

*Still from Waking Life.*

## Review by Megan Spencer, 2002

WARNING! Incoming: rave review.

Films like *Waking Life* don't come along very often, but when they do it's a blessing sent from the film gods.

*Waking Life* is the new feature by American indie director, Richard Linklater. The native Texan kicked off his movie career with the iconic *Slacker* (1991) just over a decade ago. Since, he has followed with the immaculate 70s high school movie *Dazed and Confused* (1993) - who could forget Matthew McConaughey's hapless and hilarious 'Wooderson'? Then *Before Sunrise* (1995) - characters Jesse and Celine also pop up in *Waking Life* - and *SubUrbia* (1996), another intelligent teen movie, this time set around a convenience store.

*Waking Life* is Linklater's most technically ambitious film to date, a film where his talents as a motion picture artist, writer and astute collaborator come to the fore. *Waking Life* is a hybrid film - a celluloid/video fusion - which is part fiction/part documentary; part live-action/part animation; part digital video/part film animation, and part movie/part waking dream.

Having conceived the project before he was a filmmaker, Linklater achieved his dreams with *Waking Life* by shooting a feature film quickly and cheaply on digital video. He edited it "at home" with Final Cut Pro on his Apple G4, then handed it over to his friend and artistic collaborator Bob Sabiston. Who in turn unleashed 31 eager animators onto the footage.

Using Sabiston's specially developed rotoscope software (something he developed for MTV), the animators filtered Linklater's live action footage through their individual artistic frameworks, distorting, interpreting and embellishing the images so they would become larger than life. The results are sublime, dreamy, and somewhere 'in between' everything we know about everything.

Linklater's movies are often deemed "talky". It is true; he has a deep attachment to words and wisdom as evidenced in the predominantly dialogue-driven *Before Sunrise* (1995) and *Slacker* (1991). *Waking Life* too is a film filled with big ideas (and people talking about them), with only a loose semblance of a story holding it all together.

We met Wiley Wiggins as a teen in *Dazed & Confused*; in *Waking Life* he is all grown up and sound asleep.

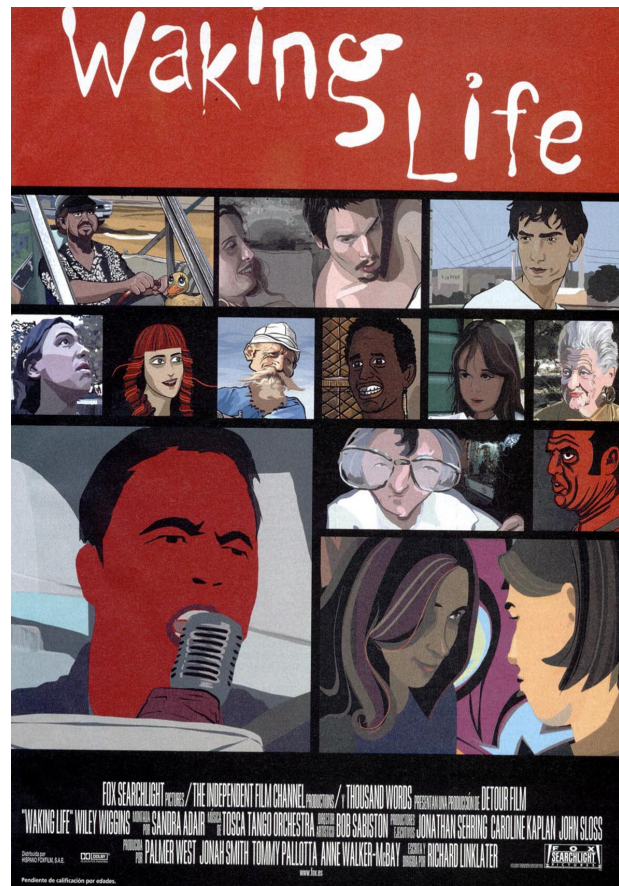
Here his character – the as unnamed 'Main Character' - is in a permanent dream state.

He floats around the world observing human interactions, randomly bumping into "punter" (actors, intellectuals, buddies, street strangers and terse people), all across the various urban locations of a comic book 'every city'.

These characters - which may or may not be figments of his imagination - talk in their own way and at their own pace about the nature of dreams and life itself.

And Cinema. Freedom. Existence. God. All the important stuff.

The above might sound like someone's idea of movie hell, not the cinema utopia I'm trying to conjure up. But that's where *Waking Life* is ingenious.



Viewers are free to pick and choose what they tune into - and what they *tune out of*. The luscious images and total strangeness of this viewing experience are compelling enough to see even the harshest academic snob through the duration.

Words meld with images in *Waking Life* to become a superb "stream of unconsciousness" where you're never quite sure what is 'real' and what is not. The characters also have an uncanny knack of commenting on how we are feeling while we are watching it. 'The film' seems to be conscious of what it is doing to the audience. This film is testament to Linklater's prowess as a writer/director, and firmly cements him as one of America's most exciting, interesting and progressive filmmakers.

*Waking Life* is a living breathing painting and the closest you might ever get to dreaming with your eyes open (without imbibing). It's poetry in motion, fun, oh – and guaranteed to do your head in.

Visit Richard Linklater's [website](#)

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