

Michel Gondry Dialogue with Jonathan Rosenbaum, 2007

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

We're at the Walker Art Center for a Regis Dialogue with filmmaker Michel Gondry. We'll be talking about his love of cinema, his humor and his artistic vision. Michel Gondry's films, from his music videos to his feature films, employ technical wizardry involving various kinds of special effects, animation and intricate narrative set-ups. He leaves plenty of room for his playfulness and irreverent satire.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I'm Jonathan Rosenbaum of the Chicago Reader, and I will be your guide through Michel Gondry's work. We'll now begin the Regis Dialogue with Michel Gondry.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Thank you all for coming. This is the second time I'm doing a Regis Dialogue. The first time was 14 years ago with Jim Jarmusch and it's worth mentioning that ... Well, first that Jim Jarmusch has been a friend of mine for 25 years. Michel, I met 10 minutes ago. He's had a very difficult day. He got caught in New York traffic and had I believe three separate trips to the airport, so I'll try to make my questions not too difficult.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I think one thing that's really interesting though about the connection with Jim Jarmusch is, first of all, Jim is a big fan of his work and I believe that you've worked with Jim Jarmusch.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah, we met through The White Stripes. We both did a remix of this song, Blue Orchid, from their last album and we did a mock up of that cover with him and I. I guess I was playing the role of Meg and he was Jack.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Anyway, to me it's an interesting kind of connection because Jim is very much a minimalist and I would call you a maximalist in terms of ... Although you both come from music actually, which is also interesting too. I mean Jim was a musician before he started making films.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I wanted to start actually in terms of the questions by asking you something about your musical background because you come from a musical family, I think born in Versailles. Is that correct?

Michel Gondry:

Correct.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Your father, your mother and I think other members of your family are all musicians. Is that correct?

Michel Gondry:

Yes, at different levels. My mom was teaching flute and playing the piano. My dad was a big jazz fan and he was playing some piano. My grandfather was an inventor, invented some ancestor of the synthesizer. It's funny because in the new video of The White Stripes, you can see Jack playing on it. He used it. It's called a Clavioline. It's a very small synthesizer and he invented it in 1949. So yeah, I had this very creative background when I grew up.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

You basically were a drummer or are a drummer.

Michel Gondry:
Yeah. I don't know why people laugh at that.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
Well, my impression is that you made your start as a drummer in a band called Oui Oui.

Michel Gondry:
Yes.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
And you started making music videos of that band.

Michel Gondry:
Yeah. Well, in fact we made ... With Oui Oui, which is spelled like "yes yes" in French, we met in art school so we were-

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
Where did you go to art school?

Michel Gondry:
Sorry?

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
Where was-

Michel Gondry:
Well, we started at school, like high school. It was a high school art school in a suburb of Paris, and then we moved into higher art at school in 1980. The good thing with art school was I got to meet people with the same artistic orientation than me coming from different backgrounds. When you grow up in a small ...

Michel Gondry:
Versailles is a very conservative, small town also. I don't think we were conservative in my family but you meet people who have the same background, coming from the same place but with different tastes. When you go into art school, you meet with people who come from different places but with the same taste, which is interesting because you have the richness of people coming from different backgrounds and different parts of France, but all liking music or liking art. So, I think art school got this great quality to me that allowed me to meet friends that I still have to this day.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
Were you also a cinephile?

Michel Gondry:
Not necessarily. I liked film. I remember liking Charlie Chaplin when I was very young and something, but not on any technical level. I became more cinephile when I had a roommate, which was a friend when I moved in Paris who's called Jean-Louis Bompont who eventually became a DP and did the film *The Science of Sleep*.

Michel Gondry:
He had a tremendous collection of French films from the early age to the '60s, and he was very-- He was only three years older than me he seemed to be always in his 50s for some reason. He had a great collection of film and he let me explore it and really stimulated my knowledge in this department.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
Well, what was it that led to you making your first videos of the band?

Michel Gondry:

Well, initially I saw my friend... Actually, to come back, my dad had the Super 8 camera and I've done some experimentation a little bit when I was a kid but not really something serious. But I always liked animation. I would do flip books and when I was starting to do film with my friend, I realized I was doing most of the work on it.

Michel Gondry:

Just because he had the camera he would call himself the director so I went to a flea market, I find this great camera. It's called a Bolex, 16 millimeter, which it's very simple. It's mechanical and you can rewind the film, do it frame by frame, super imposed, do a lot of visual experimentation, and I started to experiment.

Michel Gondry:

It was natural for me to use the music of my band to illustrate my experimentation, my little stories. It started more using my band as illustration and then it switched around when I more illustrated the music of the band.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I see. I haven't seen the earliest videos but I'm wondering if the fact that you were a drummer... In other words, if you tended to edit on the beat very much. If it's--

Michel Gondry:

Yeah.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yeah.

Michel Gondry:

I had this problem. To me, when I started to edit myself, my own videos on the ... To me, it was not an alternative to edit on the beat and I find it very limited because, you see, the beat is a dot on the line, so you've all ... The line, you have much more opportunity and it's really restrictive and I had to let go of [french] goes to work with an editor.

Michel Gondry:

Later on, when I did video like Star Guitar for the Chemical Brothers or The White Stripes Hardest Button to Button that we're going to see later, I came back to that but that was really on purpose. But in the beginning, I was a little lost with that. If it was not on the beat, I felt something was wrong and I obviously realized that it was wrong because it was very stiff.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

In a way it's almost like whether you were playing accompaniment or solo too with the music because it's... Or it seems little bit like that because sometimes playing against the beat is a way of contributing to the piece, so to speak, in terms of editing with different rhythms.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah. If you compare to music, I would say cutting in the beat would be more being the bass, so you have to emphasize on the bar basically and if you cut in between as the action goes out really with ignoring the beat a little bit. It's more like being the solo in some ways. You're more floating and I think that's what's necessary.

Michel Gondry:

Let's say if there would be like a heavy disco music when we walk on the stage, it would be tempting to walk on the beat, but then you feel like an idiot because you're walking like a catwalk. I don't know if you noticed, but when there is a party with very loud music, when people walk in and they feel like the center of attention, you want to avoid that, to walk on the beat because you don't want to look like a top model or something. I guess when I was editing in the beginning, I had to learn this process to work outside of the beat.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I should add, by the way, that I'm sort of in a different position from most of the people, I think, here in the sense that I think most of the people here was introduced to your work through your music videos, where I was introduced to your work through your features and then recently started going back and basically becoming acquainted with your videos. I still have a lot more I'd want to see.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

My impression, it was one or more of these videos that Bjork saw that led to you working with her. Is that right?

Michel Gondry:

Yes. She just had recorded her first solo album in probably '93. Yeah, I remember because I was 30 and she was ... I was 30 and she was 27. We had the birthday during the shooting. She came to do the photo cover with the photographer Jean-Baptiste Mondino and she had seen this video that I'd done for my band.

Michel Gondry:

The song was called "La Ville" and she received all this table, that was the only one that caught her attention, so she wanted to meet with me and then when we met, she saw... Basically what happened is I did the small video for my band. I did six in all. The three first were really minimalistic and they were really, as I was saying, animation on which I would use my band to do score basically.

Michel Gondry:

Those video, people would see them but they were about us being as insect or being as puppet and it was very ... We were trying to take a piece of the medium of being in a video because we didn't like the pop star culture and all this kind of stuff.

Michel Gondry:

So, when I tried to get a job for the band, people said, "Oh yeah. Those videos are great but I don't want to be an insect." I remember an early conversation with Mick Jagger to his video and he didn't want to be an insect. I had to put that on the side to work on more conventional style.

Michel Gondry:

But when Bjork came to visit me in Paris, I show her this early work and she was the first person honestly to really appreciate this work I have done before, although my friends were supportive and my family but I could never put them in festivals because they were a little amateurish.

Michel Gondry:

It was more about the energy and when I got some idea, I just wanted to try it out. I didn't want to pay the... I mean, in festival admission, it's a lot of work. I remember the film that were getting attention, film that were done over a year for two minutes. I would never have the patience.

Michel Gondry:

But when she saw the film, she was completely... She couldn't stop laughing and it's interesting that I realized that it was actually more funny than I imagined, and it's a good feeling in some ways.

Michel Gondry:

That's how we met basically and we started to talk. I remember over a lunch, we talked about animals and she ... From these videos, you saw that was our first meeting. She wanted to have the human behavior represented by animals instead of human beings, and so a sort of fairytale like the Little Red Rider...

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Riding Hood?

Michel Gondry:
Yes. Sorry.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
At least I've heard that some people say that some of it is derived from Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Is that true or not?

Michel Gondry:
Not true. No. I think-

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
That's what it says on Wikipedia, anyway.

Michel Gondry:
Okay. It has to be-

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
But you never can be sure with Wikipedia. Sorry.

Michel Gondry:
No. The bear came from her. I was thinking of a wolf and she mentioned the bear because she was obsessed with bears, but she was obsessed with white bears. My wolf was black, so we end up with a brown bear. Not compromised, very combined but I know influential for me was "Hedgehog in the Fog" which is a wonderful admission piece by Yuri Norstein.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
Oh.

Michel Gondry:
What was interesting by meeting Bjork is we both were sort of anti-Walt Disney this day and we grew up watching mostly Russian or Eastern European animation and we liked how story would take time to be told, how it was poetic and a lot of texture.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
One thing that intrigues me is the fact that another filmmaker who started out in animation and went to live action was David Lynch.

Michel Gondry:
Mm-hmm.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:
But of course, he came from painting rather than music. But I think that it seems to me that... At least my sense is that there's still a feeling that's close to animation in the earlier music videos in some ways. Although, it's kind of hard to put my finger on what makes it like animation but I think it's a kind of... Maybe the sense of artificial movement in a certain way that makes it like that.

Michel Gondry:
Well, I think I gradually incorporated human being into a world I started to create. The first film I did was just object and then I wanted to show my fellow musician, so I put them in room that would intercut easily with a world I had created with these little character. So, maybe when you see the video, you can really feel that.

Michel Gondry:
It's not a live action where there is little gaps for animation. It's animation where there is little gap for live action.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yes. One of the things that is already clear from this video, which you've already seen, is just how complicated your plots are. I mean, it's amazing to me how much you can actually get into such small space of time. That's why, in a sense, I was thinking of you as a maximalist instead of a minimalist because of just the number of plot strands that are going on in each of your music videos.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I mean, it's fairytales and it's other things as well. I think there's... Am I right? Yeah because I didn't see it too clearly now, but there's a Soviet flag on the moon.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah, it's funny when I would watch it from the video back in the room. I was thinking, "Why I put these flags there?" I would come in front of this crowd and maybe this question will be asked. Should I come up with an answer? But I remember, first of all, there is a lot of plots but a lot is coming from just conversation with Bjork.

Michel Gondry:

I think what we do is we put all on the table and then my job was to collect the pieces and try to find a story that will match. It will be hard to tell you exactly how each element came. but what I know is everything was sincere and not derivative. I think it's how you end up to feel honest and to feel [inaudible].

Michel Gondry:

I don't know the most circulating... At the time, I just probably learned that the moth at night, they turn around the light because they used to fly by having the moon on their left. That's how they get their orientation, so if you put them next to electric light, their genetic component is not equipped to discern that the lamp is not infinite, so if they keep on their left, they going to run like that.

Michel Gondry:

I was running this kind of principle in my head, crossing with fairytale and the scary mood in the forest, so all that mixed together. What's interesting when you work like that is you start a lot of streams of story and at the end, they can really cross very well and kind of solve each other in a natural way.

Michel Gondry:

My explanation today when I saw the Soviet Union flag was I thought probably I always thought it's a little rude for the American people when they step on the moon to put the American flag. They should've put the Earth flag or something like that. As well, maybe I thought at that the time that... It was just the end of the Communist regime there and everything, so that was like...

Michel Gondry:

When you put a flag on the moon, it's going to stay forever and it would be interesting to put the Soviet Flag knowing that it would be the last time you see it, only it would be there left on the moon. All sorts of things. I guess, I just-

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I thought of the fact that Iceland is maybe close to the Soviet Union too, but I don't...

Michel Gondry:

I don't think of it this way. Maybe unconsciously, we're anti-Walt Disney, although I like Walt Disney. In fact, I love many of the cartoon that he did. I don't know, it's interesting because Bjork is very... On one hand, she's very specific and we have very strong conversation but whenever I ask about that, I guess we are both happy that in some way we're somewhat controversial, on a small level.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

One thing that really fascinated me in this documentary about you, *I've Been 12 Forever*, which many of you have seen actually in this series, is that you say at one point that you actually don't feel you have to understand all the lyrics of the songs that you do videos for. In fact, if I understand you correctly, it almost helps if you don't know all the words.

Michel Gondry:

Well, what happened is when I moved to... I was terrible at English at school. You can hear now, I have more of a vocabulary but my pronunciation is really terrible. To me, somebody who speak English, French who speak English with English-American accent, it's a different type of personality than the one I have. It's somebody that's much more outgoing.

Michel Gondry:

Anyway, I really hardly spoke any English when I moved and I started to work with English or American artists. Basically, I learned to follow conversation by capturing certain words and making my own reality little bit on the side. Basically, the first thing you have to find out is when somebody tell you something and when somebody ask you a question.

Michel Gondry:

Because if somebody tell you something, you can't just go, "Yes, yes, yes." Then when the question comes, if it's like, "What color do you want?", you can't say yes, you have to say a color. You have to pay attention to hear the color. Then another thing to learn is when the subjects change and that's the hardest part when you're inferring because you're speaking about civilization and then suddenly you're speaking about Janet Jackson or whatever.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

One thing that makes it seem appropriate though is that when you choose certain words and ignore others, than in a way, it's condensing the song. In a sense, the kind of world that you deal with so much is like dreams and dreams always involve condensation of some kind.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah, and it's certainly true what you say but it can go even deeper in some ways and I'm not sure I have the knowledge to really define that, but by picking up some words, those are the words that we echo into something personal inside me. On the principle of dreams, it's a little bit the same. You going to capture some amount of what happened in your day or in your memory and the one that matters are equal to something else.

Michel Gondry:

It's going to be realizing to the dream, so I think it's a similar way of functioning. But I remember talking for a long time with Dave Grohl about his video. Actually, I think we're going to see it later, Everlong.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yes.

Michel Gondry:

I interpreted his song by picking out the words I understood and I recreated the story and they told me the story was much closer to what he had in mind. That's the story he wrote. In fact, I would come back to his initial feeling by coincidence because when somebody writes in sort of a poetry or a style of a poetry, they just pick words that mean something and then wave it into some more abstraction because you don't want to be too explicit in your lyrics or will be a little flat.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yep. This seems like a good segue into looking at Everlong.

Michel Gondry:
Thank you.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

To me, this is a perfect example about how much can be packed into a music video. It just seems like there are at least three or four dreams that are going on in this. There's a bit, if I'm not mistaken, of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Is that possible?

Michel Gondry:

Mm-hmm. It's funny because I never was a big fan of those movies but when I started to work on this video, I looked into that and I kind of explored and I didn't watch horror. I remember watching one, there's a guy, the one with the hand.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yes, which turns up in *Science of Sleep*, the big hand.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah, yeah. After this video, I started to write the premise of the *Science of Sleep*, the idea to choose a couple that are sharing the same dream and interaction between dreams. I started from there.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

One question I've been wanting to ask you a lot and it's... One thing that's so remarkable about these videos, you almost think that you think of something and then you spend all this time trying to figure out how to achieve it. Does it happen very often that you have an idea and you can't achieve it? That you don't come up with a solution?

Michel Gondry:

The failure comes a lot of time about schedule with people. We nearly didn't do this video for stupid reason because Dave Grohl didn't want to be with the girl in the bed. It's more this kind of... Technically, there is always a solution. I don't know if you noticed for instance but in the previous video when Bjork was flying in the sky and then she jumped on the tree, it's very difficult to...

Michel Gondry:

When I did the storyboard, I was like, "Oh, I don't think I'm going to be able to have her flying and then jump on the tree." But then just a cut and she's on the tree and that's it.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yeah.

Michel Gondry:

I mean, in the worst case scenario, I would do a jump cut so there is always a solution. But I remember this is the first video, maybe the second, probably the first video I shot when I moved to Los Angeles. I lived there bunch of years, three, four years and I remember you had this catalog where you had the backdrops, called a translate which are images big like this screen and with photo and you have a view from a building, view in the forest, view outside a window, at night.

Michel Gondry:

You could pick any photo and they could deliver and then you can build your stage in front of the photo. The video I did for Bjork, it's the first time I used back projection which you could shoot animation and then project on same side of screen and then add your actor moving.

Michel Gondry:

Sometimes to me, the excitement, it's as trivial as, "Oh, what am I going to do? I'm going to use these big images

and create the whole video without leaving the stage." Whether we're indoors or outside and I have this big picture to use to start from. Sometimes, it seems very mundane but sometimes this give me the kick to start to create the world.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Right, it's similar to the way that elements of the song would too, also.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yeah. Was this one of the more difficult ones to do? I mean, apart from getting somebody to get into bed but I mean... I'm just wondering which ones in particular you found more difficult.

Michel Gondry:

I have to say that they are all extremely difficult. There is always a moment where we had to stall the shooting. Generally the shooting is over two days average and there is always a moment in the middle of the second day I realize I have my shot list which is like that, let's say, and we are still there.

Michel Gondry:

I've done every single shot here and I wasted, I spent three quarter of my time and I did one quarter and I have to find a way to go through that and my producer comes on and say, "Well, do you need that? You need that." It's never comfortable, never easy. Every video I see, I remember the pain.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

One thing that I found fascinating when I read was that you said that you preferred not to use digital effects because of the... When people are performing in them, they're not participating as much if you're getting these effects digitally.

Michel Gondry:

Well, the first video we had here, everybody would tell me, "No, you have to use a blue screen," and I had done many blue screens before that. Each time producer or technician would tell me, "No, you don't do back projection anymore. It's how you do it," and every time, I would say, "Okay, fine. I do with with blue screen."

Michel Gondry:

Then this time, I said, "Okay, I'm going to do it this way because I wanted to trade." I had read books on Hitchcock, how he would be very creative with the back projection, combining motion in foreground, motion in background to really create the impression of people falling in void, having this nice quality of the difference of quality of the imagined foreground and background.

Michel Gondry:

I decided that... I knew what would happen. I'm losing my point here. What was the...

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

About using the blue screen.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah. That's the first time... What was the question? I'm so sorry.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

At least I'd heard you saying that you preferred not to use digital effects and blue screen.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah, okay. Of course, yeah. When I was watching it, Since this video was done in '93. If I had done the technology

that was at the top at the time, I think it would've looked much more dated than it is now because basically I'm just using techniques that are timeless.

Michel Gondry:

I don't want to fall into the temptation of being the nostalgic, oh, it's always better now. Anybody always feel that what was before was better. The whole world is going down the road which is not true. I use technology but it depends on what and I think a lot of times, technology is forced into being used because it's sort of a trend.

Michel Gondry:

It's not being used to advance idea or make things look really different. For instance, I had one, the scene in the car with blue screen or green screen which I do a lot of time and because what it says to you, it says that the actor were not committed enough to go all the way to this city to shoot the scene and they just did it on the stage.

Michel Gondry:

It doesn't really engage you. For this reason, other reason, I think a lot of time, optical effect and texture effect, mechanical effect are more visceral. In *Eternal Sunshine*, we did some digital effects but a lot of time when Jim Carrey was walking and you see the background disappear, just we are walking with a screen of translucent plastic.

Michel Gondry:

We would never achieve that by painting stuff and doing it digitally. I think it depends on the effect you want to do. Because I bought this 16 millimeter camera, I figured out a lot by myself what I can do with it and I use that when I went into bigger production.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

One thing I wanted to do with your indulgence is that... I think it might offer an interesting lesson about how your concepts get realized. I wanted to read you the script of the next and final music video we're going to look at which is *The Hardest Button to Button*. I don't know, it might even take longer to read it may be to see it but I think it's really interesting because it really lays out the concept, I think, pretty clearly.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Meg and Jack are playing outside in various locations. Street, forest, train tracks, underneath a bridge, et cetera. We will create a visual echo on camera by using a manipulation of their instruments. Okay, that doesn't sound clear. Let me explain.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

For instance, each time Meg hits one part of her drum kit, this part remains on the spot it was hit and Meg in a cut moves next to it. She hits the same part and again remains at the same spot as she moves to the next spot and so on. She leaves behind her a trail of drum kits wherever she plays.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

To be more precise, at the beginning of the song, she plays only the kick for at least 16 beats. So, we'll be at the end of this part, a row of 16 bass drums perfectly aligned. Then she hits the cymbal on time and resumes the bass drum, this time accompanied with low tom-tom, so now it'll be one cymbal and many bass drums and big tom-tom in the row.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

In the meantime, Jack does the same with his microphone and his amplifier. Each time he plays a new chord, he moves on step and his mic and amp stays behind, creating a row of mics and amps. We will see both of them crossing the landscape, leaving behind them a trail of amps, mics, and drum kits.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

During the course, the sound gets heavier. Meg plays the full set: cymbal, snare, and kick. So, the trail following the pattern she is playing will look like a bass drum and cymbal, a snare and a cymbal, two bass drums and a cymbal, et cetera.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Jack's amplifier will grow bigger. As the sound is getting heavier, he can let two amps instead of one each time behind him. The third part of the song, the repetition of the hits on the drum and guitar will give opportunity to create a crazier geometrical pattern with the instruments.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

For instance, the first two times four, we see Meg will one drum set, then two drum sets, then three and four, creating a horizontal line of drum sets. That's the first four beats. The second four beats, she creates a complete line of drums each time, so it goes four drum sets, eight drum sets, then 12 and 16.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Then Jack, he's got one small amp, the two, three, four amps, then one big one replaces the four small amps like in Monopoly. He then has two big amps, a wall of sound. Back to Meg, each beat, a new set of drums surrounds the one she is playing on.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

After the four bits, she is surrounded by the biggest set of drums ever. Jack, he is standing on top of two big amps, then four big amps, then eight to twelve, playing his guitar. He raises it in the air, being pushed between two growing columns of big amps. Using the same principal, the video will grow more and more surprising and geometrical, to reach an apotheosis of instrument shapes.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

There will be no special effects. All will be done in camera using a cut each time and adding a drum set or an amp before we shoot the next bit. Thanks, Michel. Now, let's take a look at it and see if it applies.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Every time I watch this, I think of two things: how much patience it must've required between each shot and how much money it must've cost to rent all those drum sets and all those amps.

Michel Gondry:

Well, I can answer. In the scheme of the price of a video, even if it's not a huge budget, the price of a drum kit is very small. The hardest part was to find 32 drum kits of Ludwig. I had the producer, called Julie Fong, and she really found them.

Michel Gondry:

Basically, what would happen is we would build the whole row of drums. and start by the end when it's all built. Each time, we will shoot 20 seconds of this part of the song. Then Meg would go to to next drum and we'd peel off the first layer and the art department guys, they would run 200 yard and start to build the next row.

Michel Gondry:

By the time we finished to shoot this one, this one will be built already. We shot that over two and a half days in Harlem.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Sounds like two and a half very busy days.

Michel Gondry:

It's funny to tell you how I got the idea initially. I don't like to show the instrument in videos because there is this kind of attitude in rock and roll that I don't like. It's been done so many times. But Meg and Jack are the only exception because they are playing like toys. When you see them on stage with the colors and the fact there are only two, it's why I got the idea of the Lego blocks for the first video.

Michel Gondry:

It's very conceptual and artistic, so I think it deserves to be... I think the best video with them is when they really play with the instrument. But when I heard the song, I heard buttons so many times, so I thought, "Oh, I'm going to use the button of the amplifier", so it's many buttons, many amplifier, so I got the idea from that and then when somebody's dead you have to button their shirt. Nothing to do, but doesn't really matter.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Well, I think we're going to shift now to actually talking about your films but I'm interested in asking first of all... Because this actually means going back a little bit because this last one was made in 2003 and you made your first feature, I think, 2001.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

First, how did you happen to meet Charlie Kaufman and how did you get involved in making features? How did that come about?

Michel Gondry:

He was working with Spike Jonze. Basically, I remember when I was shooting Everlong and we had this low ceiling. Spike came onto the set and said to me, "Oh, it's interesting. I'm working on the screenplay where they have low ceiling as well." I was like, "Done."

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

That's *Being John Malkovich*.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah. I had been trying to find a screenplay. That was the reason why I moved to Los Angeles and I couldn't find any screenplay that was bearable to read, to be honest. Really difficult, uninteresting, and predictable. He let me read the screenplay of *Being John Malkovich* and I couldn't believe that you could actually enjoy the process of reading the screenplay. I read it all at once without stopping.

Michel Gondry:

It was encouraging and as well, I was a little depressed because he was younger than me, he started after me and already had good tracks, et cetera. But he was kind enough, he introduced me to Charlie Kaufman and when we started to talk with Charlie, we had a lot in common into the way we have this kind of geometrical pattern.

Michel Gondry:

Him in his storytelling, me into how to use a space by breaking it into as many paths as possible. We started to talk and soon after, we started to talk about *Eternal Sunshine* and I took this concept from a friend artist about the memory erasing.

Michel Gondry:

In the meantime, I read this other screenplay and I really liked the one of *Human Nature* which became the first film I directed.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yes, and how do you describe the connection between human behavior and human nature?

Michel Gondry:

Well, human. For one thing. No, but it was difficult for me because I knew everybody would... All the critics will label me as, "Oh, he does video. He doesn't know how to tell a story." The smart move would've been to make a film that looks like shit to say, "Hey, I don't care about the visual. It's all about the story."

Michel Gondry:

I didn't want to do that. Because I estimated I had invented my own language by doing those videos, by using those projection. All my story, I always told myself, were a lot about the city and the forest and the limit because, I don't know, I think I grew up just in the city, just at the limit of the forest and I was always fascinated and I explained that in my DVD.

Michel Gondry:

When I was a kid, I didn't know if the Earth was a big ball of concrete with little skin of dirt for the forest or the other way around, so I was a little bit obsessed with that. I had developed this way to show the city and to show the nature on stage or outside or mix up ways to shoot onstage and outdoor.

Michel Gondry:

I wanted to use that for my film, so you can see a connection here as well. I use those techniques in *Human Nature*.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Well, I think we all get a chance now to see the connections because we're going to look at the first three minutes of his first feature now.

Crowd:

"Lila! Lila! [crosstalk 00:44:37]. Lila, do you think this will affect the sales of your book? Lila, are you sorry you did it?"

Lila:

"I'm not sorry."

Speaker 5:

"I am sorry."

Speaker 6:

"I don't even know what sorry means anymore."

Lila:

"I'm not sorry. So I spend the rest of my life in jail. So what? I've been in jail my whole life anyway. A jail of blood and tissue and coursing hormones. A jail called the human body."

Speaker 5:

"The only thing I know is that I'm sorry. Sorry for my expulsion. Sorry for my Lila, rotting in her jail cell and sorry for Nathan, rotting in his grave."

Speaker 6:

"I don't even know what sorry means anymore. It's odd. When I was alive, I knew. Maybe it was all I knew. But here, sorry is meaningless. Love is meaningless. Jealousy is meaningless."

Lila:

"My story begins when I was 12."

Speaker 7:

"Jesus."

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

One thing I've always wanted to ask you and I don't know if it's... I may be completely off base about this when I wrote it as a possibility but do you feel a particular or a special affinity with Alain Resnais?

Michel Gondry:

Well, affinity would be sort of presumptuous. I admire his work and I love how... Yeah, he's one of my favorite director in France and in the world. I love how he found humility in science which I admire because generally, science is regarded as being cold and just calculation and I don't believe so. His films are very geometrical and they are still very human and very poetic.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yes. There's of course a surrealist side also.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I was thinking, because where I felt this most of all is actually in your second feature but particularly because of a film that unfortunately has never even been released in the United States, *Je T'aime, Je T'aime*, which I felt it was almost the sense of eureka when I was watching this film and I suddenly thought, "Hey, that's a shot from *Je T'aime, Je T'aime*," and that the concepts somehow has a relationship to it.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Of course, they're quite different but in some ways, it seemed it was a very affinity of the films. In this case, I actually was thinking of the white mice in *Mon oncle d'Amérique*.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah. True. It's interesting because Charlie Kaufman never watch his movie. When we started to talk about *Eternal Sunshine*, I think I told him about *Je T'aime, Je T'aime* and he never wanted to watch it, obviously never want to be influenced and I understand. I didn't watch it until late in the process.

Michel Gondry:

I remember we were in this process of... Well, maybe to summarize *Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime*, it's a sort of science fiction movie but it's very... Resnais is more intellectual. He's not going to do a big movie with effect. Basically this guy sneds--he used to be executive and he participates to an experiment to be sent one year ago for one minute and relive his life.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

It's just before he committed suicide. It's determined because he was someone who attempted suicide.

Michel Gondry:

I think his wife committed suicide.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Oh, that's right. I'm sorry. You know it better than I do.

Michel Gondry:

But then everything goes wrong, so things start to mix up and he gets stuck in the past but basically what I realized that Alain Resnais was... He used editing as a special effect. I'd say that was the lesson I learned. Instead to do complex transition, the fact that you use misplacement of object and suddenly--

Michel Gondry:

I remember this cut when he was bending to grab something and then he cut to completely different situation when he complete his action. I think his editor was Roman Capier... I'm not sure. I'm terrible with names but he has a very strong editor and you can see all his movies are really, really well edited.

Michel Gondry:

Basically, I realized we are in this place with Charlie when we realized I had too many ideas for transition to jump from one memory to another. We could not afford it. It was becoming overwhelming for the emotional part of the story. I remember this film I watched again and realized that he would play with editing in such a creative way.

Michel Gondry:

He would cut the song. It would be some choir. It was kind of this '70s feel when you use a lot of abstract music with choir that was great for some stuff that happened in the brain and they would cut, just a simple cut from a big choir to silence. That was giving a very visceral effect of being at one place and then being transported into another place with that understanding.

Michel Gondry:

Basically when you watch a movie, you have one hundred years of being used to cut scenes and everything is here to help you to forget about this cut because you don't see cut in real life, of course and when you see them in movies, you forget about them. You just feel you're watching one piece.

Michel Gondry:

But then if you manipulate that by cutting the song with the image, playing with silence, suddenly you rediscover the cut as being something physical that you experience and it's much more grabbing than the morph or dissolve or change of light. I think Resnais was very smart because he used those effect and I think I got inspired from that.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Well, glad my intuition was correct. I feel that there's a connection also in a really strong sense in your film and in his of romantic loss. It's a poetic sense of romantic loss that both films are really about in a certain way.

Michel Gondry:

Well, his film called *Providence*, which is the point of view of somebody who's dying and he's losing his mind and he's doing this nightmare. You really feel this integration of the conscience through a series of flashbacks and it's complex but visually it's very rich and it's always very visceral.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Because I think we have a lot of clips, I think we're... I want to move along but I think the clip I wanted to show of *Eternal Sunshine of the Captive Mind* is very emblematic of the film and for people who haven't seen it, it's going to be a little difficult. Which I apologize for, I'm going to read a line from my own review of the film just to set up this clip.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

The science fiction premise has a ring of contemporary truth, emerging from a failed romantic relationship. The hero, a subdued Jim Carrey, discovers that his ex, an aggressive Kate Winslet, has hired a company to erase all her memories of him.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

He enlists their services too but technical screw ups send him into a kind of temporal free fall in which past and present consciousness bleed together. You'll see, this has at least as much going on as any of the music videos, maybe more. If we can look at that now.

Clementine:

"Mm-hmm. I have another idea for this problem. This is a memory of me, the way you wanted to have sex on the couch after you looked down at my crotch. Joel, the eraser guys are coming here so what if you take me somewhere else, somewhere where I don't belong and we hide there until morning?"

Joel:

"Man. I can't remember anything without you."

Clementine:

"That's very sweet, but try, okay?"

Joel:

"Okay. (singing)"

Clementine:

"It's working. I'm genius. Joel! Joel! Where'd you go? I'm supposed to come too."

Speaker 10:

"Listen, I'm just going to go get a salad bowl. Can you stir the soup and can you keep an eye on Joel?"

Clementine:

"Sure."

Speaker 10:

"He just likes to be near me."

Clementine:

"Absolutely. Okay. It worked. Oh my god. Look at this. Whoa. It worked! Look. Look at this dress, man. Oh my god. Look. I wish I could take it with me. Who am I?"

Joel:

"Mrs. Hamlin."

Clementine:

"Right, Mrs. Hamlin."

Joel:

"I must be about four. Oh my gosh."

Speaker 10:

"Found the salad bowl. I'm serving salad and string beans. Is he okay under there? Peanut, are you all right? Gosh. I promise I feel like I could clean up all day. Listen, would you hate me if I asked you to clean some string beans?"

Clementine:

"No, not at all. God, I love this kitchen."

Speaker 10:

"Thank you so much."

Joel:

"You're not looking at me. She's busy. She's not looking at me. No one ever looks at me. I want my mommy."

Clementine:

"Oh, baby Joel. Hey, Joely, Joely."

Speaker 10:

"Is [inaudible 00:55:46] little peanut under there okay?"

Clementine:

"Mm-hmm (affirmative). He's fine. Do you have something to drink?"

Speaker 10:

"Would you drink a cocktail at this hour? I mean, I know it's not 5:00."

Clementine:

"I would die for a [inaudible 00:55:55]."

Speaker 10:

"Hang on, let me check if I have it."

Clementine:

"Okay. Joel, hey, no. Sweetie. Joely, your mother wants me to mind you. Get back under the table."

Joel:

"[Ice-cream 00:56:05]."

Clementine:

"No, not until after you've had your dinner. Come on, Joel. Joel, grow up."

Joel:

"Don't make me, Clem. Oh my god."

Clementine:

"I'm here. This is so warped to me."

Joel:

"I'm scared. I want my mommy."

Clementine:

"Don't cry, baby Joel. Baby Joel, it's okay. Joel, Joely. Joel! Stop it. Look, I think it's working. Look, we're hidden, Joel. Look. Hey, honey, look. Wait there. My crotch is still here, just as you remembered it."

Joel:

"Yuck."

Speaker 11:

"It stopped."

Speaker 12:

"What?"

Speaker 11:

"It stopped erasing. Oh shit. This is terrible. He's off the map. He's off the map."

Speaker 12:

"Where?"

Speaker 11:

"I don't know where. What do you mean? I don't know where. This is bad. This is very, very bad news. Where are my glasses? Okay. Crap. Okay. What do we do? What do I do?"

Speaker 12:

"What should we do?"

Speaker 11:

"I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do."

Speaker 12:

"What should we do?"

Speaker 11:

"Crap. Crap. I don't know. I just said that. I don't know what to do."

Speaker 12:

"I'm sorry. What should we do?"

Speaker 11:

"I don't know. You're freaking me out."

Speaker 12:

"Well, we have to do something. He could wake up all half baked."

Speaker 11:

"Quiet, you're freaking me out."

Speaker 12:

"And gooey and... Half baked. That sounds so good."

Speaker 11:

"Oh, shit."

Speaker 12:

"I'm hungry."

Speaker 11:

"Oh, shit."

Speaker 12:

"Oh, oh."

Speaker 11:

"What? What? What? What?"

Speaker 12:

"We should call Howard."

Speaker 11:

"No way, no sir, man. This is my... I can handle this. I can't call Howard."

Speaker 12:

"[inaudible]. There's no time to fuck around."

Speaker 11:

"I got this under control. What are you talking about?"

Speaker 12:

"Stop fucking around."

Speaker 11:

"Okay, I'll call Howard."

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I should add that this is my favorite of all your films, even if I get the title wrong. One thing, actually another echo it has from a film, just momentarily at least, is at the beginning is Jerry Lewis's *The Nutty Professor* because of the way... Which is called in French, let's see, Dr. Jerry-

Michel Gondry:

[French]

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

His love, yeah. But I think one thing that really impressed me that takes us back to the beginning of our discussion is the way you use music at the beginning of this because it's not... It's creating all these counter rhythms and even though the cutting and the narrative and all this is, you could say, very complicated, it's also very... To me, it's very poetic and lucid the way you get this interaction between two quarreling couples actually that is going on in this sequence.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I think that the music actually makes it really... Brings something really important to it. I think it's a very interesting way, it seems to me, that in a subtle way, you're applying lessons from the music videos that you learned from them.

Michel Gondry:

I think John Bryan who wrote the score brought a very emotional and human touch to a movie that was very much... It's kind of little bit plot driven. Obviously there is a romance and all that, but it could've been much more technical and a little more cold and by using his music, we immediately feel...

Michel Gondry:

He really helped us to feel we're going to the past, to a memory that is lost and et cetera. I don't know how that exactly equal my work with music video. It's interesting. I remember having this conversation with Spike Jonze the first time we met years ago and he was telling me when he would listen to a song, he would imagine a movie that this music would be the soundtrack for, the score.

Michel Gondry:

I never really worked this way but maybe when I became a director, I more looked at it this way. But it's interesting what you say. When I write a... Now I'm writing my own material. When I write music, it's really great to keep myself in a certain mode like if I do something with suspense, I can listen to Stravinsky or whatever or some music that sounds already like a score. That really puts me in one mood that help me to write.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Does it help produce the images, would you say?

Michel Gondry:

Yeah, yeah, totally.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yeah. I could certainly see how Stravinsky does that because it seems to me that's very good way to always get images.

Michel Gondry:

It's interesting when you hear a little bit of Stravinsky, you realize that all those great film score composers really took from him, it seems.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I'm wondering in terms of your own features if there's one that you feel closer to or happier with or less happy with or so on. I'm just wondering how you feel about the three of them.

Michel Gondry:

It's complex. I'll tell you how it works for me. I became successful doing videos, then I did *Human Nature* with Charlie Kaufman and it was mixed reviews. It was difficult for me because I just didn't realize that when you direct, you're subject to be criticized and judged and then personally accused and you get really... You get people irritated at you.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

There were some very harsh reviews of that film.

Michel Gondry:

Yeah, some was good, some were good. It was really mixed.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yeah.

Michel Gondry:

So, then I did *Eternal Sunshine* and it was unanimous all of a sudden and I find it suspicious in a way because I still like my first film too and if I want to believe the review of the second one, I have to believe that my first film was not great. I guess it's not great, but like a piece of shit sometimes.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

And yes, on your second film, you actually got an Oscar, right?

Michel Gondry:

The screenplay got an Oscar. Because I was involved in the story, I got my Oscar too. I have to put some context.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Yes.

Michel Gondry:

Then I wrote *Science of Sleep* which is 100% personal and it's the first subject I would have the courage talk about would be me and things that happened to me. I did it a little bit after I did the documentary. I didn't direct the documentary *I've Been 12 Forever*, but when I saw it together, I said, "Okay, it's sort of a compilation of a lot of different part of me and it seems coherent because it seems that it's about myself." Maybe it's-

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

It's more personal.

Michel Gondry:

Narcissistic or whatever but I thought this movie could go to a lot of different direction and to me, I saw it like when a rock band or pop band do their first album, generally, they put all their ideas they had since they were kid to like they

are... 15 years of ideas that they squeeze into one album and then when they do the second album generally two years later, they have two years of ideas, so it's much more concise and balanced.

Michel Gondry:

But there is a quality in the first album that is interesting, that's kind of the jam of all those ideas. I think *Science of Sleep* has a little bit of this quality. It's obviously very hard for me because Charlie Kaufman is extremely skilled and talented and very respected.

Michel Gondry:

So, I was going out on my own on... It was not as highly respected as *Eternal Sunshine*. I think I did pretty good. I'm happy with myself.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

I think it's a good movie.

Michel Gondry:

I like to watch this movie because it's something that I took off of me and I give it to the actor and then I see the actor struggling with my problem and it feels good. I like that.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Okay, why don't we watch... This is the last clip we're going to have which is from pretty early in the film, relatively early and then we're going to have some questions from you. So, let's take a look at *Science of Sleep*.

[Clip in French]

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

It's nice to see a kind of auteurist constant of a musical instrument again kind of appearing almost as a character. Well, I'm sure some of you have questions and even though it's hard to see, there's someone with a microphone.

David:

Hi, Michel. I'm David.

Michel Gondry:

Hi.

David:

Early on in your discussion tonight, you talked about how you had Bjork fly into the tree and you story boarded out and it didn't necessarily maybe come out the way you wanted it to be. You made some reference to technology can get you out of this situation. Is that kind of post-production where it would help you kind of show what you wanted to show?

Michel Gondry:

Well, I use some post-production. In this video which is done mostly on the back projection, which is a technique that you shoot on 35 millimeter film what you want to see behind the character and then you project it and then your camera sees what you see. Sometime, when she's flying at some point, I think we use one or two shot of blue screen. I use that already.

Michel Gondry:

It's funny, I just did a video. My son directed a video and I did the animation, I also am animator, and it's fully animated. He told me that it was amazing that it was in his head and now it's on the screen. I think that's the main joy of doing this job, especially with animation because there is very few intermediate between your brain and the result.

Michel Gondry:

Obviously, it's different and you have to learn to accept it and sometimes it's probably even better but when you get an idea or an image and you succeed to put it on screen, there is a really strong satisfaction.

Speaker 22:

I wanted to ask you about your creative process and how... One of the cool things that I like about you is how much you do talk about your creative process. On your videos and stuff, you talk about how you make your work and I just wonder, has that always been easy for you? Yeah.

Michel Gondry:

I started to have to talk about it when we did those DVDs with Spike Jonze and Chris Cunningham and we did the promotion, the three of us together. What happened is we got the same question all the time we did the press junket. You go into the hotel room and they have so many guys who come and go interview you.

Michel Gondry:

The thing is, if I was on my own, I could repeat the same answer again and again but because they were next to me, they would hear that I'm just repeating the same thing. I told myself to force myself to find a new answer each time and it was interesting because instead of being this boring, exhausting process to always answer the same question, the same response to the same question, I try to find new answer without lying.

Michel Gondry:

So, I had to dig deeper and find exactly... A lot of time, people ask me, "Do you remember when you got this idea of this shot or this story or this effect?" By really thinking after awhile, I could really exactly remember when I got the idea and how it came to me.

Michel Gondry:

When people pick an image or video or part of a film, I can really train myself to exactly remember how the idea came. It's interesting because I'm not very good if you ask me political question. I have my opinion and I have a sense of what's going on. But if you ask me a question about the creative process, it's true, I would be more skilled to answer that because I was challenged about it through an early age with my father and my mother, who had different view of the question.

Michel Gondry:

My mother thought inspiration was not coming from you, it was coming from God or some spirit and you were just a vessel and you could not be arrogant about it and I didn't like that. Not that I wanted to be arrogant, but I wanted to be proud of what I would achieve eventually.

Michel Gondry:

So, I decided that was wrong for me and I wanted to be responsible for my idea. At a very early age, I started to try to understand what it was to be creative and try something different.

Speaker 23:

Well, thank you so much for being here tonight. Merci beaucoup. Can you share if your dreams have a part in your creative process or anything that helps you open to free your imagination?

Michel Gondry:

Yeah. It has a lot to do. Obviously early on, I was a big fan of surrealism, not a great specialist but the way they allowed themselves to take inspiration from their dream and the logic he displays on the different level than the purely intellectual.

Michel Gondry:

Anyway, the interesting thing in the dream is you constantly get surprised. In the average, when you watch TV and people talk about dream and they always say there is nothing more boring to hear somebody's dream and there is some truth in that. Sometime you there in the morning and somebody's going to come to you and say, "Oh, I had this dream," and it's going to go on forever and there's nothing special about it.

Michel Gondry:

It can be truly boring but they have such a bad reputation and some people, some directors say, "Put your dream in a movie and you lose an audience." Obviously I was thinking of that when I did *Science of Sleep* and maybe I've lost some audience there.

Michel Gondry:

But on the other hand, if you can learn to use them in an entertaining way. Sometimes there is something really fun and absurd and surprising dreams. You're going to always transform them when you say that, when you relay them because they are too long and complex and repetitive to be entertaining.

Michel Gondry:

But there is sometimes an element that's really absurd which describe in a very direct manner what you feel deeply and then you can put that out and it's really funny and it's surprising and it's deep. I use that a lot and a lot of time, I have images in a dream that I don't have to explain but at least I feel they're mine because they're coming from my brain even.

Michel Gondry:

As I explained in the documentary, *I've Been 12 Forever*, I had this dream about visiting my house. There was a scaffander and seeing myself very old. When I woke up, I was like, "Oh, that's great. I'm going to do a short film," and then I did a short film and realized my dream was influenced by Kubrick's movie the *Space Odyssey*.

Michel Gondry:

But it didn't matter so much because after dreaming it, I kind of own it in some way so that's the beauty of dream, it's coming from yourself.

Speaker 24:

Do you think that in the near future or just anytime in the future that you're going to do another collaboration with Charlie Kaufman?

Michel Gondry:

Well, I hope so. We will see. I mean, he's directing his movie now. Yeah, why not? Yeah. I would like to. You know, it's difficult because I'm sure a lot of people think that there is more depth in the work we did together than the work I do on my own but maybe there is that but maybe as well, my way of thinking is a little more naïve and sometimes by working with him, I had to explain and to write things that when I work on my own, I don't have to.

Michel Gondry:

Maybe that corresponds more to what I aim to do. It's difficult. When I do video, I know if it's good or bad. I know what's wrong and if it's worked because it's small enough that I don't have to wait years, or I don't know, to have perspective on it.

Michel Gondry:

For a movie, it's different and there is so many opinion that are bombarded to me that I don't know. It's true that a lot of people come to me and say, "Oh, I love *Science of Sleep*, but *Eternal Sunshine* was my favorite movie," like you did and I respect your opinion and maybe it's true.

Michel Gondry:

I want to give myself chance to be a writer as well which is I'm not initially but I think it's great to write. I mean, when you're on your own and nothing is stopping you from creating the story, it's really great.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Sorry. Before we go on, I just wanted to interject a quick question of my own. When are we going to be able to see *Be Kind, Rewind*?

Michel Gondry:

I think it's coming out December 21st.

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

Oh.

Speaker 25:

Is there a song that you mostly want to do a video for that you haven't yet? Any songs you're into now?

Michel Gondry:

I always dread this question because I feel I'm out of the loop. Actually, with my son I've been listening to MF Doom. It's quite brilliant. I mean I like The White Stripes, but I don't like rock in general. To me, it's very based on attitude, it's very backward but I think The White Stripes have a way to transform it which is artistic and interests me.

Michel Gondry:

I don't know. I listen to a lot of things. Of course, I'm a big fan of Bjork. I nearly did a video for CocoRosie which I liked very much but the schedule didn't work. What was the other part of the question? It was about music I like?

Jonathan Rosenbaum:

If there was a particular favorite song that you wanted to make a...

Michel Gondry:

Oh yeah. It's interesting because lately, I've been obsessed a bit with... I did this song for Massive Attack, a very complex video with one shot and just when I finished the video, I had another idea and one day, I'd like to do it. It was just a tree and it start very quiet and then there is more and more wind in the tree and the tree is completely bending. I think it would be so great with this song. It's like having the chance to do a second video on the one song I did already.

Speaker 26:

Two questions. One, are there any contemporary directors or movies that you admire or are inspired by? And then are there any guilty pleasures in music, movies, or TV that we'd be surprised that you like?

Michel Gondry:

I have a lot of guilty pleasure in movies. I like *Night at the Roxbury* for instance. I really like this movie. I like *Stuck On You*. I think it's great. I don't like TV anymore, I just watch DVDs but I got *Off Set* but that's not a guilty pleasure if it's a great piece of work. I'm obsessed with *Mr. Show*. I know all the pieces by heart.

Michel Gondry:

It's how I'm trying to look... Basically, I watch that to put myself to sleep. It's funny because I know every piece by heart.

Speaker 26:

It seems like there could be some inspiration there because a lot of their episodes are interconnected.

Michel Gondry:
Yeah.

Speaker 26:
And cross characters.

Michel Gondry:
But it's interesting because I discover I work with David Cross, obviously in *Eternal Sunshine*, and then he did this movie about my turd that we did that together. After, I remember my editor telling me, "You have to watch Mr. Show. It's great." I don't know, I was put off by the visual of the cover. Finally, I bought it and I just couldn't stop watching it.

Speaker 27:
I had a question about Dave Chapelle's *Block Party*.

Michel Gondry:
Mm-hmm.

Speaker 27:
I was wondering, that seems like such a radical departure from the rest of the films we've seen here tonight and the music videos. What brought you to that project and what ideas were you able to impose on it?

Michel Gondry:
Well, Dave Chapelle is very fascinating and he's very charismatic and obviously, he represents the African American culture and community which I always loved its music. I love the hip hop and the rhythm and blues. For me, it was very... I mean, he asked me to do it and we always make this joke. He always said to me he couldn't get Spike Jonze to do it so he asked me, which is very...

Michel Gondry:
When he said that, I said, "I wanted to do a movie with Chris Rock, which said no." So, we are even. But to me, the main challenge was... When I did *Human Nature*, everything was calculated, not necessarily in a negative way. I was obsessed with Hitchcock and Fritz Lang and how these directors were really putting their brain on paper and then putting the paper into process to transform it into a movie.

Michel Gondry:
It was very controlled, so I had this in a smaller scale, of course, and then I learned going into shooting *Eternal Sunshine* to leave more space for chaos or for improvisation or for a surprise and happy accidents. To me, the next step would be to go on a set with absolutely nothing ready which is really scary, interesting because you put yourself in a dangerous...

Michel Gondry:
Especially when you're shooting on film, because it was all shot on Super 16 millimeter. You put yourself into danger to come back with nothing in the camera and have to edit nothing basically. But then, when something is created and some magic happen, it's really rewarding.

Michel Gondry:
With Dave, working on out on the street, so I'm talking about the part when he's putting the concept together which in terms of production was really small. The producer didn't care at all about this part. As long as it didn't cost more, he didn't care if we went there or not, it's just sort of the concept.

Michel Gondry:
But to me, it was the most important part nearly. So we went there and we followed Dave and we saw the interaction

and I was trying to think of, "Oh, I'm going to have to tell the story," and there was absolutely nothing on paper. That was what was interesting.

Michel Gondry:

For instance, when we met those kids doing the marching band in Ohio, we were looking for a car wash that's new and we knew the owner I wanted to talk to him and we crossed this campus and we saw those kids running late for their rehearsal and I said to Dave, "Okay, go to interact, talk to them."

Michel Gondry:

Immediately, they form a circle around them. It's what you see in the documentary and then Dave invited them to play to the concert. Most of them never been to New York and it was a big organization. We have to find two buses and we didn't know if their principal would let them go and it was big suspense that we all showed that and then when they find out that they could come and there was this explosion of joy...

Michel Gondry:

From scratch, we created this big suspense on that. To me, it was really exciting to contribute to that and that was my main motivation. I mean, I love the music. I was a little uncertain about the sense of celebration. I didn't know what they were celebrating. They were all on stage, "Today, we're making history. It's the greatest day in the history of music."

Michel Gondry:

I was like, "Why are a bunch of bands trying to make a concert and it's raining." The director was completely lost and doesn't know what camera to look at. That was how it felt, but then I got a sense of what it meant. It meant that they're celebrating celebration, I guess, and they succeeded because at the end, they were all onstage and they felt they had achieved something.

Michel Gondry:

Now, when I watch the film, I understand that to get all those people together and doing this thing was the goal to achieve. It gives me this sense that I didn't have before and I think I took it a little bit further, took some of that in my new film, *Be Kind Rewind*, which is more about community.

Jonathan Rosenbaum: Unfortunately, we're out of time now but can we give a big hand?