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I am sure you know the plot, and words wouldn't help to describe how original (and ingenious) it is. The film works on so many levels- it is a screwball...

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Wildly inventive, but hard to like.

Watching this film, I felt a great admiration for the sheer invention of it, the boundless creativity with which the writer and director attacked the subject. Being John Malkovich is full of strange characters, wonderfully creative moments, and a sort of lunatic atmosphere that starts to take on its own twisted logic after awhile. If you buy the initial premise...

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I agree with Roger Ebert- THE film of 1999., April 1, 2000

By [J. Cunningham "silentjens"](#) (Chicago, IL USA) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

Don't get me wrong- I loved American Beauty. I was shocked by The Sixth Sense. I was moved by Magnolia. But for me, the movie in 1999 that made me sit back and say "wow" was Being John Malkovich.

I am sure you know the plot, and words wouldn't help to describe how original (and ingenious) it is. The film works on so many levels- it is a screwball comedy, an existential discussion of the nature of existence, a study of sexual identity, and a satire of the modern desire to "escape" from life. On top of all of that, it is darn entertaining to watch!

The characters (played to perfection but Cusack, Diaz, Keener, and Malkovich himself) are all well-drawn, and the actors do a fantastic job- wait until you see Diaz, unrecognizable in frizzy hair and frumpy dress.

The directing is top notch as well. Spike Jonze (of Three Kings fame) has made a wise choice- he recognizes the script is the star and has directed a film without any flashy camera work, which would detract from the real focal point. That is not to say the work is pedestrian- he did everything that had to be done to make the film, and he did it well (note his Oscar nod for best director).

The production design is a big star here as well. The 7 1/2 floor is almost "Gilliam-esque"- in fact, when I first saw the preview I assumed it was Terry Gilliam's (Brazil, 12 Monkeys) newest film.

The best word to describe this film is "giddy." I saw that because that is what I brought away from it- I felt giddy watching it, and you can feel the cast and crew felt the same making it. The best thing I have read about the film was from a rejection letter from another studio, which neglected to option the screenplay: "I'm sure Being

John Malkovich would be regarded as a work of genius on whatever planet it was written." If that doesn't make you want to see the thing, nothing will.

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"Being JM" is incredibly original thanks to cast, screenplay,

May 17, 2000

By **Parker Lewis "park-lewis"** (Santa Clara, CA) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

"Well, there's this guy...." That's all that some viewers could really come up with when asked to describe "Being John Malkovich", the latest film starring Cameron Diaz, Catherine Keener and John Cusack. Oh...and John Malkovich is in it, too. This movie is so original, I can't even begin to explain this movie, other than that it was intelligent, fascinating, and hilarious. Because of the originality, it is completely unpredictable: you are so completely in the dark trying to guess what is going to happen next, that you end up not even bothering to guess-which makes a great movie-going experience. Cusack plays Craig Schwartz, a puppeteer who believes he is not just a puppeteer, but an artist. Diaz, in a wig that makes her nearly unrecognizable, plays Schwartz' animal-loving wife, Lotte. Cusack, upon the realization that he might not make it as a puppeteer, decides to get a day job, at a place on the seventh and half floor of a New York skyscraper. It is here at this odd office floor, that Cusack stumbles upon a portal to John Malkovich's brain-where he is allowed to experience what it is like to be a celebrity for 15 minutes, and then be spit out somewhere outside the New Jersey turnpike. Hilarity ensues, and metaphysical questions are asked.

This movie is like a dream-and not in the sense that it's an incredibly great movie, although it is. It's like a dream because of the way that the logic is formatted. Things that have seemingly little significance, have a large significance by the movie's end. We are whisked away from plotline to plotline, that soon the rhythm of the rapidfire plot becomes catchy. Things that would not make sense in most movies makes complete sense here. Being John Malkovich's intentional irrationality make this a dadaistic masterpiece, a trend that I am unsure if I would want duplicated, because perhaps then motion pictures would become a medium for the insane.

The writer, Charlie Kaufmann, is quoted as saying that he wrote it not thinking that it would ever turn into a film. In response, John Malkovich said that only a writer who did not think that their script could become a film would write such a script. I'd have an inclination to agree with Malkovich, unless it has become hip to produce scripts that are risky, odd, and seemingly drug-induced. This may well be the one movie that you should see this year. Josh Bob says check it out. Five stars.

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27 of 30 people found the following review helpful:

It reminds us that some movies are just meant to be FUN!,

March 27, 2000

By **M. Osorio "M"** (CA USA) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

A movie doesn't have to be "Schindler's List" to be good. Sometimes people forget that movies don't always have to take themselves so seriously. Yet, action flicks sometimes don't take themselves seriously enough.

"Being John Malkovich" rises to the challenge to produce a whimsical, utterly HILARIOUS story that is so outright absurd and bizarre from the very start, most viewers will stop trying to make sense of it after about five minutes into the film. It is then that the audience just lays back, goes with the flow and HAS FUN! If you're someone who always has to understand every detail and motive for every action in a film, THIS MOVIE IS NOT FOR YOU!

But, if you can handle some silliness, and really like to laugh, watch this movie. You won't be sorry. I was almost crying from laughter in my seat. The whole audience was in an uproar. Refreshing, zany, quality films like this don't show up often. So, don't miss a chance to see "Being John Malkovich," just be sure to check your cynicism at the door. :-)

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10 of 10 people found the following review helpful:

Ho-Ha!, April 27, 2000

By [Matthew Keough](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

One of the best films of the past decade is now available in a packed DVD that contains tons more than merely what the description states. I picked it up a week early and was so happy to see a beautiful animorphic image that presents the film exactly as I remember it on the big screen (for once, unlike "Eyes Wide Shut"), great digital sound, plus documentries on the real puppet master who performed for the movie, the 7th 1/2 floor docu and the Malkovich T.V. special in their entirety, the preview and tv spots, plus, and best of all, the hilarious "An Intimate Portrait of the Art of Backround Driving" and a Spike Jonze interview that defies description. A great special edition that doesn't overdo it, the best since the Criterion edition of "Rushmore."

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22 of 26 people found the following review helpful:

Who do you want to be today?, March 30, 2000

By ["the_ninja"](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

In case, you don't know, that's a line from an Oingo Boingo song.

Being John Malkovich is a movie about people. John Cusack is an unemployed puppeteer who gets a new job in a very peculiar place: the 7 & 1/2 floor of an office building. He soon discovers a tunnel into the mind of movie star John Malkovich.

That's the plot at it's most basic. Trying to summarize this movie is like trying to explain what color looks like to a blind man. It is a shockingly original, amazing film. It was truly robbed of an Oscar for best original screenplay: while American Beauty was good, it wasn't as good as Malkovich and not nearly as original.

The direction by Spike Jonze is strange and surreal. There aren't a lot of bright colors or beautiful shots, but the movie really draws you in with it's dark, strange atmosphere. As I said before, the screenplay is utterly brilliant. The movie kind of reminds me of Terry Gilliam's Brazil - only it's not nearly as maddening to watch.

The performances are quite good, but really do serve the story. No one stands out in this movie. Not even Malkovich. One note: if you don't pay attention, the plot may confuse you a bit.

Being John Malkovich is a very rare kind of movie indeed: one that is stunningly original and incredibly well-done. Truly a must-see.

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9 of 9 people found the following review helpful:

I think; I feel; I suffer; I like this movie, December 9, 2004

By

[Renee Floyd "DeliriousPink"](#) (Redwood City, CA United States) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

Being John Malkovich is one of the most thematically ambitious films of the 1990's. It delves figuratively and literally into the weaknesses and complexities of the human psyche through the self-revealing and often comical actions of the main characters. Through bizarre situations, a subtle but emotional soundtrack, and a tiny portal on the 7 1/2 floor of an office building, Malkovich investigates the multi-faceted aspects of human beings, and the troubles they face in trying to find themselves.

Each character in this film is aware, sometimes painfully aware, of his or her identity, and the extremes that they reach in trying to change, control, and manipulate their identities suggest that consciousness is perhaps more trouble than it's worth. Craig Schwartz, played by John Cusack, is a talented puppeteer, and therefore a master at adopting multiple personalities, but until he finds a real person to imitate, he remains in his workshop, alone and unsatisfied with his life. That is, until he meets the magnetic Maxine, who's confidence and boldness enchants Craig for the entirety of the movie.

It seems logical to assume that if Craig is unhappy with his identity, then he could be happier if he wasn't aware of himself at all. As Craig says, "Consciousness is a terrible curse - I think; I feel; I suffer." Once Craig discovers the Malkovich portal in his office, people start lining up, literally, to partake in the life-altering experience; everyone, that is, except Maxine. Not once does she reveal the slightest interest in going through the portal. Maxine is comfortable in her own skin - a quality which Craig, and

pretty much everyone who meets her, greatly admires - but it is not a comfort that comes from being ignorant of her own identity. Maxine is very aware of the power of self-assurance, a power which she uses to influence Craig, his wife Lotte, and Malkovich himself. While Craig proves that consciousness coupled with insecurity result in depression and desperation, Maxine exists at the opposite end of the spectrum, mixing consciousness with greed, and resulting in manipulation and callousness.

John Malkovich further reinforces the idea the consciousness kills; that "ignorance is bliss." Before he discovers Maxine's true intentions, he is blissful and carefree, with a strong acting career and a hot new girlfriend. But once he finds out, he becomes paranoid, frantic, and untrusting. When he consults his friend Charlie Sheen for advice, Charlie says, perhaps more revealingly than intended, "The truth is for suckers, Johnny boy." Indeed, it is Malkovich's conscience that steals his happiness. If you've ever wanted to be someone else, or at least wondered what it would be like, then Being John Malkovich is a must see. A wry comedy that makes you think; an intellectual adventure that makes you laugh -- Being John Malkovich is a non-oppressive, insightful, and captivating glance into the deepest of human desires and insecurities.

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15 of 17 people found the following review helpful:

A comedy with depth, laughs, insights and CREATIVITY!,

February 9, 2003

By [Linda Linguvic](#) (New York City) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

I avoided this 1999 film when it was in the theaters. It looked just plain silly to me. And yet, it's received accolades from critics everywhere. And so I decided to catch up on what everyone was making such a fuss about and see the DVD. Oh my! What a film! I've never seen anything so innovative and creative in my life!

John Cusak stars as an out-of-work puppeteer. Cameron Diaz is his wife. Catherine Keener is the sassy woman they both find attractive. And John Malkovich plays a version of himself. All are excellent actors. And all are exceptional. How the writer, Charlie Kaufman, ever thought up the premise is amazing. And the director, Spike Jonze, certainly knew how to make it all fit together.

This is a comedy with depth. And the laughs and insights keep getting better. There's an office building with a floor numbered 7-1/2. It's only 4 feet high and everyone who works there has to walk around half stooped over. Then there's a secret doorway behind a file cabinet. When a person crawls in, he or she falls down a tunnel and finds himself or herself inside the brain of the actor John Malkovich for a mere 15 minutes. Soon, Catherine Keener and John Cusak are selling tickets to people who want to experience this. Soon, too, Cameron Diaz gets hooked - so much so that, with an interesting gender-bender twist of the plot, she finds herself being John Malkovich while making love to Catherine Keener. And that's just one of the many sub-plots.

Sound confusing? Well it's not. It might sound silly, but as a viewer I was completely there with the story all the way, letting myself enjoy the twists and turns of the plot that just kept getting better as this intriguing tale moved along. It's all very surreal. And it's absolutely brilliant.

Later, I thought about all the themes it touched on. The puppeteer theme had to do with manipulation, both with puppets and with real people. Everyone was manipulated in this film, and different people pulled the strings at different times. It also had to do with what it means to be a celebrity. And what, actually, is identity?

I loved this film and hoped the DVD would have some good special features. I yearned for insight into the making of the film and I wished there were interviews with the actors. Instead, there's scene with an "extra" who had the job of driving a car back and forth all night so that the headlights would give the appropriate background for one of the shots. And a scene where the director feels sick and throws up. However, when I think about it, what can I expect from such off-beat filmmakers?

This is the most refreshing film to come out of Hollywood that I've ever seen. It might not be for everyone but I thought it was great! It therefore gets one of my highest recommendations.

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7 of 7 people found the following review helpful:

To be, or not to be?, August 8, 2000

By

[T. Waltz "Writer/Editor"](#) (San Diego, California United States) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

Craig Schwartz (played by actor John Cusack) has a problem: he doesn't like being Craig Schwartz. This identity crisis is identified (pun intended) immediately within the beautiful establishing shot(s) of director Spike Jonze's fantastic -- if not highly bizarre -- film "Being John Malkovich." In the aforementioned shot(s) we see a puppet show taking place -- a solitary performance, which is orchestrated and conducted by Schwartz, with no audience in attendance and (presumably) with no other purpose than providing him with a mode of escape: from himself, from his life... from reality. "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" proves to be the running theme (or should I say "belief?") for all the characters in the movie (including Schwartz), each seeking a new and improved existence -- specifically via a magical portal that allows them to enter the mind of acclaimed American actor John Malkovich. But once the transition is made, and each character has a chance to "be" somebody else-to experience the hoped -- for improved emerald splendor of another's grass -- Spike Jonze throws a wicked curveball at the audience, asking the question "Is it really greener elsewhere?"

For me, this ingenious film worked on many levels. Firstly, the technical aspects, from lighting to camera angles, and everything in between, were handled and produced in a very controlled and (I think) appropriate fashion for the message being conveyed. An example of this can be found in the choices of lighting for the scenes involving Schwartz. He's a man who has grown despondent with his life, so Jonze chooses to light him in a gloomy, almost haze-like manner, conveying a sense of doom and depression, as well as depicting a gloomy and futile attempt by Schwartz to struggle through the suffocating miasma that surrounds him every day. It is not until we see Schwartz manipulating his puppets, or until he enters the mind of Malkovich (essentially, in both cases, "becoming" someone or something else), that we see a brighter, more illuminating style of lighting used, which seems to indicate Schwartz only feels alive and free when he is able to escape from himself. This clever handling of the lighting shows the audience -- with or without the assistance of related dialogue -- what kind of life Schwartz lives, and gives definite clues to his personality and his motivation (or lack thereof).

On the emotional and psychological levels, I found "Being John Malkovich" to be extremely satisfying. Not only was the quirkiness of its subject matter both challenging and refreshing (I mean, a magic portal into the mind of John Malkovich, for Pete's sake!), but the underlying questions being asked, as well, made this a pleasurable viewing experience. I left the movie wondering about my own existence, and about the times I -- like everyone else, I'm sure -- have considered what it would be like to be someone else; to see the world through another's eyes. The answer, I believe (and the movie provides this quite clearly), is that a person can never really know what it's like to be someone else without completely becoming that other person. And once you do, what's the point? You've lost yourself and will never know the differences you are now experiencing. Spike Jonze meets Soren Keirkegaard: I like it!

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12 of 14 people found the following review helpful:

Wildly inventive, but hard to like., October 30, 2000

By **[Daniel Swensen "- -"](#)** (USA) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(DVD\)](#)

Watching this film, I felt a great admiration for the sheer invention of it, the boundless creativity with which the writer and director attacked the subject. Being John Malkovich is full of strange characters, wonderfully creative moments, and a sort of lunatic atmosphere that starts to take on its own twisted logic after awhile. If you buy the initial premise (admittedly, a lot to swallow) that a man finds a little portal in the back of an office that leads into the head of John Malkovich, then you will be in for a ride for the rest of the film. If you're the kind of person for whom this "makes no sense," then re-rent Bridges of Madison County and give this one a pass.

That being said, the movie is, ultimately, rather too quirky for its own good. The ridiculousness of the movie's basic idea precludes any sort of traditional, satisfying dramatic conclusion. It's not difficult to figure out, early on, that this is not a "happy ending" movie. Some of the characters are genuinely flawed, and in some places, unlikeable, but that fact is one of the few real human touches in the whole production. As such, the film takes on a rather tragic character that makes it hard to recommend with gusto.

If the basic premise of Being John Malkovich appeals to you, it's worth at least one

look. At the very least, it's one of the most original films to come out in a long time, if not necessarily the most satisfying. If the basic premise strikes you as "unrealistic," then by all means, use your common sense and don't watch it.

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6 of 6 people found the following review helpful:

., May 4, 2000

By **A Customer**

This review is from: [Being John Malkovich \(VHS Tape\)](#)

I used to dream up ideas for movies something like this, and always lamented the fact that such delightful oddities would never enjoy the coveted "green light" of Hollywood. So naturally I was dizzyingly pleased to hear about Being John Malkovich, and my expectations were not disappointed when I went to see it.

Being John Malkovich easily matches up with some of the other surprisingly thought-provoking movies of the year, such as Fight Club and American Beauty. Underneath the quirkiness and the eccentric humor, very interesting ideas regarding identity, ego, and the nature of human consciousness (esp. the unconscious) are being played with. There are some suprisingly dark twists to the film, and the characters struck me as unusually mean-spirited -- but neither of these things are, necessarily, complaints. The end was, to me, somehow very sad and vaguely disturbing, and the concluding image of the film is beautifully metaphorically suggestive.

At the same time, Being John Malkovich is generally very accessible and funny. Not all of the humor works quite as well as it'd like to, but most of it does, and there are numerous moments of winningly imaginative hilarity. The performances range from interesting to good. Malkovich himself is a treat and, I have to assume, a remarkably good sport.

Being John Malkovich also boasts the most unusually charming cameo appearance that I've ever seen, I think. Shame on a previous review for revealing it to those who haven't seen the film. I'm not sure if I've offered anything especially new with this review, but rest assured that if you have an interest in seeing this movie, you probably will not be disappointed. An eccentric gem of a film that I like to think of as a refreshing breeze of genuine imagination wafting through the stagnant airways of the Hollywood behemoth.

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