



PREVIEWS & EVENTS

Natural Born Killers

Natural Born Killers follows married couple Mickey (Harrelson) and Mallory (Lewis) across the desert of New Mexico as they embark on an endless killing spree, and in the process become media stars. Unsurprisingly controversial at the time, *Natural Born Killers* is a powerful viewing experience and remains an accomplished and innovative piece of cinema that will keep you talking about it long after the credits have rolled.

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Having completed his Vietnam trilogy with the turgid and perfunctory *Heaven and Earth* (1993), a far more classical film centred on the true-life story of a Vietnamese woman, the wife of a traumatised veteran, and her construction of a business empire over in the US, Stone returned to formal excess with his hugely controversial and exciting 1994 film *Natural Born Killers*.

Based on a story and script by Quentin Tarantino, the film has historically been approached superficially as a moralistic and grandstanding piece about the detrimental, desensitising impact of TV entertainment, pop culture and violent movies. Indeed, it developed into something of a self-fulfilling prophecy when the film became the centre of controversy and fierce debate around the ethics of screen violence and the potentially harmful impact on viewers in the 1990s. The UK went so far as to halt its home entertainment distribution for some years.

If the idea of violent art – and, in particular, violent art engaged in its own playful discourse around violence in art – falling foul of a climate of narrow-minded censoriousness and priggish moralising seems very familiar right about now, then it speaks as much to Stone's prescience as a filmmaker and the enduring resonance of his work as it does to history repeating itself.

Natural Born Killers also endures because of its sense of freshness and experimentation with regard to viewer sensation. With the film's visual and sonic language – an onslaught of mixed media, animation, frenetic cutting, bizarre abstraction and in-camera effects, coupled with a thunderously loud sound design and rock score – so clearly intended to approximate its central characters' fractured, damaged subjectivity and warped behaviour, Stone's control of form is undeniable, in spite, or rather because of the mania of the film style. It is also a remarkably funny and entertaining film, showcasing thrillingly excessive performances from the likes of Robert Downey Jr and Tommy Lee Jones in supporting roles, and of course the superb coupling of Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis as the young killers Mickey and Mallory.

Paul Ridd, bfi.org.uk, 28 August 2019

I don't know of a movie that has made me more ambivalent, more undecided and more uncertain in my reaction than *Natural Born Killers*. As an experience for the average viewer, the blood-stained road-movie story of Mickey and Mallory is numbingly familiar, the satirical attacks on media and prisons pedestrian and all too easy. As actual filmmaking, the visuals of the film are rushed, awkward. There is no 'viewpoint' towards the killer-protagonists consistently and intelligibly assembled, and so the usual defensive arguments – that the film exploits the issues about violence it purportedly deals with – have some measure of truth. By almost every regular criterion *Natural Born Killers* is a failure as a work of art. Yet it is the film released by Hollywood in

1994 that most deserves serious support, respect and admiration. Oliver Stone, without entirely knowing how or why, went for it. He dared to put his deepest rage on screen. All of us who live and work in Hollywood stand abashed, first at how he manoeuvred himself into a position to do it, and second at how far he was willing to go; what he was willing to risk, what he was willing to question.

How can a film be 'bad' in the ways listed above, and be 'important' and necessary in other ways? It's confounding. It reveals contradictions within the very framework of how we try to talk about films. But this is the film's 'importance'. *Natural Born Killers* is one of the few Hollywood films that forces us to come to it, after a while, on its terms.

Everyone knows the imitation *Badlands/Bonnie and Clyde/Gun Crazy* plot of *NBK* by now, that is unless they haven't cared about Hollywood action cinema of the last three decades. Everyone knows that Stone pasted onto the basic situation a kind of Zolaesque allegory in the third act, where the punk killers Mickey and Mallory inspire a bloody prison revolt thereby acting out what *TV is Doing To American Society*. What five minutes of *NBK* tells us is that accounts of the stories and the characters' psychologies, these conventional ways of describing a movie, are all beside the point. Every attempt to describe this film, or admire it, in naturalistic vocabulary, or to explore the sensations that the garish rapid montage sequences produce, also misses the mark. *NBK* is not a meaningful disquisition on the impulse to be violent, nor is it an analysis of the role that media plays in making us more violent. Rather *NBK* is a film about film. It is Oliver Stone duelling with the recent history of the movie image. It is an attempt to look at how an 'image culture' has taken over from immediate experience. Violence is a secondary symptom of a primary disease, the sheer pollution of representational imagery.

Stone's decisive energy and will to subvert are directed against the Hollywood deal itself, the unholy pact between commercial cinema's practices, and the audience's jaded appetites. The film demands that the audience question all regular modes of identification, and all reality of character and situation. This is done as resolutely as anything by Bresson or late Godard or experimentalists like Stan Brakhage and Michael Snow. A brief exposure to Stone's aggressive montage style tells us that we're not in Kansas anymore. We're in a radically disjunctive universe where image, action, and sensation are divorced from the narrative armature of cause and effect.

NBK begins with a detailed shot-by-shot reconstruction of the opening sequence from *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*; it ends with the phrase 'Let's make some music, Colorado,' thereby invoking *Rio Bravo*, one of Tarantino's favourite action movies. All of *NBK* is freighted with and at war with Hollywood action cinema. (Stone's own films such as *Scarface* – which he scripted – and *Platoon* are even invoked as part of the sea of visual shit.) What Stone wants somehow to do is slough off his Hollywood identity with this movie. He wants, in some deeply tormented way, to annihilate the shell of Hollywood norms that have heretofore controlled his own and everyone else's careers. This is an aspiration that everyone who works in Hollywood understands: the desire to make a film about characters who are not palatable, to deal with emotions and situations that cannot be resolved positively, to leave the regular, three act, psychologically motivated story structure behind and finally, if you follow the logic, to question the whole of conventional representation.

Larry Gross, *Sight and Sound*, March 1995

NATURAL BORN KILLERS

Directed by: Oliver Stone
©: Warner Bros. Productions, Monarchy Enterprises B.V.
Presented by: Warner Bros.
Presented in association with: Regency Enterprises, Alcor Films
Production Companies: Ixtlan, New Regency Films
In association with: J D Productions
Executive Producers: Arnon Milchan, Thom Mount
Produced by: Jane Hamsher, Don Murphy, Clayton Townsend
Co-producer: Brand Vossler
Associate Producers: Risa Bramon-Garcia, Richard Rutowski
Unit Production Manager: Leeann Stonebreaker
Controller: Barbara Ann Stein
Location Manager: Jacolyn J. Baker
Post-production Supervisor: Bill Brown
2nd Unit Director: Philip Pfeiffer
1st Assistant Director: Herb Gains
Script Supervisors: Barbara Stoia, Deirdre Horgan
Casting: Risa Bramon-Garcia, Billy Hopkins, Heidi Levitt
Screenplay by: David Veloz, Richard Rutowski, Oliver Stone
Story by: Quentin Tarantino
Director of Photography: Robert Richardson
First Assistant Camera: Gregor Tavenner
First Assistant Camera (Chicago): Robert C. Carlson
Key Grip: Chris Centrella
Visual Effects by: PDI
Special Effects: Steve Luport, Frank L. Pope, Jim Schwalm, Lucinda Strub
Animation Sequences by: Colossal Pictures
Edited by: Hank Corwin, Brian Berdan
First Assistant Editor: Thomas J. Nordberg
Production Designer: Victor Kempster
Property Master: Charles Stewart
Costume Designer: Richard Hornung
Assistant Costume Designers: Mark Bridges, Mary Zophres
Special Effects Make-up and Key Make-up: Matthew W. Mungle
Special Effects Make-up: Gordon J. Smith
Hair Designer: Cydney Cornell
Titles and Opticals by: Pacific Title
Colour Timer: David Orr
Associate Music Supervisor: Sylvia Nestor
Executive Music Producer: Budd Carr
Music Editors: Alex Gibson, Carlton Kaller
Sound Mixer: David MacMillan
Boom Operator: Steve Bowerman
Re-recording Mixers: Tom Fleischman, Michael Minkler, Christian Minkler
Supervising Sound Editors: Michael Wilhoit, Wylie Stateman
Dubbing Editor: Kelly Oxford
Sound Editors: Jeff Watts, Robert Batha
Supervising Dialogue Editors: Dan Rich
Sound Effects Editors: Randy Kelley, Mark A. Lanza, Joseph Phillips, Peter J. Lehman
Stunt Co-ordinator: Phil Neilson
Technical Adviser: Capt. Dale Dye (ret) USMC
Dialogue Coach: Nadia Venesse
Animal Wranglers (Southwest): Tom Berto, Rick Little

Cast

Woody Harrelson (Mickey Knox)
Juliette Lewis (Mallory Knox)
Robert Downey Jr (Wayne Gale)
Tommy Lee Jones (Dwight McClusky)
Tom Sizemore (Jack Scagnetti)
Rodney Dangerfield (Mallory’s dad)
Russell Means (old Indian)
Pruitt Taylor Vince (Kavanaugh)
Joe Grifasi (Duncan Homolka)
Edie McClurg (Mallory’s mom)
Kirk Baltz (Roger)
Marshall Bell (deputy 1)
Everett Quinton (Wurlitzer)
O-Lan Jones (Mabel)
Ed White (pinball cowboy)
Richard Lineback (Sonny)
Lanny Flaherty (Earl)
Carol-Renee Modrall (short order cook)
Sean Stone (Kevin)
Jerry Gardner (work boss 1)
Helen Caffrey (work boss 2)
Leon Skyhorse Thomas (work boss 3)
Corey Everson (TV Mallory)
Dale Dye (Dale Wrigley)
Eddy ‘Doogie’ Conna (Gerald Nash)
Evan Handler (David)
Terrylene (Julie)
Maria Pitillo (Deborah)
Josh Richman (soundman)
Matthew Faber (kid 1)
Jamie Herrold (kid 2)
Jake Beecham (kid 3)
Saemi Nakamura (Japanese kid 1)
Seiko Yoshida (Japanese kid 2)
Jared Harris (London boy)
Katharine McQueen (London girl)
Salvator Xuereb (French boy 1)
Natalie Karp (French girl)
Emmanuel Xuereb (French boy 2)
Jessie Rutowski (young girl)
Sally Jackson (Mickey’s mom)
Phil Neilson (Mickey’s dad)
Brian Barker (young Mickey)
Corinna Laszlo (Emily, hostage in motel)
Balthazar Getty (gas station attendant)
Red West (cowboy sheriff)
Gerry Runnels (Indian cop)
Jeremiah Bitsui (young Indian boy)
Lorraine Ferris (Pinky)
Glen Chin (druggist)
Saemi Nakamura (Japanese reporter)
Steven Wright (Dr Emil Reingold)
Peter Crombie (intense cob)
John M. Watson Sr (black inmate)
Douglas Crosby (Mallory’s guard 1)
Carl Ciarfallo (Mallory’s guard 2)
Melinda Renna (Antonia Chavez)
Jim Carrane (Smithy)
Bob Swan (Napalaton)
Louis Lombardi (Sparky)
Robert Jordan (WGN newscaster)

USA 1994
119 mins

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