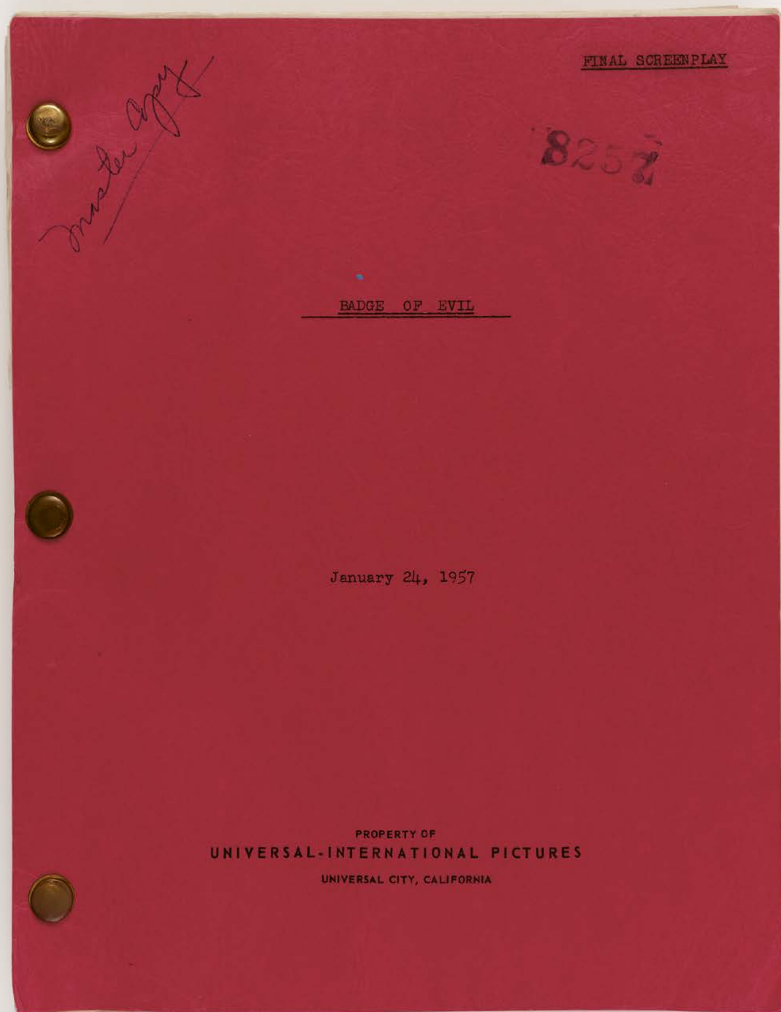


Robert M. Rubin, collector of vintage screenplays, in conversation with filmmakers Josh Safdie and Ronald Bronstein



(Follow the Script)

Cover of Orson Welles's personal copy of the screenplay for *Touch of Evil* (working title *Badge of Evil*), 1968, directed by Welles. Photo: Thomas S. Barant. Courtesy: Robert M. Rubin

RANDY KENNEDY
Thanks to you all for making time for this. I feel pretty lucky to be sitting in on this cinema obsessives' self-help group. I'll get things going. I've gotten to know Bob a little, and he's talked to me about his screenplay collection. I thought it would be a great fit for this column, which concerns the collecting obsession—not so much blue-chip art collecting as the kind pursued in more esoteric circles, by people who use collecting as a way to know a subject or a genre or an era inside out. So I asked Bob to choose five scripts out of his collection out of—what, hundreds, maybe thousands?

ROBERT M. RUBIN
Thousands, yes.

RK Which span from the silent era, almost the beginning of the movies, up until the 1980s?

RR I don't really have an end point set. For example, I have some more recent David Lynch material, like *Lost Highway* (1997), because I have Barry Gifford's archives. But because Godard said that film is a 19th-century problem that was resolved in the 20th century, I guess I should probably just forget the 21st century and leave that to guys like Josh and Benny [Safdie] and Ronnie.

JOSH SAFDIE
It's funny. As screenwriters, directors and producers, we barely print our own scripts anymore. I'd say 99.9 percent of scripts are now shared as a PDFs and read on screens. They just don't exist anymore as documents, as objects. So the kind of collecting Bob does is probably going to be relegated mostly to the 20th century by default.

RK What was the first script you bought, Bob, and why did you gravitate to this kind of material, which is different in a lot of ways from rare-book collecting?

RR I've always been something of a book collector. When I was a young newspaper reporter in Red Bank, New Jersey, I used to spend my off hours at a used-book depot. It wasn't really a store but more like a warehouse. They had a huge trove of books, which they sold by the yard for decorative purposes. I would spend hours combing through boxes looking for interesting first editions, picking up A. J. Liebling and Joseph Mitchell and Jim Thompson paperbacks, that kind of stuff, back in the '70s. Then when I met Richard Prince, I got a little bit more interested in the next level of collecting. The problem is that books are really expensive, plus I didn't want to get in Richard's way. For example, when Richard bought Milton Berle's entire joke file at auction for \$65,000, I bought Berle's bar mitzvah Torah, inscribed to him by his mother, for a few hundred dollars.

JS Same auction?

RR Same auction. Yeah. I was like a pilot fish. One day about fifteen years ago I saw a script for *Blade Runner* (1982) in an entertainment memorabilia catalogue. I'm a big Philip K. Dick fan. So I bought it. As I became more familiar with the market, I became interested in the idea that there were multiple writers and multiple versions of screenplays, unlike books. The guy who sold me the *Blade Runner* specialized in scripts, and I started to see what was out there. There's a lot, which is important. It's like you're standing on the riverbank and watching stuff float by. You want to be able to grab something pretty regularly. I mean, it's no fun to save up to buy a painting once every three years. Right? I realize now that my three primary collecting thrusts corresponded to my three personal ages of cinema. One, being the age that I am, pushing seventy, I grew up watching a lot of cowboy shit on television, so Westerns are part of my DNA. The second phase was film noir, which I discovered in prep school, really, through reading Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain. And then the third phase is New Hollywood. I graduated from college in 1974, so I was there running the film society during the high period of New Hollywood. I also have a sprinkling of auteur focuses—Preston Sturges in depth, Anthony Mann in depth. Some of that is accidental, based on what's available. I also have a lot of Hitchcock, and good Hitchcock is hard to find. He was very controlling of his process material.

JS Would you define auteurism as the work of a writer/director, or can it be solely a writer or a director, or . . . ?

RR By director. My bible was Andrew Sarris's *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929–1968*. In fact, Sarris taught a class I took in college. But I should also mention that I'll take any script, produced or unproduced, by somebody who has standing as a writer in the literary realm.

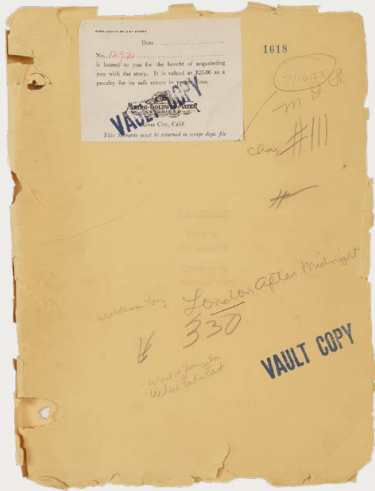
JS That's interesting. I get it. We're producing a script by the novelist Ottessa Moshfegh, and she's a great writer but to my knowledge she's never written a script before. Yet her writing is cinematic. It's an interesting process to watch.

RONALD BRONSTEIN
The original principles of auteurism have been terribly misconstrued, turned into a kind of one-man-band ego idea of a writer-director combination. It's sent lots of otherwise gifted artists down an unbecoming path.

RR I think my collection—which is really a collection of reconstructed archives of the films I'm interested in—will do a lot to swing the pendulum away from the director-as-auteur idea because these documents allow you to look at a particular writer from film to film before the writing is filtered through a director's vision. So I agree with you: It's perfectly clear that the auteur theory swung way too far in favor of the director. I think the original intent of the auteur theory was to demonstrate that there were people working within the studio system, in what seemed to be cookie-cutter, hacklike circumstances, who put a personal touch on the movies they made within that system. And over time, that became perverted into the idea that the director of the movie is the author of the movie. We had that stupid kerfuffle between Pauline Kael and Sarris over *Citizen Kane* (1941). As the guy who owns every conceivable variant of that script, I'll tell you it's perfectly clear that Herman Mankiewicz wrote the story and spun a great yarn, and Welles was the one who turned it into a great movie.

RB The problem arises when gifted directors feel pressure as artists to become writers, when it just isn't their strong suit. It's the rare case when someone can do both. The skill of being able to imprint your psychic fingerprints onto a movie, translating a

London After Midnight (1927) / Freaks (1932)



Screenplay for *London After Midnight*, 1927, directed by Tod Browning. Photo: Thomas S. Barratt. Courtesy Robert M. Rubin



Conjoined twins Daisy and Violet Hilton on the set of *Freaks*, 1932, directed by Tod Browning. Courtesy Robert M. Rubin

London After Midnight is a legendary lost film from 1927 starring Lon Chaney. Fully a quarter of all silent films ever made are completely lost, but this one tops every list of the most important. The last known print was destroyed in an MGM studio vault fire in 1967. It was “reconstructed” twenty years ago using the script, extant stills and some Ken Burns-camera movements. In 2014, a poster for the film sold for \$478,000, making it the most expensive movie poster ever sold at auction. But this “vault copy” of the script is real process material, a relic of the movie as it existed in Tod Browning’s mind before it was committed to film. The poster is just advertising for something already in the can.

One of the primary archival interests of scripts is their use in the excavation of the content of lost footage, swept from the proverbial cutting room floor. The guts of Orson Welles’s *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and Erich von Stroheim’s *Greed* (1924), to name two of the more famous examples of disemboweled 20th-century films, are known to us only through script versions. Then there are the characters who never made it into various movies, despite being written into them and occasionally even being filmed: Charlotte Rampling’s mysterious hitchhiker character in *Vanishing Point* (1971) comes to mind, although Rampling was eventually reinserted into the film for its second life, after it achieved cult status and somebody noticed. (Her character had survived in the British version, like a spy in a sleeper cell.) In 2013, the Polish artist Agnieszka Kurant made a short film titled *Cutaways* in which Rampling, Abe Vigoda and Dick Miller play the characters they portrayed (before being excised) in *Vanishing Point*, *The Conversation* and *Pulp Fiction*, respectively. Describing the phenomenon her work explores, Kurant uses the term “exformation”—coined by a Danish science writer, Tor Nørretranders, to refer to explicitly discarded information. It’s a perfect word for these scripts and set photos: the stuff that fell off the back of the truck on the way to making a movie.

Lost films are an entirely different level of lostness. *London After Midnight* has engendered decades of rumors about prints languishing in abandoned South American or former Communist bloc warehouses. In 2012, it even spawned a Spanish novel, *Londres después de medianoche*, by Augusto Cruz García-Mora, in which the legendary California science-fiction editor Forrest J. Ackerman, who saw the movie at the age of eleven and never got over it, dispatches the narrator in search of the holy grail, a print.

I love how the text on this copy of the script is slowly fading and will, like the film, eventually be lost.

Browning would go on to make *Freaks* and, of course, *Dracula* (1931). I own a considerable number of set photographs and production stills from his personal collection, which was sold at auction a few years ago. The casual set photographs of *Freaks* are remarkable. The numbered stills were shot for publicity purposes, including several two-shots of the director himself with various actors from the film. There are also many unnumbered images of Browning enjoying communal lunches on the lot with the cast, or otherwise hanging out. These pictures are extremely touching. Browning clearly respected and bonded with the entire ensemble—no ableism or discrimination on that set. (Andrew Sarris described *Freaks* as “one of the most compassionate films ever made.”)

Set photographs are a useful complement to the scripts and add a level of visual interest you don’t get with a screen grab. Because they were shot with proper still cameras, they offer much higher resolution than images taken from film negatives. Some were used for methodical documentation of sets, for continuity purposes—ensuring the same look from take to take—and others, taken for future marketing purposes, depict posed action. These are essentially tableaux vivants staged right after the actual filming. They are about the archaeology of small differences. —RR

script into images, is a great skill in itself. That’s what auteur theory was originally devised to analyze and decode. The translation itself was the personal part, not the screenplay.

RR The analogy is that you can talk about the Bulls and Michael Jordan, but you can’t forget Scottie Pippen. But we live in a winner-take-all society, so the idea of a collective work of art runs counter to the way Americans process culture. Right?

RB Bringing this back to Bob’s collection, take his script for a silent movie like *London After Midnight*. Because the movie is lost, by default the script becomes the movie, or the only thing that’s left to stand in for it.

RB Josh and I have a very contentious and almost hostile relationship with the writing process in general. Because we’re both avid readers, we have tremendous and abiding respect for the sanctity of the static word on the page. But when you’re approaching writing for film, you cannot shake the awareness that what you’re writing is not static, that it is fundamentally transitional, intermediary. As a result, you lose respect for what you’re writing. I mean, Josh brought up PDFs. In the past, people were committing words to paper in an entirely physical sense, literally imprinting ink onto paper with keys attached to little hammers. The way we work now just underscores outright how capricious and permutable the script is.

JS A script is not a text. It’s a tool . . . like an actual tool—like napkin directions. It’s like driving back before GPS and smartphones. You write the directions down on a piece of paper, a receipt, or whatever. When you get to your destination, you throw them out the window. A script is no different, really. *Good Time* (2017) was the first time we ever even had a script supervisor.

RR We tried for years to avoid script formatting entirely.

JS For *Uncut Gems* (2019), our script supervisor was really just a kind of stenographer for additional dialogue that came along as we were working. If you look at her scripts, they’re likely much more chaotic than the film itself . . . She’s just trying to keep up with the way that we’re constantly changing the dialogue in real time. I’ve heard editors who keep the script supervisor’s notes on hand when working. When I heard that, I was confused. We never refer back to our script or a supervisor’s script in postproduction.

Every step of the way we’re writing and rewriting until eventually there’s no space left. Ronnie and I write together. Benny and Ronnie edit together. So in our process, Benny becomes a writer, too. He’s editing and sculpting dialogue, dialogue that might have been written or improvised.

RB Bringing this back to Bob’s collection, take his script for a silent movie like *London After Midnight*. Because the movie is lost, by default the script becomes the movie, or the only thing that’s left to stand in for it.

JS I’d never read a script for a silent film before I saw Bob’s. It sounds silly but it never dawned upon me that such scripts exist. But of course they do.

RK Do all of you know filmmakers, fellow filmmakers, for whom the script really is a kind of bible from which actors are not supposed to deviate?

JS Oh, yes. Our script supervisor on *Gems* works with Noah Baumbach, and she said they would often do like sixty takes and that Noah remains incredibly loyal to the movie. Apparently, he’d say: “You didn’t say this word” or “You said that word but it isn’t in the script.” I think that sort of dedication, take after take, can become an almost psychedelic experience for some actors—and directors! I imagine filmmakers like Aaron Sorkin and the like are very married to the page. That’s their way. I read the script for Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Licorice Pizza* (2021), and of course it’s very written, but it felt more like notes for himself and the actors. You’re seeing how he’s going to direct it. It felt like he was keeping it alive. When we wrote this script *Get On My Shoulders*, which I guess ended up mutating into *Daddy Longlegs* (2009), we were so . . . Bob, I should give you one of the copies of that script.

RR I’ll take it.

JS I had written the script when I was like twenty-one, finished editing when I was twenty-two. We tried to make it but couldn’t get the money. I wrote all the dialogue and tried my hardest to make it feel as improvised as possible on the page. But we just couldn’t get it pro-

duced. A by-product of the failure to get that script produced was a fear that if we tried to make the movie on the page, the movie would die there. So in an effort to keep a film alive, we started to write our scripts in prose. Like it’s alluding to an eventual process of adaptation. It was quite liberating because you can feel the margins. It feels more open to change. It’s collaborative in that way. Ronnie can attest to that.

RR Our aesthetic sprung out of this central axiom that a movie was written while it unspooled in the camera. And therefore, we didn’t want to write too much before the camera was rolling, to protect and ensure immediacy. With *Daddy Longlegs*, everything was written as prose. Returning to *London After Midnight* for a second, it seems to me that there’s a whole section of your collection that falls into the category of material that recovers important content and ideas that never made it into a film, or else no longer exists in the form of a film at all. The only thing we have to go by is the written word.

JS Yeah, it seems like your interest in scripts lies in the omission.

RR Well, it’s true that the least interesting scripts in my collection are final shooting scripts that were faithfully followed by the director. There’s very little to be gleaned from them archivally. The weirdest script I own is one for *Don’t Look Back* (1967), which clearly didn’t produce the movie. It was something that D. A. Pennebaker’s office had to have typed up afterward, probably to try to persuade a distributor to take the film on. Back then, you couldn’t just email a potential exhibitor some clips. Making and sending prints on spec was way too expensive. In the weird department, there was also a script once floating around for *Contempt* (1963). Godard was of course famous as a guy who had no scripts. Right? This one came up for auction in France and sold for some ridiculous amount of money, nearly \$200,000, because nobody had ever seen a Godard script before. But it was perfectly clear that the script was simply written after the fact to get a producer off his back. The definition of an archive is something that creates meaning by its aggregation of elements. This is a

Touch of Evil (1958)

As scripts go, master copies are great ones to have. They are “Frankenstein” scripts, cobbled together with scraps and edits from many different hands, raising tentative possibilities.

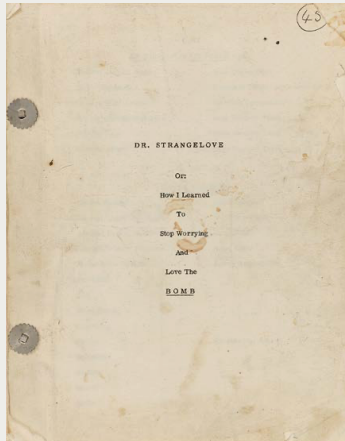
At some point, someone—usually the script supervisor—blends it all together into a final shooting script, but I suspect that this copy, given Welles’s working methods, is more like a real-time working copy of a shooting script than a document that’s final in any simple sense of the word. I’m reminded of the byzantine edits and cut-and-pastes I’ve seen on Balzac’s printer’s proofs, in which he’s frantically editing right up until the thing goes to press. It’s an interesting analogy: master-copy screenplays as the filmic equivalent of an annotated printer’s proof. Except that one ends up as frozen text and the other is dynamic, meant to midwife a coherent series of moving images.

Like most other Welles films, *Touch of Evil*—which until very late in the process was titled *Badge of Evil*, after its 1956 source novel, by Whit Masterson—had a checkered postproduction history. Welles was kicked off the project once filming was complete. The released version was typical studio butchery, although it has been gradually recut and restored over the years to something closer to Welles’s original intentions. You need a road map to navigate all the different versions out there. The scripts help. —RR

144	Planting Bomb.						
EXT. SPANISH	LINCOLN BLOOR SOLAR MICK		1/4	VEHICLE	N		
So. 2							
EXT. BORDER U.S. - MEXICO	MICK SUSAN LINDSEY SLOANE INTEGRATION OFFICIAL- BY CRISMON OFFICIAL- BY		2- 3/8	VEHICLE	N		
So. 1							
Opening at border.							
EXT. MEXICAN OFFICER	SUSAN PABCO SLOANE DRIVER OFFLOCKER PA - EXT OFFLOCKER #2 - EXT		2- 3/8	VEHICLE	N		
So. 1/2, 1/4							
Susan picked up.							
EXT. AMERICAN NATH SUPERVISOR	SCHWARTZ MICK ADAM DOUG WENZIE GUTMAN MARCIA PABCO #2 - EXT		6- 3/4	VEHICLE	N		
So. 1/2 thru 1/4							
Cast arrives to invest- igate explosion.							

Detail of the shooting schedule for *Touch of Evil* (working title *Badge of Evil*), 1958, showing the notation for the movie’s famous opening-sequence tracking shot. Photo: Thomas S. Barratt. Courtesy Robert M. Rubin

Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)



Screenwriter Terry Southern had a hand in a number of cultural touchstones besides this one, including the foundational New Hollywood smash *Easy Rider* (1969).

Southern was clearly instrumental in helping Stanley Kubrick transform a nuclear thriller (*Red Alert* [1958], by Peter George) into a black comedy. Weegee was on the team as set photographer. His photographs memorialized the script’s original pie-fight ending, otherwise lost to history. This brings us to a whole other subgenre of collecting: production stills by well-known photographers: Mary Ellen Mark (*The Missouri Breaks* [1976]) and Dennis Hopper (*Rio Bravo* [1959]) come to mind.

Here Southern is having fun with the characters’ names. You can see how he plundered the list of presidential aides for the Air Force chief’s now-unforgettable name, Buck Turgidson, memorably portrayed by George C. Scott. A big improvement over Buck Shmuck, if you ask me. I should also note that the “sawblade” brads binding this script indicate that this movie was a British production. The Brits used these brads instead of the standard American round brass ones. That’s the bibliophilic angle of collecting this stuff: how it was reproduced, bound, and distributed, not to mention the question of who typed and colored the “rainbow” scripts—so called because of the many different-colored revision pages (each color indicating a different revision date) bound together. They are, after all, some kind of manuscripts, even if they are also just process material along the way to something else. —RR



Left: Title page of Terry Southern’s hand-corrected screenplay for *Dr. Strangelove*, 1964, directed by Stanley Kubrick. Photo: Thomas S. Barratt. Courtesy Robert M. Rubin

Above: A Weegee set photograph of the pie fight originally planned for the ending of *Dr. Strangelove*, 1964. Photo: Weegee (Arthur Fellig)/International Center of Photography/Getty Images

collection of archives that I think will keep film people busy for generations. I’m putting the raw material together and then putting it out there. I’m not relying on a director or actor or whoever to spin self-serving anecdotes or say what happened. I’m finding the goods that, as I like to say, fell off the back of the truck on the way to the screen. “Exformation,” as the artist Agnieszka Kurant calls it.

RR One of the most interesting things to me is to see the late changes in scripts that seem almost offhand, a word change, for example, but what is said then becomes canonical, one of the most remembered lines in the film. You can’t imagine them another way. In your collection, for example, *Touch of Evil* (1958) still being called *Badge of Evil* right up to the end. Or in Terry Southern’s copy of *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), he switches the name of General Buck Shmuck to General Buck Turgidson, one of the all-time great military movie names.

RR In the master copy for *The Searchers* (1956), the last words are: “Ride away?” with a question mark. Of course the ending shot of John Wayne not riding away but just walking through the darkened doorway into the big Western landscape is now burned into our brains. I think that what’s also interesting is to read movie scripts that were never produced by great writers who have had other movies produced.

RB Yeah, there’s a David Lynch script called *Ronnie Rocket*, which somehow fell into my hands when I was maybe sixteen. I could not believe that there was somebody who, in my mind, was a household name, a titan, who couldn’t get a movie made. It was shocking to me. Little did I know!

JS I found the *Vanishing Point* (1971) script fascinating. You watch a movie like that, of course you can feel the existentialism and the influence of Beats, but to see an “in memoriam,” I couldn’t believe that. Inscribed to Dean Moriarty.

RB An in memoriam on a script implies that the writer thinks this intermediary document has some sort of permanent value to it, like a book, a novel.

RR I think it was a reflex for the writer, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who, by the

way, I only knew because I used to be an avid cigar smoker and had read a book he wrote in the ’80s called *Holy Smoke*, which was like a bible of mine. And then later on, I found to my astonishment that this was the same dude who wrote *Vanishing Point* under the pen name Guillermo Cain. And I read *Three Trapped Tigers*, which is his wacko magical realist novel. When I first saw *Vanishing Point*, I thought it was just a fun road movie, and now that I know about the script and Cabrera Infante as a novelist and critic, it has a whole different resonance for me.

JS Scripts nowadays—and I don’t know when this started—have this capitalistic pressure for “commercial” appeal. I don’t know if it’s a by-product of commercial directors becoming big successes in Hollywood or if the studios have become more concerned with marketing, but you no longer just see scripts on their own. They always seem to be accompanied by a “deck.” It’s become an assumption: You write the script and then you have to make a deck. Something that’s supposed to walk people visually through what the thing is. It’s silly, totally silly. But it’s a staple now. I guess it’s the evolution of “this meets that.” So today, it would almost be weird to see a script without an introduction. Now, I’m not reading a thousand scripts, and the ones that do find their way to our company might be more inclined to be “creative,” but it feels pervasive. This top-sheet for the *Vanishing Point* script, albeit with much purer and more artistic intention, feels decades ahead of its time.

RR Which is, in a sense, just an update of the “treatment.” Scripts started out more as blueprints than as polished texts because studio movies were green-lighted in Hollywood on the basis of the treatment. I have a copy of a William Faulkner treatment for *Gunga Din* (1938), which I think he was drunk when he wrote.

RB What does the treatment look like? How is it structured?

RR It’s basically summary of the plot, saying, “Here’s the story,” and then there are some sarcastic asides.

JS Done with the assumption that the folks

reading it don’t have the time to read the whole thing.

RR Exactly. And then Faulkner gets asked to write a “dialogued treatment,” which is the next step. And he’s like, “Oh, something might happen here.” Faulkner’s script for John Ford’s *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939)—a movie for which he received no screenwriting credit—is actually a document that you can read in the larger context of Faulkner studies and see him working out things in the script that later come out in the novels, about the rape of the land and other things, just transposed from the Hudson Valley to Yoknapatawpha County. So it’s interesting to think about what so-called hack work meant for some writers and directors. Faulkner scholars are beginning to read his drafts for movies that weren’t credited to him or didn’t make it to the screen at all. In those years, by the time the script was written, they knew they were already going to make the movie. The script could materialize pretty far along in that process. Then *Easy Rider* (1969) came along and blew everything up. Suddenly Hollywood didn’t know what the hell to do. There were all these people running around with their visionary spec scripts trying to get their movie made.

JS On the subject of hack work, you know, David Lynch directed commercials. Which were him slumming it, in a sense, but of course no true artist ever slums. Someone just sent me his promo for Michael Jackson’s “Dangerous” (1991). And it’s scary. It’s actually very scary. Scary in the exact same way that all good Lynch stuff is. Go and watch his fragrance commercials. They feel very personal ... like he’s thinking of the way perfume seduces him. They’re so romantic but also so artificial. You don’t see that struggle in a lot of other big filmmakers’ commercial work. He was working on what he wanted to do when he took those jobs.

RR In 1988, he shot an Yves Saint Laurent perfume commercial in the Maison de Verre.

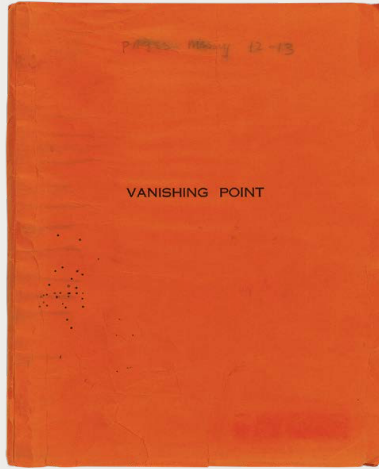
JS Oh my god, really?

RR You can find it online. It’s very Lynchian. There’s no mistaking who made it.

Vanishing Point (1971)

A very arty script for a movie that ended up on the bottom half of Southern drive-in double bills, *Vanishing Point* was written by the Cuban experimental novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929–2005) as Guillermo Cain, a pseudonym chosen in tribute to the great noir novelist James M. Cain. This was Cabrera Infante's only screenplay. It's a great example of a script that's written to evoke and sell a concept for a movie, not a practical blueprint for something already greenlighted. Its opening page has a dedication to Dean Moriarty, the character from *On the Road* based on Neal Cassady. Cassady had just died in 1968, around the time that Cabrera Infante probably started the script. I've seen very few dedications in screenplays (Walter Hill dedicating his screenplay for Sam Peckinpah's *The Getaway* [1972] to Raoul Walsh, director of *High Sierra* [1941], is one). Kowalski's wired hippie is the spawn of Moriarty, but given *Vanishing Point*'s downmarket distribution, that literary reference remained strictly inside baseball.

The foreword is also noteworthy, especially where he uses the word "samples" in discussing music, long before samples were a thing, and talks about using existing songs, rather than a purpose-written soundtrack, as aural counterpoint in dramatic films—something we take for granted in the movies today, post-Scorsese and Tarantino. Speaking of Tarantino, his film *Death Proof* (2007)—my personal favorite among his films—is an homage to this movie and its emblematic white Dodge Challenger. I had a shirt made with the image of its license plate "0A5599, COLORADO 1970," on one sleeve, and that from the Mustang from *Bullitt* (1968), "CALIFORNIA JZ 109," on the other. I also own a breathless 45-rpm radio promo spot for *Vanishing Point*—I notched a trove of these out of a North Carolina radio station that had them going back to the '70s. There were promo spots for cheerleader and nurse exploitation films as well. Normally, I don't go for postproduction or promotional material, but these babies were just too hard to pass up. —RR



Cover of the screenplay for *Vanishing Point*, 1971, directed by Richard C. Sarafian. Photo: Thomas S. Barratt. Courtesy Robert M. Rubin

Gift of the Ages (1993, unrealized)

A material remnant of a born-digital but lost screenplay for a short film never made, *Gift of the Ages*, the story of a boy's tumultuous thirteenth birthday, was sent to Larry Clark by Harmony Korine before they collaborated on *Kids* (1995). Harmony told me he wanted to prove to Clark that he could actually write a movie. The floppy disk or whatever paleo-digital support on which the original document was saved was lost in a house fire. Harmony, like most artists, is a pack rat. He saves everything, but he couldn't save this; the printout he sent to Clark is the only physical copy in existence. One day it should be reunited with his archive, wherever that lands.

I bought the script from Larry Clark. It's an interesting bookend to *London After Midnight*. Its "lost"-ness is of a different century (well, not quite). Paul Schrader and Paul Rubens (Pee Wee Herman) are among those who have reached out to me after hearing that I have stuff of theirs that they don't. Given the ephemerality of this material, it's not surprising that some of it goes AWOL as a movie gets made. I happened to know Harmony already and surprised him with this one. The copyright is his, of course, but the artifact is—at least for the moment—mine. —RR

Drawing by Harmony Korine on the cover of the folder for his first screenplay, *Gift of the Ages*, 1993 (unrealized), which he sent to Larry Clark. Photo: Thomas S. Barratt. Courtesy Harmony Korine and Robert M. Rubin



RK I have a sort of a process question, about scriptwriting, for Josh and Ronnie. I did a talk with Jim Jarmusch about a year and a half ago, and he was talking about how, at least in the really early movies, the scripts came out of fragments of things he collected and wrote down that kind of cohered in the filming: pieces of dialogue that he had; ideas for scenes and characters and settings. Do you both collect string in that way, in daily life, that makes it into final dialogue or action?

RB Like a list of orphaned ideas, waiting to find foster care?

JS Well, maybe just snatches of dialogue that occur to you or an idea for something a character could do. Things that don't really have any home when they come to your mind and then they end up falling into a scene in a movie you're making.

RB We do it all the time, but they only find their way in organically. It almost never works when you cram them in with blunt force.

JS [Holding up a notebook page.] This is a potential scene with dialogue in it. It has not yet made its way into a movie, but it could. I think you'd be hard-pressed to find any writer or writer/director who doesn't overhear something on the street and write it down on a pretty consistent basis.

RB It's not really our approach, though, to take disparate bits and try to string them together. We work very hard to create a conceptual, theoretical clothesline. Wait, Josh is shaking his head a little.

JS [Laughing.] The truth is that we will find ourselves receiving texts from one another all the time saying, "This just happened to me. File it. We have to put it in a movie somewhere."

RB Ok, yes, that's the truth. But it goes into a kind of waiting room. You understand? It goes into a foyer and it sits and it waits, like the waiting room at jury duty, where you might not be called in at all.

JS Ronnie and I have a script that we'll never make. It's only a collection of ideas. It's the two-liter-soda-and-candy-side of our process. It's called *Pizza Me*. It's just a collection of . . .

RB It's exclusively those orphaned ideas that

we bat back and forth, strung together with no context.

JS It's a collection of the most surreal, ridiculous tangents that spin off relevant ideas. It's really a way not to write. If someone were to actually make *Pizza Me*, it would be the most insane thing ever.

RB Even the title, *Pizza Me*, is a misappropriation of "You want a piece of me?"

RK Oh, I thought it was, maybe, somebody walks into a pizza joint and says, "Pizza me!"

RB [Laughing.] No, because there would be a logic to that!

RK In your collecting, Bob, I know you said you don't have any chronological limitations and you have three overarching themes. But are there any rules you follow?

RR One thing I do is rate things along a conceptual continuum between the archival and the artifactual. So, for example, I have John Wayne's working copy of *The Searchers*. It's 100 percent artifactual because there's none of his handwriting on it. It's a final shooting script, basically what you see on the screen. The Duke is very methodical; he folds over every page of his script when the scene is done. But that has no archival value. It's an artifact. It's like Steve McQueen's Tag Heuer wristwatch, right? You can buy any number of great vintage examples of that watch for \$5,000. Or you can buy the one he owned and wore for a couple million at auction. That's the artifact. Against that, you have scripts that have no collectible value, but they have information that adds to the value of the archive. I tend to be more on the archival side, although I'm not averse to having some cool artifacts. I just bought Sally Struthers's working copy of the episode of *All in the Family* that Sammy Davis Jr. appears in (1972). It's great but it's essentially artifactual. I'm a huge Sammy Davis Jr. fan, and I grew up with Archie Bunker. As far as collecting rules go, you know, as with any kind of collecting, the more you buy, the more you pay on time and don't dick people around, the more they come to you with better and better stuff. So the entire picker ecosystem for entertainment

memorabilia knows that my guy has a guy, and that it's cash on the barrelhead. No stress, right?

RK You're getting the best drugs.

RB Is your collection the biggest of its kind?

RR It's the biggest of its kind because it's probably the only one, or one of the few of its kind, that's thematic. The other collections tend to be acquisitions by libraries and institutions that focus on particular directors or writers. The Harry Ransom Center in Texas has the David O. Selznick archive and the De Niro archive, the Lilly Library at Indiana University has Welles and Ford . . .

RB Do you have a private collector nemesis?

RR Well, the other day I was bidding for Ben Johnson's working copy of *The Wild Bunch* (1969). I have all kinds of *Wild Bunch* material. I have three or four different scripts and I have set photographs. I even have Peckinpah's early TV Western scripts. That's how much of a Peckinpah completist I am. But I wanted Ben Johnson's working copy. I thought I'd have to pay three, four, five thousand for it, maybe six or seven. I dropped out at fourteen because I realized this other bidder really, really wanted it. I'm dying to know who that could be and what his angle is. I'm starting to get pipped at the post on stuff that surprises me. Everybody has always wanted material from *The Godfather*, *Apocalypse Now*, Casablanca, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz* and the like. But a premium of ten grand over the market value of a generic *Wild Bunch* shooting script because it was Ben's? I don't get it. A so-called lined copy of *The Elephant Man*, used by the film editor to put together the movie, just went for \$32,000 over a high estimate of \$5,000. More people are starting to get into the game.

JS Someone once told me the smartest thing you can do is invest in the 20th century. I asked what that meant and he said, "Buy the physical proof that the 20th century existed." Because who knows what comes next.

RR It's pretty good advice. I've been working at it for years now.