



Ensemble: The Filmmakers from Richard Linklater's *Nouvelle Vague*

Slacker

Slacker

Director: Richard Linklater

Production Company: Detour Film Productions

Producer: Richard Linklater

Production Manager: Anne Walker-McBay

Casting: Anne Walker-McBay

Screenplay: Richard Linklater

Director of Photography: Lee Daniel

Steadicam Operator: Ralph Watson

Editor: Scott Rhodes

Art Director: Debbie Pastor

Wardrobe: Meg Brennan

Music: Buffalo Gals, Triangle Mallet Apron,

The Texas Instruments

Sound Editor: Denise Montgomery

Cast:

Richard Linklater

(should have stayed at the bus station)

Rudy Basquez (taxi driver)

Jean Caffeine (roadkill)

Jan Hockey (jogger)

Stephan Hockey (running late)

Mark James (hit-and-run son)

Samuel Dietert (grocery grabber of death's bounty)

Bob Boyd (Officer Bozzio)

Terrence Kirk (Officer Love)

Keith McCormack (street musician)

Jennifer Schaudies (walking to coffee shop)

Dan Kratochvil (expresso czar, masonic malcontent)

Maris Strautmanis (giant cappuccino)

Brecht Andersch (Dostoyevsky wannabe)

Tom Pallotta (looking for missing friend)

Jerry Deloney (been on the moon since the 50s)

Heather West (Tura Satana lookalike)

John Spath (co-op guy)

Ron Marks (bush basher)

Daniel Dugan (comb game player)

Brian Crockett (sadistic comb game player)

Scott Marcus (ultimate loser)

Stella Weir (Stephanie from Dallas)

Mark Harris (T-shirt terrorist)

Greg Wilson (anti-traveller)

Debbie Pastor (wants to leave the country)

Gina Lalli (sidewalk psychic)

Sharon Ross (devoted follower)

Frank Orrall (happy-go-lucky guy)

Skip Fulton Jr (two for one special)

Abra Moore (has change)

Lori Capp (traumatised yacht owner)

Gus Vayas (cranky cook)

Louis Black (paranoid paper reader)

Don Stroud (recluse in bathrobe)

Janelle Cooloch (shut-in girlfriend)

Aleister Barron (peeping kid)

Albans Benchoff (Coke machine robber)

Nigel Benchoff (budding capitalist youth)

Zara Barron (Coke heist accomplice)

Kevin Whitley (jilted boyfriend)

Steve Anderson (guy who tosses typewriter)

Robert Pierson (based on authoritative sources)

Sarah Harmon (has faith in groups)

David Haymond (street dweller)

John Slate ('Conspiracy à-go-go' author)

Scott van Horn (Nova)

Lee Daniel (GTO)

Charles Gunning (hitch-hiker awaiting true call)

Tamsy Ringler (video interviewer)

Luke Savisky (video cameraman)

Meg Brennan (sitting at café)

Phillip Hostak (hit up for cigarettes)

D. Angus Macdonald (video playing store)

Shelly Kristaponis (shoplifter)

Louis Mackey (old anarchist)

Richard Linklater on breaking through and 'Slacker'

In your early learning about cinema, was your focus on watching films or amassing technical expertise?

All of the above. I just read a Godard quote recently about his early twenties, watching a thousand films a year. He said, 'The cinema screen was the wall we had to scale to escape from our lives.' *Exactly*. The people who do this are the ones who are manifesting an alternative universe for themselves. That's what I was doing. I started a film society; I just created a bubble. There was no money involved. It runs on pure interest and passion – to this day. That's what the arts are – an alternative universe where this little thing you're doing is important. Isn't that all that matters?

Every young filmmaker is insecure. 'Is this going to happen for me?' Well, it's going take the world a lot longer than you think to discover just how great you are. It won't be at the rate you want. It'll be when you actually maybe *are* great, after a lot more work than you can possibly imagine.

There's a pragmatism and resilience there that might be at odds with some artistic sensibilities!

Yeah, I think you can be too sensitive. I'm plenty sensitive, but I put that in the right place. You've got to have this other element. I realised early on, it requires a multiple personality – you can't just have one skill-set. You have to be a bit of a hustler, a charmer, a bit of a manipulator. The best book I ever read about that was Elia Kazan's *A Life* [1976]. He talks about qualities he had that made him feel kind of phoney: he was something to everybody. But what is film but adapting – making it work with this person, convincing that person to trust you?

Do you remember first realising that a film was directed by a person – that that was a job?

Not really. I didn't fully understand it for a while. When I was a kid, the one famous director was Alfred Hitchcock, and I didn't know what he did. I knew it had something to do with these scary, thrilling kind of movies we'd watch on TV... but I didn't know. I always thought I was going to be a writer. By high school, I was writing plays and short stories, and I thought, 'I wonder if I could write a movie?' I think seeing *Annie Hall* [1977], I was like, 'Oh – Woody Allen wrote that. And he's in it, and he directed it.' It started to all make sense a little bit. I saw *Eraserhead* [1977], that was another one, my senior year of high school. So it started occurring to me. And then my dad explained the auteur theory to me. He wasn't a cinephile, but he had vast knowledge, he was aware of stuff. So he had some notion of the American studio system versus the European auteur. And I thought: 'That sounds pretty interesting.' So I started watching everything. Subtitled movies, for the first time. Going to movies alone. You know, these little leaps you take. The day it becomes not a social mission, but what you do. Go in the afternoon, buy tickets, sit alone. It felt weird the first time, and then then you realise: this is wonderful.

And setting up the film society – what inspired that?

This was the mid-80s, so film societies were all kind of dying, because of video. But I just wanted to see the movies. It was completely self-serving. I realised I could rent them for a hundred and something dollars, and I could get 50 people to pay two or three dollars...

Did you do the projection yourself?

Kathy McCarthy (*anarchist's daughter*)
 Michael Laird (*burglar*)
 Jack Meredith (*getaway accomplice*)
 Clark Lee Walker (*Cadillac crook*)
 Kalman Spellitch (*video backpacker*)
 Siggouri Wilkovich (*slapping boyfriend*)
 John Hawkins (*choking girlfriend*)
 Scott Rhodes (*disgruntled grad student*)
 D. Montgomery (*having a breakthrough day*)
 Mimi Vitetta (*teacup sculptor*)
 Susannah Simone (*working on the same painting*)
 Bruce Hughes (*card-playing waiter*)
 Keith Fletcher, Eric Buehlman (*café card players*)
 R. Malice (*Scooby Doo philosopher*)
 Mark Quirk (*Papa Smurf*)
 Kim Krizan (*questions happiness*)
 Annick Souhami (*has conquered fear of rejection*)
 Regina Garza (*smoking writer*)
 Stephen Jacobson (*S-T-E-V-E with a van*)
 Eric Lord (*doorman at club*)
 Kelly Linn (*bike rider with nice shoes*)
 Racheal Reinhardt (*cousin from Greece*)
 Stewart Bennet (*sitting on ledge*)
 Kevin Thomson (*handstamping arm licker*)
 Nick Maffei (*pixi-visionary*)
 Nolan Morrison (*to be buried by history*)
 Kyle Rosenblad (*going to catch a show*)
 Ed Hall (*band playing at club*)
 Lucinda Scott (*dairy queen photographer*)
 Wammo (*anti-artist*)
 Marianne Hyatt (*late-night pick-up*)
 Gary Price (*watching early-morning TV*)
 Joseph Jones (*old man recording thoughts*)
 Kendall Smith (*post-modern Paul Revere*)
 Sean Coffey (*Super 8 cameraman*)
 Jennifer Carroll (*all-night partyer*)
 Charlotte Norris (*convertible driver*)
 Patrice Sullivan (*day tripper*)
 Greg Ward (*tosses camera off cliff*)
 USA 1991
 100 mins
 35mm

35mm collection print courtesy of the
 UCLA Film & Television Archive

The screening on Mon 5 Jan will be introduced by
 season programme assistant Sean Atkinson

With thanks to

Season Programme Assistant Sean Atkinson

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Me, some roommates, whoever wanted to help out. They were 60mm prints.

Have you never wanted to make a film about a film society?

The film freak film! Well, I'm making that right now [with *Nouvelle Vague*]. They were good years. Living in your cinema, showing films, watching films. I learned a lot. You learn how to go find an audience. And I think it fit my personality. I was fundamentally shy; not that outgoing. But I could do it on behalf of a Fassbinder series. I could do it on behalf of cinema. I didn't mind asking for favours. Cheating. Stealing.

So you knew how to do all of that when it came to making your own films.

Well, parallel to that I was making my own – I was making shorts, I made a Super 8 feature [*It's Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books*, 1988]. Making sure I made a separate feature in there.

*Did you feel when you made *Slacker* that you'd gone up a level?*

It was probably the biggest leap I ever took. It was still a no-budget film, but I'd made films privately up to then. With this one, I was asking people to give me their time – cast and crew. That's very hard, with no money. You have to really manipulate and charm when you're not able to pay people. Man, are you dancing. It was tough. Yeah. But it was also: 'Can I do this? Can I lead a group, can I articulate my ideas?' Especially as it was a film that was hard to describe.

Did acting in it yourself help with that, or was that more of a necessity?

It was a natural offshoot of the design of the movie, but I thought I'd be the first one in the pool. I had been in acting classes for all that time, too, and you do a lot of monologues. I liked the monologue, and I also saw actors of all kinds be able to do it – even not very professional actors could still hold court on one thing. It feels like improv, but of course, it's not: it's all really tightly structured. That film... no one really knew what it was except me. I was having a little private revolution. But we all believed.

What did it feel like when it was not only accepted, but embraced?

I've found myself in this same headspace since: 'This is a film that may not work; maybe no one will understand it; it doesn't have a story; it doesn't have a recurring character.' But I had such deep belief in the experience it would be watching it, I thought I could keep an audience. I come back to the power of cinema. I bet the whole thing there. And then when it... I say 'worked', it wasn't everyone's cup of tea, but people who knew cinema saw whatever was fresh about it. A lot of teachers showed it: here's a film that breaks every rule, and yet somehow works.

And I had no faith because at that point, the indie world was truly a New York phenomenon. I thought, 'I'll make this film from Texas and because it doesn't have cowboys in it, no one will take this film seriously at all.' I guess on an anthropological, social level, I was amazed that we would be accepted in places like New York. I always had that little Southern chip on my shoulder: the left-behind, the lower class... I thought it just wouldn't be accepted in the official film world. And I was just amazed at how open they were. That's a real tribute to our business. So that was wild, to see it get picked up and become part of the cultural conversation – President Clinton quoting it in a speech, things like that. That's completely lost these days, of course. I think the mainstream back then was still a little more avant-garde, indie-curious, and now they just can't afford to be.

Interview by Hannah McGill, *Sight and Sound*, June 2024