Toy Story* now, you know, the animation looks very primitive or something like that." But not only do I not agree with that at all, my take has long been that I think *Toy Story* remains the greatest Pixar film, period. Now, others might disagree, and there's other candidates, of course. But I'm just saying, I don't think it was just the first or wasn't just amazing. I think it was an absolute masterpiece. Such a beautiful piece of storytelling. And part of it is that John Lasseter, he just happened – and, you know, I think this is not a coincidence – he said, "How are we going to launch this? With the perfect fusion of form and content" The problem, the potential pitfall, with digital animation, was that it would look sort of shiny and unreal. So, he said, "So, let's make a movie about plastic characters, where we can use this technology. You know, it might not completely be able to create a tree or a human face the way it looks, but it can create a doll 100%." And so, more than almost any animated film, you felt like, at times, you were almost watching a documentary about these characters that looked exactly like Mr. Potato Head or whatever, much more than they would have in a drawn animated film.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, he almost used that shiny, chilly quality, at the time, that digital animation had, to increase the realism of it. What a genius stroke. But, of course, none of that would mean anything if the script wasn't so great, if the characters as written weren't so fantastic. And in some ways, *Toy Story* coming out in '95 gets into some of these identity games that we were talking about in these other movies, through the character of Buzz Lightyear.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

The brilliant comedy of that character, that Buzz Lightyear is a toy who thinks he's real.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

That's not far from *Being John Malkovich*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No, totally. And also, you know, it started a franchise immediately, and they had a pretty good ride with sequels. I mean, I love the second one. I love the third one.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I couldn't agree more.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I don't like the fourth one very much. But those first two sequels are so good. And I think probably – my favorite Pixar movies are *Inside Out* and *Finding Nemo*, but *Toy Story* is right up there, like, easily top three. I mean, it's just, put it in today, and it's still as good as it was – God, what is this, 25 years ago now.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's the one I've gone back to the most, and part of it is that – because this was so unprecedented. In a way, they were taking chances. I think, you know, a number of the Pixar films took chances and were very artistically bold. So, it's not like they suddenly became cautious. But there's one chance they take, one of the things they do that is just so out of the box, and I'm forgetting the name of it, but it's the whole thing with the character who becomes the antagonist. That boy next door.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What was his name?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And those creatures he creates-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-out of, like, you know, broken Erector Set and stuff. These kind of monster toys. That stuff is so great, because it's such a dark character.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I'm looking up this dude's name, because I'm trying to remember what his name was. I think it was Sid.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It was Sid, yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. That was good stuff. Yeah, I mean – and also, by the way, not 25 years, 29 years. So, next year is the 30th anniversary of this movie. Like, it does not feel like a 30-year-old movie.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It doesn't at all. John Lasseter told me something interesting about – I had written in my review – I had become sort of obsessed with that character of Sid and how great he was, and I just loved these, you know, fractured monster toys that he created. It was so cool.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's expressionistic, isn't it?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It is, and there was something about him, even though he was this warped character, he was very creative. And I said, in some ways, he is the soul of this movie. And years later, when I met John Lasseter, he told me something, like – he said, "I always loved that part of your review, because when we were making *Toy Story*, he was our favorite character." And it's something about the way that that balances all the kind of sweetness and light that you get in an animated film, that I think makes the story of *Toy Story* just feel very rich, very, very full. And, of course, the franchise continued in that way. I mean, it would always – it would be about things like loss and, you know, leaving home and, you know, really, really amazing stuff.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. There's just something weirdly expressionistic about a guy building toys out of broken parts.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I mean, what can you say?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

So, that's your – that's my number three, your number two.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I had it as number two, which is sort of interesting because I do think that – I think *Toy Story* is a great work of art. I think there are other films on my list that I think are as great works of art as it, but the reason I have it as number two is, how often do you have a movie that just, boom, changes film culture like that?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Drawn animation was kind of going to kind of be over. I mean, in terms of as a mainstream product. We were going to go into the digital animation era. So, that was a technological change. But to mark that kind of technological change with a movie that was such an incredible work of art, and in a way to determine the change – I mean, the change would have happened anyway – but to determine it by making this movie that was so great, that when everyone saw *Toy Story*, how could they go on doing anything but making more of these? Because it just set the standard.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And the fact that the, for lack of a better term, old way, sort of peaked the year prior with *The Lion King*-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, my number two is *Being John Malkovich*. So, you know, that's how high I placed this. Everything we said, I just – it's so potent and so good and still holds up. It does not feel of any era, really. I was going to say it doesn't feel dated or anything, obviously. How would you even consider it dated? It feels like this movie still hasn't been made.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's true. One thing when I, you know, watching it recently for the first time in 25 years, there was – most of it I actually had not remembered very well. So, I actually went on the ride all over again. I was kind of, like – you know, I certainly remembered one or two scenes in John Malkovich's apartment, but I was, like, really, "Where is this going?" And it was exhilarating in that way. But one thing I hadn't remembered, strangely enough, is I hadn't remembered how big a part of the movie *John Malkovich* was.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He should have been nominated.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Which sounds like a strange thing to say. It's called *Being John Malkovich*. But I hadn't remembered him, you know, in his witty and sort of droll way, being used in the movie as a kind of found object and being a good sport about it. But it's more than that. I mean, he really is a character in the film. He gives a hell of a performance. And I read some interesting stuff about how he said that when he was originally sent the script, he was half-enchanted and half-horrified.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.



**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

He sort of thought that he could really get screwed over if he made the film, because we all know it as a very successful and beloved film, but if it had been in a bomb, he thought he would forever be associated with it might make his name-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That's tough.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-a punchline.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, he took a real chance in making that movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, no doubt. And I just think that the Academy dropped the ball in two ways that year. They did not nominate Christopher Plummer for *The Insider*. Well, in multiple ways that year. That's such a bad example, that year, of the Academy and what was actually good, you know, just not crossing paths.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But they didn't nominate Christopher Plummer and they didn't nominate John Malkovich, so.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah. I think both of those are – I think, yeah, I think Plummer's, like, the best thing in *The Insider*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He's so good.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And yeah, Malkovich absolutely, absolutely should have been. All the acting in Being John Malkovich is – it really struck me watching it this time – so spectacular. I mean, Cameron Diaz, just great. Disappears into that character.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

## **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

When Catherine Keener came on, I've seen – you know, I like Catherine Keener a lot. I don't think she was ever as good as she was in that. And Cusack, an actor that, actually, I'm not that big a fan of. I often find I don't like John Cusack in movies like, you know, *Grosse Pointe Blank* or whatever. There's a way that he can seem a little fool of himself. But once in a while, like in *Say Anything*, he's great, and he's really great in this, partly because I think the director toned him down a little bit.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

The melancholy of that final moment will always stay with me. Like, I rarely feel that kind of a feeling when watching a movie and there's just such a – the way it just goes to credits and you're just, like, "Wow."

## **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Absolutely.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

So, my number two. Alright, man, drumroll for your number one, let's hear it.

## **OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

OK, here we go. It's *Reservoir Dogs*. And, and it was an easy choice. It's kind of like when I do my 10 best lists this at the end of the year, especially when you're doing, like, your number one, I always say, "I don't choose my number one. My number one chooses me." This chose me. I mean, there are movies on my list that I might love as much as *Reservoir Dogs*, possibly. Maybe *Toy Story*. But the thing about *Reservoir Dogs* is, and I remember when I saw it, I saw at a screening room. I didn't even see it in the theater. I knew this was the change. And here's what the change was. And here's where I really will draw on having been around a long time. So, independent film became a thing in the '90s, and what did that mean? There were a lot of dimensions to it. And frankly, just to be honest about it, I mean, you know, if it hadn't been for Harvey Weinstein operating the marketing machine and backing Quentin and changing the Oscars the way – I mean, he was part of the change. Because we all know that, you know, the movement kind of started with *Sex, Lies*, and that was Harvey and all that stuff. So, all that was kind of there. But what I saw in *Reservoir* – and I was a fan of *Sex, Lies*. I mean, who wasn't? But what I saw in *Reservoir Dogs*, and I remember the moment it happened, I was gripped by the film from minute one, watching it, all involved in its characters, just getting drawn in. But then you have that moment when the Tim Roth character reveals who he really is, reveals that he's under cover. And he's got to memorize this stuff and you're just getting that super intense, film noir kind of feeling of, "Oh, fuck, I am so – this is wild. I am so immersed in this. This is such a dangerous situation. What is he going to do?" And, you know, I've been – as I said, I've been loving the movie from minute one, but at this point, I am feeling this level of drama and immersion that I associate with, like, old Hollywood movies. I mean, I'm talking about really great old Hollywood movies, the thing that made people fall in love with Hollywood where, you know, you're watching a movie and you forget yourself. You're absorbed into the screen. Just the basic magic of movies. OK, that is what independent film did

not have. I mean, there were – you can point to examples of it. There were examples in the '80s of movies that we could call independent films that, in a way, presaged this, like, prominently, *Blue Velvet* or whatever, or the Coen brothers' first film. But when I watched *Reservoir Dogs*, I mean, independent film was still, you know – I called them granola films. It was these sort of earnest films that were good for you and had these kind of fractured narratives, or these narratives that kind of just limped along and you went with them. But the calling card was the humanity. When I saw *Reservoir Dogs*, I just felt like, "Quentin Tarantino is reinventing our addiction to narrative," because that's what it's really all about. The great films, all the great films we've been talking about here, have a thousand fantastic qualities. But the primal quality that made cinema, cinema for the last 100 years is people going to movies in the '30s, the '40s, the '50s and '60s, the '80s, the '90s, and watching a movie and asking that question, "What is going to happen next? I want to see that." That addiction to storytelling is the locomotive, the engine of cinema, and that's what Quentin Tarantino brought back in this film, because independent film hadn't had it. You could say, "Well, what about mainstream movies?" No, the whole point is that mainstream movies now had that thing, our addiction to what's going to happen next, in a plastic, processed way. In other words, yeah, we knew what it was like to watch a movie like, you know, *Conan the Barbarian* or whatever. But mainstream movies were losing our connection to that immersion in cinema in a totally organic way, and now it's going to come from the independent film world. That's what Quentin brought back. His films had many other qualities like all these other films we've been talking about. They had human truths to them and all sorts of observations about crime and sex and this and that, of course. But the engine of it was that he was a magical storyteller, and that is what cinema is. Cinema is storytelling that is so magical, it makes you forget yourself. Of course, he did that to the nth degree in *Pulp Fiction*. *Pulp Fiction* is a movie entirely about storytelling. It's this magical, acrobatic act of storytelling, but that kind of thing was there, in miniature, in *Reservoir Dogs*. And when I saw it, I walked out and I said, you know, that movie is going to change anything, everything. Ironically enough, it was marketed by Miramax, marketed by Harvey, but not a hit, partly because – I mean, we haven't talked about this aspect of it, but it got branded with this thing of the violence.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And I'm not unfairly. In other words, it became known as, "if you're going to see this, get ready for the ear scene."

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And I think that scared a lot of people off.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Right.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And certainly, I thought that was a thing. I mean, that scene was, like, this was – we’re used to it now, but that scene was – there had never been anything like that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Never been anything like that. The editor of *Entertainment Weekly*, I remember, was incredibly put off by it. His whole thing – he thought this was a change, but he is his thing was, “He’s bringing sadism into the mainstream.” And my thought when I heard that was, “Yeah, he sure it is.”

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Wow.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

“You have a problem with that?” Sadism was now going to be an element of entertainment. I wasn’t particularly a prude about that, but wow, it was shocking.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I mean, the ear scene was just, like, “Whoa.” It was intense. But it was also – I emphasize this – it was narrative. It wasn’t, like – and, I mean, if you go back and watch *Reservoir Dogs* again, you see that it’s actually not that violent a scene. It’s all in your head. You’re on the edge of your seat watching that scene. You’re, like, “What is going to happen? What is going to happen?” That is the primal movie question, and movies will die as an art form unless they know how to preserve that question.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I mean, what else can you say about *Reservoir Dogs*, man? It’s a fantastic movie. I feel bad that it’s lower on my list. We had to talk about it so much earlier and now we come back to it for your number one.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But certainly, a respectable choice for number one. You can’t not-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, my point is simply that it was the movie – the reason it was the movie that changed everything is that the films that were going to become successful, in this new machinery of independent film, were the films that were going to reach a certain level of narrative excitement. That was the door that Quentin kicked open, but it was also the bar that you had to cross. And I would argue that all the films, all the independent films at least, on our two lists combined – *Being John Malkovich*, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, you name it – these are films that all clear that bar.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

They are, among other things, enthralling pieces of storytelling. So, the independent film movement, as basically baptized by Quentin, reinvented the idea of movie storytelling. That's what was great about it. And now, I think we're at a point where that next needs to happen again. It needs to be revived.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, 100% *Reservoir Dogs*, man. Good movie.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Alright.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Alright, so, I'm going to come from the complete left field with my number-one choice. I want to say up front, this is a very deeply personal pick. It's one of my favorite movies, period, and I really hope you liked it, Owen, and I actually don't even know what you thought of the movie. So, I'm going find out now. My number one best directorial debut of the '90s is from 1997, Andrew Niccols' *Gattaca*. And I find this movie, as everyone scratches their head, so emotional that it just sort of reduces me to this day. You know, thematically, it's about fighting for your dreams and breaking boundaries and becoming more than what you were supposed to be, and I find that really resonates with me. I mean, that final moment – spoiler for anyone who hasn't seen it – with Xander Berkeley sort of waving Vincent through, that moment truly ranks up there with Salvatore watching Alfredo's reel in *Cinema Paradiso* or Kay having the door shut on her in *The Godfather*. It's these moments where you're physically affected by the depth of emotion of what you're seeing on screen, and combined with this absolutely majestic Michael Nyman score. It's one of the great scores. It's one of the great pieces of music composition, period, to me. And it introduced this exciting voice that I do think ultimately petered out as his career went, but, you know, Andrew Niccol, he eventually turned a corner into sort of Philip K. Dick territory, and I'm not sure that's where he's at his most assured. Because he did stuff like *In Time* and *Good Kill* and *Anon*. But those early works, this, *The Truman Show* – *The Truman Show* was a very different script than what the film was, but still, the idea he got on the page there. I haven't gone back to *S1m0ne* since it came out, but I'd be very curious to see how it plays now.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I've been hearing that *S1m0ne* – I want to go back, too, because I've been hearing that *S1m0ne*-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Nailed it?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-was really ahead of its time. Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I bet. I bet. And I was a big fan of *Lord of War*, too, which was a different kind of direction for him. But this movie, *Gattaca*, I truly – I watch it every year, and it just affects me emotionally. That whole scene where they're swimming, and Vincent beats his brother and he says, "How are you doing this?" I just – it kills me every time. It's just such a beautiful movie. And to me, it's just an incredible debut, for this to be your first movie. I love it.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Well, it's funny, Kris. You really made me want to see it again, in the sense that, I was a fan. I saw it just once when it came out, so, I haven't seen it since 1997. I was a fan. But what surprises me in your take is, you made me want to see it again. I do not recall plugging – I love Xander Berkeley as an actor, incidentally – I do not recall plugging into the movie on that deep human level sort of the way that you did. I mean, I was carried along by the story. But the thing that I remember best about the movie is that I thought it was a sort of extraordinary experiment in world-building in a certain way.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Absolutely, yes. I haven't even touched on all of that. I'm being very personal with my take so far. But yeah, absolutely. I mean, world-building.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Being ahead of its time in terms of – he's just such a great thinker as a screenwriter and the worlds he wants to try to explore and build on the page. It's just, there's nobody like him, really.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I recall it as a kind of chilling sci-fi movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. No, it's that, too. It's a noir, you know? I mean, it's – because it does have this underlying murder mystery thing, too. Like, whodunit. And within that, there are the implications of where science can ultimately go and all of that and being able to choose

attributes of your children and just, that aspect of it all certainly can make it a chilling movie. That within that, it is also this truly heartfelt story about a man who wants something and strives for it and perseveres. I just – it blows me away to this day. Watch it again, man. I want to hear what you have to think about it when you see it again.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I've got – it's first on the list now, to see again. I did like it. I did much – I thought it was very impressive film. I did. I did think it was – I thought of it as – am I remembering this right? – almost this kind of Orwellian noir.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. I mean, Gore Vidal is in it, of all people.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

There you go. No, I thought it was a chilling movie, and Ethan Hawke, right?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yep. Ethan Hawke and Uma Thurman. It's where they met.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah. Oh, wow, yeah. I love Ethan Hawke.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He's one of the greats.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Such a great actor. And, I will. I will see it again. I wasn't able to do that. I'm sorry I don't have more to add.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No, that's OK. If this gets anybody to go watch *Gattaca*, then I've done my job, because, again, it's just such a deeply personal movie for me.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I love your choice, and here's – I'll tell you what I really respect about it. When I saw your list, I was not surprised to see *Gattaca* on it, but surprised to see it as number one.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

But I think it is super cool that you made it number one because, you say super personal, but people ask me this stuff all the time as a critic. They go, "Are you objective? Are you this? Is there a difference between movies you love and movies," you know. For me, it's always personal.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Totally.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's always personal. You know, my number one movie of the year is – yeah, I mean, it's, like, the movies I love are because I have that personal – absolute personal connection to it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, well, that's the homework for everybody. Go see *Gattaca*.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Go see *Gattaca*, and probably a few others here.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

But they know them. And go see *Alien*<sup>3</sup>.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, watch *Alien*<sup>3</sup> again. I was just going to throw out at the end here – I don't know if you have any you wanted to mention – but just honorable mentions, stuff that I was considering. You know, I thought about *Bottle Rocket*, as anybody would. I thought about *Hard Eight*. I thought about *Nil by Mouth* and *Ratcatcher*, Gary Oldman and Lynne Ramsay's respective debuts. Those are kind of in the same breath. *Trees Lounge*. I kind of love that movie. The world that Steve Buscemi creates.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Oh, God, you know, now that you mention it-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

You wish you would put it on there?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I had a few of those, but I wrote a review of *Trees Lounge* for *Entertainment Weekly* that was a rave. I put it on my 10-best-of-the-year list. I thought Steve Buscemi turned out to be an extraordinary filmmaker. I think that is an extraordinary film. I think if I had remembered it, it might have nudged one of my films off.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh yeah?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yes. I'm glad you brought that up. The *Hard Eight* one was difficult in the sense that, you know, you wanted to have PTA on there, but, right, *Hard Eight* is a good film-



**KRIS TAPLEY**

It doesn't hold up to the other movies he did, right in the media awake, even. Like, it's just – I don't love that movie. It's a smaller movie. Smaller ambition, you know?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's a little bit of an exercise, in a sense.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

But it's good. I'll tell you, in terms of names and debut films, the one that haunted me, a filmmaker that so much seems a classic filmmaker of the '90s who should be on this list, is Todd Haynes.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I had this problem with the two Todds, Todd Haynes and Todd Solondz are both filmmakers that, in a way, you want on this list, but there was a reason that we couldn't do it that was almost a technicality. Todd Haynes' first film in the '90s was *Poison*, which is not my favorite Todd Haynes movie. I don't think I would have wanted to put – but the point is, it's not even technically his first film. His first film is one of my favorite movies of all time, which is *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, his Barbie-doll masterpiece, and it really is a masterpiece, that has never been able to be released, but given that, you know, you want to talk about when it was made, it was actually made in 1987.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Right.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, it would really be cheating to count it as any kind of '90s film. So, Todd – and *Poison*, I would not put on there. So, Todd Haynes, just for that reason, couldn't be on the list. Now, the first film anybody ever heard of that Todd Solondz made, the movie that put him on the map, is a movie that I absolutely would have put on this list, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

The problem is, it's not his first film. Todd Solondz, before the independent film movement, in 1989, I believe it was, made a studio film, I think, called *Fear, Anxiety and Depression*, which is a kind of Woody Allen knockoff starring himself. And it is, to put it

mildly, not good. He kind of made that movie, it went nowhere, he flamed out and went and taught English to kids overseas or something like that, and then reinvented himself, had a second act as an independent filmmaker with what I almost think of as his second first film, which is *Welcome to the Dollhouse*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

But it's not a debut feature. So, it couldn't count. My real point is that when you're talking about great filmmakers in the '90s, and great filmmakers who came up in the '90s, the two Todds, as we thought of them then, loom very, very, very large for me. I think Todd Haynes is an absolute genius who has continued to be a great filmmaker, and Todd Solondz, he's working on a new project that sounds interesting. I wasn't so crazy about his work after *Happiness*, except for this one film, *Palindromes*, but, you know, at his best, a visionary talent.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

One movie I would have had on here if it was a debut, but I had to be reminded it wasn't, was *Swingers*. Doug Liman did a movie two years before that, *Getting In*, which I've actually never seen, but I'm such a big *Swingers* fan, I might have had that on here if it was a debut.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I went through the same thing. I wanted to put *Swingers* on this list, and when I went to IMDb and saw that he had made *Getting In-*

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

-in whatever year it was, my heart broke.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It was, like, "Oh, because he made this piece of shit, I can't put *Swingers* on my list?"

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Exactly.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

*Swingers-*

**KRIS TAPLEY**

So good.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And, you know, Liman's career is an illustration of something interesting, too, which is that *Swingers* is such a great movie and it's just sort of totally humanistic, and then he went in such another direction.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And there's a part of you that goes, like, "OK, great. You wanted to do this. You wanted to – it's fine that you made *The Bourne Identity* and all that stuff. But couldn't you ever make another movie like *Swingers*? Please?" You know?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Did you consider *American Beauty* at all? I'm sure people are wondering why we haven't brought that one up.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I'm not a huge fan of *American Beauty*. My feeling about it is that – I'm not a huge Sam Mendes fan in general. My feeling is that he did a very good job of directing *American Beauty*, and it is a compelling film in many ways, but there are aspects of it I don't buy. Actually, my problem is the screenplay. I just feel like it just feels a little set up and manipulated. I wasn't kind of carried away with it the way that a lot of people were. Clearly it won the Oscar.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

So, I wouldn't have been tempted to do that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, it never really came close for me. The only other two that I thought about, I went back and watched Alejandro Amenábar's *Thesis* again, just out of curiosity. I had not seen it since before I saw *Abre Los Ojos*. And it's fine. I don't think I would have got it on the list, ultimately. And *Very Bad Things* from Peter Berg, which is just raucous and insane but I like it a lot.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Hey, listen, I – back in the day, I led the charge for *Very Bad Things*. I reviewed that out of the Toronto Film Festival and I loved it. I've seen it since I think it's a fantastic film.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It's one that, you know, arguably could have been on this list, and Peter Berg obviously went on to have a major career, but, you know, *Very Bad Things* is audacious.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. It's awesome.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Really, really, really something.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, officially the longest episode of *50 MPH*, unless I go in here and cut some of my jibber-jabber or something, but-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

I think it would be my jibber-jabber that would be cut, and this is what happens when you have me on. I do monologue. I warned you about it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's good. I knew we had the perfect guy, though, to talk about, you know, debuts of the '90s You had a perfect perch to see all this go down. And, you know, rest in peace to *Entertainment Weekly*, right?

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Right, absolutely. Well, listen, it was truly an exciting – it was exciting at the time. We knew 100% what it was by – you know, by '92, by '93, it was clear, so, it was incredible to be in the middle of all that. My take is we could be in the middle of it again. The talent is absolutely there, but as – I hate to bring this name up again – but as someone like Harvey Weinstein proved, the talent isn't enough. You need a business structure.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

And that – and Paul Schrader has made this point. It's the point you made before. You need the audiences, and the audiences have to be there, and they have to show up. You know, I'm surprised at some of the movies that – like I'm surprised, for instance, that – this is just an example of something. I'm not saying this is the greatest movie. But I do think *Love Lies Bleeding*, the Kristen Stewart movie, is pretty damn good. It got the reviews it deserved. It got the buzz to be out there. Kristen Stewart is clearly someone that people are interested in talking about. And it's a really, really good movie. I was surprised at its incredible mild – you know, they put it out in 12, 1,300 theaters. That was the right thing to do. It didn't really, you know – it didn't generate impressive numbers at all, and it makes me go, "Where is the audience? Aren't there more people to show up for that movie?"

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Or are we really the, “Oh, fuck it. I’m just going to, you know – I just stay home. You know, I just stay home unless it’s *Mission: Impossible 10*,” or whatever?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I think that’s what we’re at that.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Are we really going to turn into that?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I think so. Everyone just is going to wait for that on streaming. No one’s going to the movie theater to see those movies, and it sucks.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It does, because they’re the most fun movies to see in theaters.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It’s actually a more exciting movie than *Mission: Impossible 10*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Yeah, I don’t know. I mean, but-

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

This is not “eat your medicine.”

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Right.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

It’s not meant, you know – this is not – that’s not what I’m talking about. It’s a real crisis. But we’ll see. We’ll see where the industry goes.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Who knows? Who knows what will happen, man. I feel like, every day, it’s a mystery.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Maybe we’re never going to have the ‘90s again, but here’s the – I’ll leave you with an optimistic thought.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Yeah, I was there and it was exhilarating, but I'll tell you something. By the end of the '80s, it actually seemed like movies were dying. It seemed like the whole commercial thing that had happened, the blockbuster mentality and all those things I talked about – the horror films, the beginning of superhero culture, Sly and Arnold and all the action films – it seemed like that was slowly but surely drowning cinema, and it seemed like the dream was kind of over. We'd still go out and see those movies. A good little movie would peek through now and again and that was going to be it. And it really felt like that in 1989. And then this thing that happened in the '90s – we weren't expecting this. No one was expecting this. No one was expecting the independent film revolution, but that's how revolutions happen. And so, my optimistic thought is, it can happen again. Because it happens when people aren't expecting it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well go out there and make your movies, everybody. Go out there and watch these movies. Get some inspiration. One thing we can agree on, happily, here, is *Speed* is one of the best directorial debuts of the '90s! Just to bring it all back.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Bring it all back home.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What can you say. Thank you for that, Jan de Bont. And thank you to you, Owen Gleiberman, for coming on here and chewing on all this with us.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Thank you, Kris.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Like you say, an incredible period of time, and the good thing is the movies are here forever, so we can always go back and watch them, so.

**OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

One hundred percent. Thanks again, Kris. This was a blast.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That's Owen Gleiberman, everyone.

**[OUTRO MUSIC]**

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Next week on 50 MPH...

**KRIS TAPLEY**

We round out our trio of episodes analyzing the '90s with a year-by-year assessment of the decade's best films.

**GUY LODGE**

*Boyz n the Hood*, John Singleton's debut, which, that film was a kind of cultural moment, but it hasn't kind of dated like one. It doesn't feel kind of preserved in amber now if you watch it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*. He put this script in a drawer for a decade until he was old enough to do it. The way this just inverts all the tropes of the genre in such amazing ways.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*Variety* and *Guardian* film critic Guy Lodge joins me to count down 10 years of movie excellence at the end of the millennium.

**GUY LODGE**

*The Thin Red Line*, just a much vaster, more poetic, kind of richer war statement. I think it's one of the greatest films of all time.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

This movie shouldn't be compelling. It's a movie about courtrooms and corporate malfeasance, tobacco scientists and news guys.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And again, how will *Speed* stack up? You'll have to tune in to find out.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH!*

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website 50MPHpodcast.com. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.