

Give Me Liberty



## COUNTING YOUR BLESSINGS WHAT ON EARTH ARE WE DOING MAKING LISTS? BY AMY TAUBIN

I MUST HAVE BEEN FEELING GUILTY rather than usual about my “top 10 films” list that I write a piece about the end-of-the-year (and end-of-the-decade) ritual. The guilt is not about the films I named and, more absurdly, placed in “most best” to “least best” order. It is, rather, about the films I left out. Like many critics, I take seriously the opportunity to ensure that films I care about have some small mention in film history. I don’t worry much about films that have wide support, although I can’t ignore them and sometimes don’t want to. The critical consensus is around *Parasite*, and as a result of appearing on so many lists and winning so many critics’ and festival awards, the director Bong Joon Ho is close to a household name. But I’d also like to think that because Kirill Mikhanovsky’s wildly original and humane *Give Me Liberty* is still playing in theaters, someone might see it on my list and buy a ticket.

Because come December, almost every person I encounter asks me what movies are on my top 10. In 2019, as always, I try to expand the definition of “cinema” by mixing experimental films and installation work—Ken Jacobs’s *The Sky Socialist: Environs and Out-Takes* (1964–66/2019) and Arthur Jafa’s *The White Album* (2019)—with theatrical features and documentaries. I apologize for failing to keep an impulsive Twitter promise to include a 30-second video of an owl mounting

an all-out attack on the lens of a surveillance camera in which he must have seen his reflection. Chris Marker would have loved it, but at a moment of cinematic abundance, there is no room for non-human creative artists. I have more serious regrets about the omission of at least five documentaries: Beniamino Barrese’s *The Disappearance of My Mother*, Nanfu Wang and Jialing Zhang’s *One Child Nation*, Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar’s *American Factory*, Waad al-Kateab and Edward Watts’s *For Sama*, and Feras Fayyad’s *The Cave*. They are all wonderful movies; they all bear witness to people and situations that we need to see and hear about; and they potentially will inspire viewers to take action or to act differently in both the most intimate parts of our lives and in those aspects of the world that, despite their seeming distance, we ignore at peril to our humanity. Indeed they are all such moving and intelligent films that to count them as mere runners-up makes me literally queasy about my preference for films that excite me aesthetically—in other words, through their cinematic form.

Which is why I was thrilled by a non-fiction film that collapses all of these seemingly warring criteria into the most revelatory movie I saw this year. Ljubomir Stefanov and Tamara Kotevska’s *Honeyland* begins as a portrait of a middle-aged Macedonian beekeeper who is believed to be the last woman to practice sustainable honey-gathering in Europe. Hatidze

The *Arabian Nights* trilogy, for its sheer level of risk, scope, uniqueness, and prodigious accomplishment.

### Film Person of the Decade

Ava DuVernay, no question. Or can you think of someone else who released four scripted features, a documentary, and a limited series, ranging from the intimate to the epic; made several influential ads and music videos; executive-produced multiple episodic series and recruited a seven-nation army of women directors; distributed dozens of features by marginalized artists through her own company; opened her own theater and started her own festival; connected everyday people with prominent artists, offering her audiences free mentoring; used Twitter not only as a promotion tool but also a public good; intervened meaningfully in industry dialogues around justice, inclusion, and the new streaming economy; and, having accomplished all this, seemed to spend most of her time spotlighting everybody else’s achievements? I’ll wait.

### SHONNI ENLOW

Associate Professor, Fordham University

#### Top 10 Films (ranked)

*Aquarius*, *Toni Erdmann*, *Moonlight*, *The Souvenir*, *Phantom Thread*, *No Home Movie*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *First Reformed*, *The Immigrant*, *Boyhood*  
**Film of the Decade**  
*Get Out*

### SCOTT FOUNDAIS

Senior Manager, Acquisitions/Production, Amazon Studios Original Movies

#### Top 25 Films of the Decade (unranked)

*Amour*, *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu*, *The Assassin*, *Barbara*, *Dunkirk*, *Goodbye to Language*, *Her*, *Holy Motors*, *The Immigrant*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Margaret*, *The Master*, *Moonlight*, *Mysteries of Lisbon*, *Norte, the End of History*, *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, *Parasite*, *Poetry*, *The Social Network*, *Toni Erdmann*, *The Tree of Life*, *The Turin Horse*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *Vitalina Varela*, *The Wind Rises*

#### Best New Filmmakers (unranked)

Rick Alverson, Ari Aster, Kantemir Balagov, Clio Barnard, Kim Bora, Ryan Coogler, Joe Cornish, Destin Daniel Cretton, Robert Eggers, Alex Garland, Marielle Heller, Jennifer Kent, Nadav Lapid, László Nemes, Joshua Oppenheimer, Andrew Patterson, Jordan Peele, Alice Rohrwacher, Lulu Wang, Nanfu Wang

#### Film of the Decade

*Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*: a movie that, in content and form, feels like a



*Drug War* is an exacting and pitiless mapping of cops, informants, and drug dealers, all triangulating to a deadly fate. It is another of Johnnie To's rigorously composed gangster films, but the first made with Mainland money. This one feels more mechanical than the *Election* dyad or *Exiled*, as if the characters are playing out predetermined fates. Timmy (Louis Koo) is the snitch, who forces a collision between the undercover cops who are controlling him and the drug gangs he has been attempting to infiltrate. To orchestrates the final shootout in near silence, punctuated by short staccato bursts of bullets as Timmy tries to orient the cops and gangs against each other in a mutually assured destruction of crossfire. But the geometry fails Timmy as well, who ends up handcuffed to his own deadly design.

## 2014

### JOHN WICK

Red Circle Club



For Hollywood, action films the 2010s were defined by the ascendance of 87-level Action Design. It was founded by ex-stuntmen Chad Stahelski and David Leitch, whose innovation was creating a one-stop shop, selling complete action sequences to films still in preproduction, providing the choreography, the stunt performers, and the second unit direction. (They would even train your star.) Stahelski and Leitch, of course, went on to start the ongoing *John Wick* franchise, which was heavily influenced by Hong Kong choreographer Yuen Woo-ping, whom they saw at work on *The Matrix* as members of the stunt team. The standout sequence in the first *John Wick* is the Red Circle nightclub shootout, an homage to

Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le cercle rouge*. Keanu Reeves is a model-like figure, recalling Alain Delon in the Melville film, who cuts through the Russian mob hangout with frictionless "gun-fu" and Brazilian jujitsu takedowns. The muzzle flashes of the gunfire nearly match the rhythm of the flickering disco-ball lighting, and when Reeves emerges onto the nightclub floor, with undulating patterns projected behind him as throbbing EDM fills the soundtrack, it momentarily embraces its destiny as a musical.

## 2015

### MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

Final Chase Back to the Citadel



Like *The Raid*, this is one long action sequence, though a chase film rather than a fight, a rolling revue of malformed steampunk freaks, pole-jumping maniacs, and one demented power chord–playing mascot, all driving armored muscle cars and trying to take down a one-armed Charliz Theron and a mute Tom Hardy. An overwhelming work orchestrated by George Miller and his longtime stunt choreographer Guy Norris, the film is a testament to the remarkable stunt performers who labored for five months to bring their vision to the screen. It all comes together with overwhelming force in the final chase, a gonzo act of action filmmaking in which there are spectacular car crashes, blooming explosions, obscenely risky stunts (especially on those bendy poles that dip into moving vehicles), and hand-to-hand combat atop speeding wrecks that is pure piston-pumping poetry.

## 2016

### THE FINAL MASTER

Series of Duels



RaMell Ross, Dee Rees, Josephine Decker, Sophia Takal, Chloé Zhao, Jordan Peele, Haifaa Al-Mansour, Ryan Coogler, Ava DuVernay, Eva Vives

### Film of the Decade

*Inherent Vice*, a loopy paranoid masterpiece

### Film Person of the Decade

Jafar Panahi: It is not enough to be "inspired" by his example. It's much better to be furious on his behalf. As Rebecca West once wrote, "a strong hatred is the best lamp to bear in our hands as we go over the dark places of life, cutting away the dead things men tell us to revere."

## RICHARD PEÑA

Professor, Columbia University

### Films of the Decade (unranked)

*Cemetery of Splendor*, *An Elephant Sitting Still*, *Ida*, *The Image Book*, *In the Last Days of the City*, *Leviathan* (Paravel & Castaing-Taylor), *Loveless*, *Marriage Story*, *Melancholia*, *Monrovia, Indiana*, *My Golden Days*, *Mysteries of Lisbon*, *Neighboring Sounds*, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, *An Oversimplification of Her Beauty*, *Pain and Glory*, *Penance*, *Phantom Thread*, *Pina*, *The Rider*, *Silent Souls*, *The Social Network*, *Stranger by the Lake*, *Toni Erdmann*, *A Touch of Sin*, *We Are What We Are*, *Zama*

### Best New Filmmakers (ranked)

Hu Bo, Chloé Zhao, Britni West, Pietro Marcello, Jazmin Lopez, Jordan Peele, Mikhaël Hers, Carlo Mirabella-Davis, Daouda Coulibaly, Alice Rohrwacher

### Film of the Decade

*In the Last Days of the City*

### Film Person of the Decade

Netflix, a word that simultaneously arouses hope, despair, love, and hatred for cinema.

## DANIELA PERSICO

Selection committee, Locarno Film Festival

### Top 10 Films (ranked)

*Holy Motors*, *The Tree of Life*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *The Turin Horse*, *No Home Movie*, *Vitalina Varela*, *'Til Madness Do Us Part*, *Leviathan* (Paravel & Castaing-Taylor), *Liberté*, *Arabian Nights*

### Film Persons of the Decade

Lav Diaz and David Lynch, because they found an antidote to cinema being "televized": the first by giving a new meaning to filmic narrative, the second by imploding the idea of the TV series.

### Top 10 Italian Films of the Decade (ranked)

*The King*, *Le quattro volte*, *Happy as Lazzaro*, *Spira Mirabilis*, *Martin Eden*, *El Sicario*, *Room 164*, *Happy Times Will Come Soon*, *The Other Side*, *Fire at Sea*, *The Young Observant*

## PERSONAL VIEWS continued

## SIERRA PETTENGILL

Filmmaker, critic

## Top 6 Films (ranked)

*The Act of Killing*, *Holy Motors*, *Certified Copy*, *No Home Movie*, *A Touch of Sin*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*

## Best New Filmmakers (ranked)

Roberto Minervini, Anna Rose Holmer, Joshua Oppenheimer

## MATÍAS PIÑEIRO

Director, *The Princess of France*; Assistant Professor, Pratt Institute

## Top 10 Films (ranked)

*Happy Hour*, *Atlantics*, *Flowers*, *The Day After*, *Travel Plans*, *La Flor*, *Sipo'hi—El lugar del manduré*, *The Human Surge*, *Film socialisme*, *Las facultades*

## Best New Filmmakers (ranked)

Ted Fendt, Eloisa Solaas, Mati Diop, Eduardo Williams, Riccardo Palladino, Sebastián Lingardi, Natalia Marin, Benjamin Crotty, Ryūsuke Hamaguchi, Jorge Jácome

## JAMES QUANDT

Senior Programmer, TIFF Cinematheque

## Top 10 Films (ranked)

*Zama*, *Goodbye to Language*, *Norte*, *The End of History*, *Film socialisme*, *Vitalena Varela/Horse Money*, *Amour fu*, *Sieranevada*, *The Death of Louis XIV*, *The Strange Case of Angelica*, *Mysteries of Lisbon*

## Best Restorations of the Decade (ranked)

*From the Branches Drops the Withered Blossom* (1960), *Nana* (1926), *Bandits of Orgosolo* (1961), *Diamonds of the Night* (1964), *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1985), *L'Atalante* (1934), *Khandhar/The Ruins* (1984), *Insang* (1976), *Francisca* (1981), *The House Is Black* (1963)

## NICOLAS RAPOLD

Editor-in-Chief, Film Comment

## Top 25ish Films (unranked)

*The Act of Killing*, *Aquarius*, *Archipelago*, *The Assassin*, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, *Boyhood*, *Cameraperson*, *Clouds of Sils Maria*, *Field Niggas*, *Goodbye to Language*, *Hong Sangsoo: Complete Works* (2010–2019), *The Kindergarten Teacher*, *Let the Fire Burn*, *Let the Sunshine In*, *Leviathan* (Paravel & Castaing-Taylor), *Lincoln*, *The Master*, *Moonlight*, *mother!*, *National Gallery*, *No Home Movie*, *The Social Network*, *Toni Erdmann*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Zama*

## BOOTS RILEY

Director, *Sorry to Bother You*

Chinese director Xu Haofeng is also a martial-arts historian, and his films reflect his studies. He believes that “a real kung fu battle lasts only seconds. And the results of a competition between top practitioners are decided even before opponents begin combat.” *The Final Master* is another of his intensely ritualized takes on the genre, and it ends with a hypnotic succession of duels as Liao Fan, who trained for two months before shooting, consecutively defeats the masters from 19 schools of kung fu in Tianjin. Fighters are doomed by their choice of weapon, stance, or target before the bouts have even begun, giving these fights an abstracted quality, as if they had already taken place and these are reenactments—or, perhaps more accurately, how-to manuals. Liao Fan often pauses at the end of each encounter, holding the winning thrust in place for examination by willing students.

## 2017

## BAAHUBALI 2: THE CONCLUSION

Pindari Attack on Kuntal Desh



The biggest Indian movie of 2017 was this mythological action melodrama directed by S.S. Rajamouli and starring the dashingly shirtless Prabhas. A complex tale of a warring royal family and the titular Baahubali's (and his son's) thwarted path to the throne, its action scenes have an inventive pulp sensibility that recently went viral on Twitter (people love soldiers getting slingshotted onto a castle). I found the most joy in the Pindari attack on Kuntal Desh, when the junior Baahubali first encounters his great love, Princess Devasena (Anushka Shetty). Their meet-cute occurs as they turn a bloody archery fight against Pindari warriors into a giddy dance, spinning each other around into position to kill dozens of unlucky soldiers. It's love at first archery-bow sight.

## 2018

## MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE—FALLOUT

Bathroom Fight

The *Mission: Impossible* franchise has become a reliable source of insane Tom



Cruise stunts for years now, and *Fallout* is no slouch with its 25,000-foot HALO jump out of a jet. But my favorite of the Wade Eastwood–designed setpieces is the bathroom fight between Tom Cruise, Henry Cavill, and Liang Yang (an expressively intense stuntman getting his first extended acting job here), which is brutal and funny, and effortlessly conveys the personality of the characters. Cruise is mostly out of breath and a step behind, buying time to think his way out of it, while Cavill is a meathead monster who smashes Yang through a mirror and raises his fists as if he were in a Golden Gloves bout and not a black ops mission. Yang is the superior fighter to them both, and his face exhibits an intimidating sense of calm that will be pierced only when an unexpected fourth person enters the fray, rearranging the power dynamics for the last time in the fight.

## 2019

## AVENGEMENT

Pub Brawl



The latest collaboration between DTV films Scott Adkins and director Jesse V. Johnson (their fifth in two years) is a bare-knuckle brawler of a film. Adkins plays a small-time London crook hardened by his time in the pen; someone put a price on his head, so he is constantly getting into ugly, tooth-shattering fights. The film tracks his revenge against the gang who sent him to jail, holding them hostage in a grimy pub until his brother (Craig Fairbrass) shows up—and then all hell breaks loose. Adkins and fight coordinator Dan Styles opt for sloppy, inebriated violence, finding creative blood-splurting uses for two-by-fours, crowbars, and conveniently placed pickled-egg jars. ●

Lives, Western

**Top 10 Japanese Films** (ranked)

*Shin Godzilla, Happy Hour, A Bride for Rip Van Winkle, The Tale of the Princess Kaguya, Shoplifters, Fires on the Plain, Sennan Asbestos Disaster, 0.5mm, Before We Vanish, Night Cruising*

**C. MASON WELLS**

Director of Theatrical Sales, Kino Lorber

**Top 10 Films** (unranked)

*Cameraperson, Caterpillar, Dreileben: Beats Being Dead, Elle, The Extravagant Shadows, Goodbye First Love, Hissein Habré: A Chadian Tragedy, Jackass 3D, Margaret, The Rehearsal*

**Best New Filmmakers** (ranked)

James N. Kienitz Wilkins, Lev Kalman & Whitney Horn, Nadav Lapid, Eliza Hittman, Nathan Silver, Ted Fendt, John Magary, Drew Tobia, Kazik Radwanski

**Film of the Decade**

*You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet:* a bittersweet ending of one era and a thrilling new beginning of another

**Film Thing of the Decade**

Screen Slate

**MANU YAÑEZ MURILLO**

Critic, Otros Cines Europa

**Top 10 Films** (ranked)

*Zama, The Assassin, No Home Movie, A Quiet Passion, Vitalina Varela, Cemetery of Splendor, Goodbye to Language, What Now? Remind Me, Sieranevada, Phantom Thread*

**Best New Filmmakers** (ranked)

Alice Rohrwacher, Joel Potrykus, Nadav Lapid, Eduardo Williams, Ognjen Glavonic, Roberto Minervini, Jordan Peele, Milagros Mumenthaler, Rick Alverson, David Robert Mitchell, Virgil Vernier, Bi Gan, Greta Gerwig, Oliver Laxe, Jennifer Kent

**Film of the Decade**

*Holy Motors:* After watching it several times—twice in the 2012 Cannes Film festival—I can't say I understand a thing about this movie. But when I delve into its fragmentary structure, its magnetic images, and its joyride of sounds and songs, I'm left in a revelatory state of mind: dazed, as when I try to comprehend the current state of audiovisual culture; melancholic, as when I look at the world around us; and deeply moved, as in my daily interactions with my children.

**Film Person of the Decade**

David Lynch

**Best Performances** (ranked)

Robin Wright (*The Congress*); Lise Leplat Prudhomme (*Jeannette: The Childhood*

*of Joan of Arc*); Joaquin Phoenix (*The Master*); Cynthia Nixon (*A Quiet Passion*); Pilar Gamboa, Laura Paredes, Valeria Correa, and Elisa Carricajo (*La Flor*); Jack Black (*Bernie*); Zhao Tao (*Ash Is Purest White*); Harry Dean Stanton (*Lucky*); Kim Min-hee (*On the Beach at Night Alone*); Sarit Lary (*The Kindergarten Teacher*)

**GENEVIEVE YUE**

Assistant Professor, The New School

**Top 10 Films** (ranked)

*No Home Movie, The Last of the Unjust, Magic Mike XXL, Nostalgia for the Light, Cameraperson, OJ: Made in America, Two Days, One Night, Museum Hours, Right Now, Wrong Then, In Jackson Heights* ●

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