THE LONG *take*

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CREATED BY

DAVID VINCENT SMITH

As I continue my journey as a filmmaker, I'm increasingly drawn to the value of pausing to document, reflect, and reconsider what drives me. Filmmaking humbles and makes lifelong students of us all.

This isn't intended as a manual or a megaphone. It's not designed to be educational, but a space to gather my thoughts each month. A place to reflect on cinema, sound, story, and those who shape them and share these reflections with friends.

More than anything, I believe in the power of the written word and the time it takes to engage with it. If you've found your way here, thank you. Time is the most valuable thing we have, and I'm grateful you've given me a moment of yours to sit with and these musings.

David Vincent Smith

INSIDE *The* CROCODILE

TO SIT IN SILENCE IN THE DARK

There's a short story by Dostoevsky called The Crocodile. Unlike his usual dark spirals of psychology, it feels more like a long-lost cousin to Kafka's Metamorphosis, full of absurd surrealism.

The story, briefly: a civil servant, Ivan Matveich, visits an arcade with his wife to see a crocodile on display. He teases the animal by waving his glove, and the crocodile swallows him whole. But Ivan doesn't die. Instead, alive and oddly comfortable inside the beast's cavernous belly, he begins to imagine a new life. The owner refuses to cut the crocodile open (it's his livelihood), so Ivan resigns himself to staying there. From the darkness, he spins entire social systems and philosophies. As he says:

"Get off by yourself in some corner or, for that matter, get into a crocodile close your eyes, and immediately you invent a complete paradise for all mankind."

It's a fascinating image; from within his strange prison, Ivan dreams beyond anything he could have imagined in his ordinary life. And it makes me think of two different kinds of retreat.

The first is the retreat that nourishes. As a director, there can be long gaps between films, years spent alone in your own cave. Recently, I read three books that map onto that kind of reflection: two by Robert Bresson, Bresson on Bresson, a collection of interviews across four decades, and Notes on Cinematography, his distilled philosophy of cinema and then Andrei Tarkovsky's Sculpting in Time.

Bresson, in particular, is astonishing for his steadfastness. Whether you agree with him or not, I've never read another filmmaker so unwavering in their rules of cinema. He famously refused to use professional actors, and more importantly, he stayed crystal clear throughout his career about what he believed cinema was. Tarkovsky admired him deeply, once writing:

"Robert Bresson has always astonished and attracted me with his asceticism. It seems to me that he is the only director in the world who has achieved absolute simplicity in cinema. As it was achieved in music by Bach, in art by Leonardo. Tolstoy achieved it as a writer."

It's rare to encounter filmmakers who have carved their own belief system so clearly, and then managed to execute it with such sublime consistency. These books are testaments to lives lived in pursuit of an ideal.

But there's also another kind of retreat, the dangerous one. Ivan's visions inside the crocodile become absurd, and Dostoevsky elsewhere warns us what happens when isolation turns poisonous. In Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov withdraws so far into his own ideology that it warps into a justification for murder. The lesson is that self-reflection can tip into delusion if it's cut off from the world.

That's the balance, I think. Unlike Ivan or Raskolnikov, Bresson and Tarkovsky didn't just sit in the cave; they came back out and offered their visions to audiences. Reflection fed their art; it didn't trap them.

So yes, it's worth sitting in the dark sometimes, refining your own ideas and your own methodology. But it's also worth remembering not to fall in love with your own importance while you're down there. After all, sitting alone in a dark room, inventing worlds that sounds a lot like writing, doesn't it? Part of the journey into the cave is also its exit.

Even one stage of one of film's most popular structural paradigm's 'The Hero's Journey', is called "Approach to the Inmost Cave," where the hero faces their great fear by entering the danger of a physical, emotional, or spiritual cave.

The cave, whether literal or metaphorical, is deeply linked to human storytelling. There's the term "caveman" for the prehistoric humans who lived in caves. And there are cave drawings, some of humankind's earliest documented artistic expressions. In Cave of Forgotten Dreams (2010), Werner Herzog explores the Chauvet Cave in France, which features images over 30,000 years old. Spiritual and metaphysical caves have naturally lent themselves to cinema as symbols of enlightenment, thresholds, and tests of the soul.

Caves also appear literally in film. The commonly referenced moment in The Empire Strikes Back (1980), when Luke Skywalker enters a cave on a remote planet and faces a vision of Darth Vader. He attacks the illusion, only to see Vader's severed head reveal his own face, a test of Luke's fear and anger. In The Dark Knight Rises (2012), Bruce Wayne is reborn in a prison-like cave as he climbs his way back to freedom. And of course, there are metaphorical caves: The Matrix (1999) is famously influenced by Plato's "Allegory of the Cave."

Whether it's Jonah in the belly of the whale, Pinocchio and Geppetto trapped inside Monstro, or Ivan swallowed by Dostoevsky's crocodile, human beings are intrinsically linked to journeys into physical or metaphysical caves, and so is the cinema experience. The cinema itself has long been one of our favourite caves: a dark chamber to retreat into, reflect, grow, and return to the world transformed. Hopefully, it continues to be so for a long time.

In Plato's allegory, which is central to his Theory of Knowledge, the Cave represents ignorance with shadows of illusion, and most people mistake appearance for reality. Truth and education are a journey of effort against resistance. S,o without sounding like some internet-crazed conspiracy theorists, it's worth examining what kind of cave we might in fact be residing in. Is it our mobile phones and social media, an echo chamber, some sort of cinematically limiting algorithmic dopamine cycle? It's worth stretching our limbs and seeing if we don't brush up against the belly of a crocodile and, like Ivan, are in fact gleefully living in the belly of the beast.

VIDEO ESSAY

ANIMAL KINGDOM

SCENE ANALYSIS & DIRECTOR BREAKDOWN

In this video, I break down the opening scene of David Michôd's Sundance-winning film Animal Kingdom, exploring how he uses film language to set up the story's tone, themes, and characters. Fifteen years

This is the first episode in a new series where I'll be breaking down iconic film scenes and what makes them work.

IN THE CUT

THE FILM: The Cranes Are Flying (1957)

SYNOPSIS: Veronica plans a rendezvous with her lover, Boris, at the bank of the river, only for him to be drafted into World War II shortly thereafter. The film went on to win the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

DIRECTOR: Mikhail Kalatozov

THE CINEMATOGRAPHY: Shot by the masterful Sergey Urusevsky, this is one of the most visually striking films of its era. His collaboration with Kalatozov is legendary, and The Cranes Are Flying remains a landmark in handheld camerawork, years before it became a common immersive technique. The long, fluid tracking shots (some seamlessly rising into crane movements) are breathtaking, while the bold camera positions and expressive framing mirror both Veronika's inner turmoil and the overwhelming presence of war.
A 4K restored version is available on Mosfilm's official YouTube channel, and the film is also part of the Criterion Collection.

PLAYBACK

NAME:

Lewis Potts (CINEMATOGRAPHER)

KNOWN FOR:

Features: *HE AIN'T HEAVY (2023)*, *KOKO - A RED DOG STORY (2019)*

TVCs: *PUMA*, *Watches of Switzerland*, *Squarespace*, *Steel Blue*, *WA Police*, *Meshki*, *RAC*, *Case Construction*, *Lotterywest*, *Bankwest*, *HBF*, *P&N Bank*, *Australian Army*, *Canteen Australia*, *QT Hotels*, *VICE*. MUSIC VIDEOS: *Universal Music*, *Sony Music*, *Warner Music*, *Spacey Jane*, *Tame Impala and many more.*

THREE FILMS YOU'D RECOMMEND:

The Rehearsal, How To With John Wilson, The Hunt (2012).

AN AUSTRALIAN FILM YOU THINK WE SHOULD WATCH:

All This Mayhem

A NOTE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF:

Enjoy the process; filmmaking is full of ups and downs, and the industry is always changing.

THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

ON TWO DEATHS AND THREE BIRTHS

"My movie is born first in my head, dies on the paper; is resuscitated by the living persons and real objects I use, which are killed on film but, placed in a certain order and projected onto a screen, come to life again like flowers in water."

- NOTES ON THE CINEMATOGRAPH - ROBERT BRESSON

This is one of Bresson's most notable and often-cited quotes. I find myself reconnecting with my passion for cinema through the editing process. The idea of images being "placed in a certain order" captures something essential about the soul of a film. Editing, unlike directing or cinematography, rarely receives the same spotlight. Its artistry can be harder to define, since we usually encounter the finished cut rather than the raw material before it was shaped and sculpted into form.

Yet these choices matter deeply. The placement of one image alongside another has the power to revive a dead moment, to create a spark of energy and imprint meaning. The possibilities are infinite: editing is like playing with a box of Lego, where stacking one block against another can yield radically different results. On set, if we're fortunate enough to capture fragments of truth with a pulse of life, the wrong juxtaposition in the edit can just as easily extinguish it.

To move beyond Lego, I've come to see editing as closer to floristry—more specifically, Ikebana, the Japanese art form that emphasises balance, harmony, and peace through the thoughtful placement of flowers. In the same way, editing is an act of mindful arrangement, of cutting and positioning images so they speak together.

"Let it be the intimate union of the images that charges them with emotion."

CONTACT

Email *dvsperth@icloud.com*

Website *www.dvsfilm.com*

If you have any questions, comments, feedback or unsolicited life advice feel free to get in contact.