

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:22	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. How long is 915 minutes? That is more than 15 hours. It’s long enough for me to drive from here in LA to Denver, Colorado. In another 915 minutes, I could get on a plane and fly from Denver to Tokyo, Japan. In 915 minutes, you can brew a great pot of iced tea in your fridge. You can brush paint on the wall and watch it dry twice. You can spend 915 minutes doing any of those things. Or you can watch a documentary. <i>The Story of Film: An Odyssey</i> is true to its title. It’s an expansive look at cinema that was originally released in 2011.
			In 15 episodes, <i>The Story of Film</i> covers the entire history of the medium, from the very beginning of film to the golden age of Hollywood to the rise of film in the rest of the world to the ascent of digital filmmaking and everything in between. It’s a staggering work. It won a Peabody. It’s been celebrated by critics and watched by millions. My guest, Mark Cousins, made <i>The Story of Film</i> . He also narrates it. He’s a director and writer from Northern Ireland.
			Mark recently followed up <i>The Story of Film</i> with the sequel— <i>The Story of Film: A New Generation</i> . It covers dozens more titles and movements, adds another 150 minutes to the series. And I’m gonna be frank with you: if you care about film, I can’t think of a better way to spend 18 hours!
			<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
00:02:02	Music	Transition	Anyway, let’s get into it: my conversation with Mark Cousins.
00:02:07	Jesse	Host	Fun synth with a steady beat. Mark Cousins, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m happy to have you on the show. I’ve been enjoying your work for so long.
00:02:11	Mark Cousins	Guest	Thanks so much, Jesse. I’m pleased to be here.
00:02:14	Jesse	Host	I have to ask you this question. So, after you make 7000 hours of <i>The Story of Film</i> —
			<i>[They chuckle.]</i>
00:02:27	Mark	Guest	—is it hard to contemplate returning to—returning to that grand subject? Yes, absolutely. To make the original <i>Story of Film</i> , I traveled around the world, Jesse, backpacking, carrying my equipment in my backpack. And so, I said, “Never again will I return to this.” <i>[Laughs.]</i> But of course, as luck would have it, cinema changed, new cameras came along, society changed, new technologies—like we could watch films in our living room—and new, great films happened. And so, reluctantly, I went back to cinema to ask what has happened in the last ten years.

00:02:56	Jesse	Host	And I think also none of us had anywhere to go for a while.
00:03:00	Mark	Guest	Yeah. I did this one under lockdown, you know, and that was a nice thing to do, because—you know, my job as a filmmaker, as you well know, is to jump on planes and travel and publicize the work. And under covid, there was no need to do any jumping on planes. And so, it was a fertile time where I could think and ask questions about what's happening the movies.
00:03:22	Jesse	Host	How much film watching were you doing?
00:03:25	Mark	Guest	Usually, I only watch films on a big screen. So, I go out every day. But under covid—like everyone, of course—we were forced inside our apartments. And I would say, in some ways, inside our memories and inside our heads. So, I was a kind of—during the pandemic, I was a kind of two films a day kind of guy. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:03:45	Jesse	Host	I'm impressed that you only go out to see movies on big screens! That's a commitment to the form.
00:03:53	Mark	Guest	It's a commitment to my own pleasure as well, to be honest. You know. Like, for me, cinema has always—the pleasure is that it's bigger than life. You know? It's epic, it's giant. I'm out of control. You know, when I'm in a movie theater, I can't press pause. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> You know? And that's crucial to the pleasure. A lot of people say they go to the pictures to laugh together and cry together, but for me it's just to be—you know, it's like to have something sublime happen to you and to submit—give a filmmaker a couple of hours of your time and say, "Do something with those two hours. Use it wisely."
00:04:29	Jesse	Host	I mean, one of the big changes in cinema that you cover in your film is the rise of streaming. And it is—you know, on the one hand, it's like the ultimate expression of—you know, what you used to have to work at a video store to access. You know? It used to be you had to be Quentin Tarantino or have a university film library where you could like bring a movie to a little cubicle or something. Now, anybody can do that. But I think you're right—like the biggest difference between watching a film at home and watching it in a theater is not that the screen is bigger, although that is a big difference, but rather that in a theater, the movie is the boss.
00:05:20	Mark	Guest	Yeah. We're out of control. You know, and—you know, that—we're so used to be in control in our lives and choosing the pleasures that we want when we want them. But what if pleasure's a bit more complicated than that? And what if—you know—fulfilment is a bit more complicated than that, where you just have to submit and switch everything off and fully focus? And I think—you know, I'm sort of 57 now, so I was brought up at the time when you couldn't just see the film you wanted to see. When I first—I read about <i>Citizen Kane</i> , Orson Welles's first film—when I was eight, and I didn't see it until I was 18. So, that was ten years of longing, Jesse. You know?
			And so, that was—my appetite built, my appetite built. I got hungrier and hungrier for that film and many others. But nowadays—and of course, I love the fact that you can see <i>Citizen Kane</i> within five seconds if you want, but I think our appetites are different now. It's like the table in front of us is full of pizza and sushi and Indian food, and we're almost not hungry anymore, 'cause it's all available. So, I think that's—you know, I was so hungry for cinema when I was young.
00:06:37	Jesse	Host	What was your movie-going experience when you were young?

00:06:40	Mark	Guest	Well, I grew up in Belfast, in Northern Ireland. So, we had—you know—the war, what’s euphemistically called “the troubles”. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> And that was like a very big lockdown. So, we could go to the cinema not very often, ‘cause it wasn’t totally safe. But the first film I saw in the movie theater was <i>[chuckling]</i> <i>Herbie Rides Again</i> . And I was—and yeah, of course it was—
00:07:05	Jesse	Host	<i>[They laugh.]</i> I’ve seen <i>Herbie Rides Again</i> . My daughter went through a <i>Herbie</i> period.
00:07:09	Mark	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Well, I hope you went right through with her, because—
00:07:12	Jesse	Host	I’ve also seen <i>The Shaggy D.A.</i> , if you’re wondering.
00:07:17	Mark	Guest	<i>[They laugh.]</i> And that film—you know, it was joyous! Utterly joyous for me!
00:07:20	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:07:21	Clip	Clip	Speaker (<i>Herbie Rides Again</i>): Miss Harris, let’s stop kidding ourselves, shall we? This is just an ordinary little car! Like a million other ordinary, rather unattractive, little— <i>[He erupts into a scream as the tires squeal.]</i> Music: Playful music. Miss Harris: I don’t think you should’ve said that! Herbie’s very sensitive about his appearance! Speaker: Alright! Alright, you’ve had your laugh. I think you ought to stop now. Miss Harris: You won’t get Herbie to stop until you say you’re sorry! Speaker: Miss Harris, the thing that upsets me most about this whole thing is you trying to maintain the fiction about this— <i>[shouts in alarm.]</i> <i>[A cacophony of honking cars and skidding tires.]</i> Miss Harris: Please! Tell Herbie you’re sorry! Speaker: Alright. Alright. Herbie, I’m sorry!
00:07:55	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[Herbie screeches to a stop.]</i> Music swells and fades.
00:07:56	Mark	Guest	‘Cause it was like a car that can fly, and the screen was big and luminous. And I was wowed by that. You know? And that kind of—that feeling of “wow” and kind of rapture and what Joseph Campbell calls the rapture of self-loss has never left me. You know? I’ve never forgotten those early moments of what we simply call entertainment or escapism. You know? And I think my sense of what movies are has become more complicated. But underneath it all, the bottom layer, the foundation is rapture.

00:08:29	Jesse	Host	<p>In your <i>Story of Film</i> movies or shows or whatever you wanna call them, we see footage from films, and we see places and footage of places. And that's most of what we see. You know. There's not a lot of the camera panning over photographs of filmmakers or actors or whatever or there's no people talking on camera. It's mostly places and stuff from movies. How do you think you got so interested—I know how you're so interested in stuff from movies, Mark. <i>[Laughs.]</i> But why is the other piece of this places?</p>
00:09:20	Mark	Guest	<p><i>[Chuckles.]</i> The places? Yeah.</p>
00:09:21	Jesse	Host	<p>Like why is it you flying around with a backpack with a—you know, digital camera in it or whatever and shooting a picture of Time Square?</p>
00:09:30	Mark	Guest	<p>Well, I think to be honest, part of the answer of that is due to the fact that I was brought up very Catholic. I'm not religious now, but when you're a Catholic, you go on pilgrimages. You know? You go to the sacred place. I remember climbing up some hill some cold day to some place where St. Patrick was supposed to have been. And even then, I don't think I really believed that he'd been there, but the idea of this sacred place—you know, the place where something really wonderful happened—you know, I think implanted itself on me. And so, when I made the original <i>Story of Film</i>, which was so long ago now, I would travel to India and to West Africa and to China and flew many places in the world just trying to put my tripod where somebody else had put their tripod, to get to the real place.</p>
00:10:35	Jesse	Host	<p>There's a great British writer I much admire, called George Steiner. And he wrote a book called <i>Real Presences</i>. And it's about that kind of numinous, almost sacred feel of a place where something really great happened. And so, I think that's why I trek to those places. So, <i>The Story of Film</i> and a lot of your other movies take the form of—you know, a cinematic essay. It tends to be not exclusively but often your voice telling a story while images that are only—you know, sometimes kind of literal, but sometimes not—play across the screen. Right?</p>
			<p><i>[Mark confirms.]</i></p>
00:11:19	Mark	Guest	<p>And I wonder how you ended up in that form rather than just writing a newspaper column or making documentaries that shoot people as they go about their day or shoot pictures of historians describing things.</p> <p><i>[Chuckles.]</i> Yeah, I tried those other things. You know? But I realized that I was fascinated by imagery. I was—at school, I was bad at using words, and I still struggle with words in some ways, I think. But I was good at imagery, Jesse. And so, what I—in all my films, the images come first. And so, I'll choose the images and then, once they're chosen, I'll sit and write live, as it were. You know, so the script never comes first. I'm always writing to the image; I'm looking at the image as I write. And so, in my films, in the voiceover—and you rightly say there are voiceovers and quite a few of them—you often hear the word “this” and “here”. It's present tense. You know. It's not—I've never written beforehand and then looked for images to find it.</p>

And that works for me. Partly it works for me because it's quite cheap [*chuckling*]*—*I shouldn't say that, you know, 'cause of course I'm aiming for the highest of high art, but I've always tried to make creatively ambitious things on low budgets, and I've successfully done that. And my films tend to make money, because I've kept the means of production, the way of making the film, reasonably simple. I always shoot silent, for example. I never record sound when I'm shooting. I was very influenced by the great Italian filmmaker, Federico Fellini. And he said, "I shoot a silent film and put a radio play on top." And I think that's sort of what I do.

00:12:56 Jesse Host

More with Mark Cousins after a quick break. Stay with us! It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:13:03 Music Transition

Thumpy rock music.

00:13:08 Jesse Host

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with Mark Cousins. Mark is the creator of *The Story of Film*. That's a 17-part documentary series that examines and analyses the history of cinema from its very beginnings until now. The project won a Peabody award in 2011. It's just been updated with two new chapters, called *The Story of Film: A New Generation*. Let's get back into my interview with Mark.

Did you think when you were a kid or an adolescent or a young man that you wanted to make movies like Alfred Hitchcock or, you know—

[*Mark giggles.*]

00:13:51 Mark Guest

Movies like Fellini?

I wanted to, but I didn't think there was a chance at all. You know, I come from a very working-class background. My father was a motor mechanic, and my mom was a home help. And so, there were no artists in our family or within our social reach. There were no books in our house, etc., you know. So, these kind of Alfred Hitchcock— and I've actually just finished a film about Alfred Hitchcock—these filmmakers were titans. These were kind of—you know, the Rockies and the Alps for me. You know, these are places to climb in and get lost in, these filmmakers. You know. But I did—and this is gonna sound immodest of me. I could imagine films in my head. I could see movies entirely that I wanted to make. There's a fancy term now, in neuroscience. The word is hyperphantasic. There are people who can clearly visualize stuff before it happens, and I'm one of them.

00:15:14 Jesse Host

So, it means that despite not having any connections in my childhood, at a reasonably early age—around the age of 23/24—I started directing. And you know, I just kept going. And so, there's a—I was, you know—I was hungry for imagery. I was hungry for cinema. I sort of needed to make cinema.

Do you think that that quality is the reason that you are able to tie so many films together in your films about films? That you can hold so much visual information inside your head in a way that you just—you know, you can't press ctrl+F and type in—you know—"Orson Welles faces shot on the diagonal".

00:15:43 Mark Guest

[*Laughs.*] I'd love to try that, actually. Let's try that right now.

			But yes, you're exactly right. You know, when I see films with my friends, they remember the story or the characters. I don't remember that, but I—with, you know—with almost alarming exactitude, I remember the imagery and what you could call the shape of the film. I remember seeing Orson Welles's film, <i>Touch of Evil</i> —which of course was shot partially in Venice, California, and I could describe the shape of those shots with some accuracy, even in my childhood.
00:16:15	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:16:16	Clip	Clip	Music: Playful piano.
			Speaker 1 (<i>Touch of Evil</i>): You've been reading the cards, haven't you?
			Speaker 2: I've been doing the accounts.
			Speaker 1: Come on, read my future for me.
			Speaker 2: You haven't got any.
			Speaker 1: Huh? What do you mean?
			Speaker 2: Your future is aaall used up.
00:16:37	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:16:39	Mark	Guest	And so, there was a certain type of kind of visual cortex going on there that I was born with, which has been very useful in my career as a filmmaker, obviously.
00:16:48	Jesse	Host	I was watching <i>The Eyes of Orson Welles</i> —your movie about Welles—and there's some shots of him that are shot from below, up past his face, such that like lighting fixtures and ceiling elements make halos around his head. And I had that experience thinking of <i>Touch of Evil</i> , in which there is a bit where he is shot such that this bull's head that's on a wall behind him—
00:17:18	Mark	Guest	Yes, famous moment with Marlene Dietrich. And they—yeah. Yeah.
00:17:22	Jesse	Host	Yeah, like it gives him—like turns him into the bull. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:17:25	Mark	Guest	Yeah, it's a great moment. Given that we're talking about this, can I tell you something quite weird, Jesse?
			<i>[Jesse affirms.]</i>
			Everywhere I go, I carry with me one of Orson Welles's boots. <i>[Laughs.]</i> And I have it here, on my desk. And since we're on radio, I'm gonna—this is the—it's a very big boot. The audience can't see it, but maybe—I'm going to unzip the boot and see if we can hear it.
			<i>[A long, metal zipper noise.]</i>
00:17:52	Jesse	Host	Yeah! I mean, you are holding a—like, I can see you—
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
			—via the power of internet. When you say—now, Mark, when you say everywhere you go, do you mean like everywhere you go like every time you go on a talk show? Like Orson Welles might bring a quarter to do magic tricks?

00:18:07	Mark	Guest	No, no, everywhere—
00:18:10	Jesse	Host	Or like when you go out to dinner with a buddy, do you have to ask for an extra seat for Orson Welles’s boot?
00:18:15	Mark	Guest	It’s there, and I’m just reaching into my rucksack. This is not gonna work at all, but also I bring two ties with me. I’m gonna see if they can make a noise. I don’t know if you can hear that. But anyway, these are two ties that I carry everywhere with me, and they belonged to two great filmmakers: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, who’s most famous film was <i>The Red Shoes</i> . But they made classic films of the ’40s and ’50s and etc.. And the reason I bring—I know it sounds slightly weird to bring stuff like that, but it’s going back to what we were saying earlier about the real presence and the kind of pilgrimage to see somewhere special. When I carry— <i>[chuckles]</i> when I have this stuff around me, like something from Orson Welles and something from Powell and Pressburger, it reminds me what my job is—which is to be as creative as possible, to try and think outside the boundaries, to try and show something that hasn’t been seen before. ‘Cause these filmmakers were great at doing that. So, it’s just a kind of reminder to be creative.
00:19:21	Jesse	Host	Mark, I hate to tell you, but if you think the boot and the ties are weird, I don’t wanna tell you what I think of your whole operation.
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
			It’s—you’re not doing typical stuff! This is not a run of the mill proposition that you’re offering.
00:19:37	Mark	Guest	No, not at all. Nor do I want to. I mean, I’ve been offered big bucks over the years to direct, you know, commercials and stuff. You know? And I just don’t need lots of money. You know? To—what I need is creative freedom, a kind of liberty to make interesting stuff. And so, I have that and I’m very lucky.
00:20:00	Jesse	Host	Let’s talk about your most recent <i>Story of Film: A New Generation</i> . So, you are pretty obsessed with innovation. Like, there’s a reason that your <i>Story of Film</i> movies are called <i>The Story of Film</i> . It’s because you like to—you know, they have been in broadly chronological order, although not exclusively. And they are about things changing. And you know, I think you probably—in the course of the 14 hours or whatever it is of this that you have produced—you’ve probably used the word “innovative” 62 times. And I wonder like when your producers convinced you to make more of this, what were the changes that you wrote down on a notecard and felt like you had to include?
00:20:53	Mark	Guest	Yep. I had some of the things that I mentioned earlier—changes in technology, the cameras got so small. I remember seeing a documentary called <i>Leviathan</i> , where the filmmakers had attached cameras to fish, etc., you know. So, cameras could go in places—
00:21:08	Jesse	Host	<i>[Playfully.]</i> Fish-eye lens.
00:21:09	Mark	Guest	Yes. Well, yes, and even—GoPro, the lens that was devised by sports people, you know. So, cameras could go in new places, and when a camera goes in a new place, you get a new type of cinema. So, that was new. Also, that new types of people were getting to make films because the technology got cheaper. It meant that more people in west Africa and north Africa and east Africa, etc., were making films. And so, cinema was no longer controlled by rich, powerful money people. And that was—that was a great moment, I thought. When we—I kept saying to myself, “The river of cinema

has become a delta.” You know, it spread, it’s gone wider, there are more tributaries, there are more types of people making movies. And when more types of people make movies, you get different types of stories, different world views.

So, there were like Romanian films, films from Iran, from Thailand, etc., which made me think, “Wow! I haven’t seen this before.” And when I think “wow, I haven’t seen this before”, I start to twitch, and I think, “Oh, maybe I should make something about this to celebrate it.”

00:22:20 Jesse Host Do you, in your day-to-day life, just like open an atlas and flip through it and land on Zimbabwe and think like, gosh, I’ve only seen three Zimbabwean films! I should find out what the other ones are.

00:22:35 Mark Guest That’s almost exactly what happens, to be honest.

[They chuckle.]

Almost exactly. Like when I made—when I—I wrote a book called *A Story of Film* before the original *Story of Film*. And then I was doing that, I looked at the map and looked at Ethiopia and thought, “I don’t know if I have seen any films from Ethiopia at all.” And then I asked myself, “Does that mean there are no good ones?” And of course, the answer is no, it doesn’t mean that. I just had to go and find out if there were good ones. So, that’s—you know, I think, Jesse, that I’ve always said to myself, “My ignorance is my best friend.” What I don’t know—you know—is what keeps me alive. ‘Cause I am constantly learning, you know, constant apprentice. And so, it’s always like that.

00:23:27 Jesse Host And I think hopefully it’ll always be like that.

00:23:31 Mark Guest What’s a good film from Ethiopia?

00:23:44 Jesse Host There’s a great masterpiece, called—it was directed by Haile Gerima, and it’s called *Harvest: 3,000 Years*. It was made a long time ago, but it’s just a sublime film.

00:23:44 Jesse Host You open *A New Generation* with a juxtaposition of *Joker* and *Frozen*.

[Mark confirms.]

00:24:25 Mark Guest And like, for a dude that’s assiduously included Ethiopian work in your *Story of Film* series, who has just truly had a genuinely internationally democratic approach to looking at cinema, that’s like two of the most regular movies, like big, Hollywood movies you could ever depict. So, why did you start with that?

00:24:25 Mark Guest *[Chuckles.]* To surprise you, first of all. *[Stammering.]* Also, it’s really important for me to show that I’m not a snob. I’m not a snob at all. I go to all the Marvel movies. You know. And a lot of the more... you know, some critics are snobs. They think that popular cinema is inferior. But of course, that’s not the case at all. *Casablanca* and *Singin’ in the Rain* and many, many other movies were super popular. So—but I—yeah, so I want to—I always want to say like cinema is the art form of the people. It’s wide and broad and—you know, innovation and great work happens in every area of cinema. But I did also want to surprise you, I think. I would be surprised if many people in the world have connected *Joker* and *Frozen* before.

[They chuckle.]

‘Cause let’s say it’s quite a different demographic, those two films. And I thought that would be fun, to see a connection there. And I think I found one.

00:25:21 Jesse Host

I mean, I think you are also—besides connecting to surprising films, the children’s film, *Frozen*—

00:25:27 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:25:28 Clip Clip

Music: Playful orchestral music.

Anna (*Frozen*): Are you okay?!

Olaf: Are you kidding me? I... am wonderful! I’ve always wanted a nose! It’s so cute. [*Baby talking.*] It’s like a little baby unicorn.

[A thump.]

What—?! Hey, woah! Oooh, I love it even more! [*Sighs.*] Alright, let’s start this thing over. Hi, everyone. I’m Olaf. And I like warm hugs!

00:25:48 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:25:49 Jesse Host

Let’s say family film, *Frozen*, and the—you know—self-consciously not family film, *Joker*.

00:25:56 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:25:57 Clip Clip

Arthur (*Joker*): You think men like Thomas Wayne ever think what it’s like to be someone like me? To be somebody but themselves? They don’t. They think that we’ll just sit there and take it like good little boys! That we won’t werewolf and go wild!

Murray: You finished? I mean, there’s so much self-pity, Arthur. You sound like you’re making excuses for killing those young men. Not everybody—and I’ll tell you this—not everyone is awful.

00:26:22 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:26:24 Jesse Host

It’s also provocative to start with those two films when a lot of critics in particular did not like *Joker*. Very actively did not like *Joker*.

[Laughs.]

[Mark agrees.]

Like, I don’t think there was a film from, let’s say, that year that was more specifically disliked—not universally, but more often specifically disliked than *Joker*. And I liked a lot of things about *Frozen*, but it maybe is a little messy. So, uh, [*chuckles*] why start with one that you knew was gonna make people mad?

00:26:05 Mark Guest

Well, [*laughs*] most parents I know who have children of a certain age, if they hear the music from *Frozen* one more time, they just go straight to the fridge and open a bottle of wine. They can’t take it anymore.

[They laugh.]

00:27:16 Jesse Host You know, and you—
Like I'm friendly with the people that wrote that music, and I think it's spectacular, and I kind of agree.

00:27:21 Mark Guest I love it! I love it and—I don't have children, so I have not been required to listen to it 24/7 for five years. So, that's something.

00:27:29 Jesse Host The parts I think are great are those great songs, and then I just—I just love that freaking snowman. *[Laughing.]* I just laugh at the idea of this snowman where the joke is that he doesn't understand he's gonna die!

00:27:42 Music Music "In Summer" from the movie *Frozen*.

*The hot and the cold are both so intense
Put them together, it just makes sense!*

*Winter's a good time to stay in and cuddle
But me in summer, and I'll be a—
[Gasps.]
Happy snowman!*

When life gets rough, I like to...

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]

00:28:01 Mark Guest I think we should end this—we should end this session with singing a few songs from—*[laughing]*. But you know, you wanna stay—you know, I'm an entertainer. You wanna stay ahead of the audience, you know? People think, "Oh god, you know, this is gonna be a history of cinema. How are you gonna—you know, this could be predictable." You know? And so, you need to stay ahead of the audience. You need to say look, this is gonna be thoughtful and hopefully fun, but not what you expect. And that's an important thing for me, to start that way. You know, and like with the original *Story of Film*, I started with *Saving Private Ryan*—you know, Spielberg's film, but then we cut to *Three Colours: Blue*, a Kieślowski film. And that was a surprise as well, I think. You know?

00:28:49 Jesse Host And surprise is an important part of art and entertainment. We have so much more to get into. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:28:57 Promo Clip **Music:** Upbeat, brassy music.

Annabelle Gurwitch: Hey there! It's Annabelle Gurwitch!

Laura House: And I'm Laura House. We host *Tiny Victories*—the 15-minute podcast that's about the little things.

Annabelle: Getting into the tiny victory frame of mind is about recognizing minor accomplishments and fleeting joys.

[Answering machine beep.]

Music: Quirky, fun music.

Speaker 1: Isn't it a wonderful day when the first password you try actually works?

[Beep.]

Speaker 2: When it's freezing cold outside and toasty as all get-out in my shower, my tiny victory is that I turn off the water and get on with my day.

[Original music fades back in.]

Laura: We can't change this big, dumb world, but we can celebrate the tiny wins.

Annabelle: So, join us on Maximum Fun or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Annabelle & Laura: Let's get tiny!

[Music ends.]

00:29:41 Music Transition
00:29:45 Jesse Host

Chiming synth with a steady beat. This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with filmmaker Mark Cousins.

00:30:28 Mark Guest

Let's talk about some of the innovations in the making of film—and technical innovations in the making of film—in the last 20 years or so that are covered in your new *Story of Film* movie and how they have changed things a little more concretely. So, you mentioned small cameras. What does small cameras practically mean, in terms of what ends up on the screen and how stories are told? If you think around the world, if you're using really small cameras, you can look like a tourist. And so, if you're filming in Iran or in other countries of the world or China where there are authoritarian regimes, you can actually film stuff that is more subversive. So, the small camera has a social and political implication. It can show stories that would be banned at a time when you needed more kit and bigger equipment, etc.. So, that's a crucial aspect of it. There's also a question of intimacy. If you're working with children—and I made a film about children and cinema—children are often scared by big cameras and loads of lights. But if there's just like a tiny little handheld camera or something like that, the child forgets that they're being filmed, and some of the best performances in cinema have come from children under those circumstances. And so, that's another advantage.

00:31:47 Jesse Host

When you reduce the equipment to almost zero, you get closer and closer to realism, but I think also closer and closer to painting and a kind of pure self-expression, as well. So, it doesn't just make the films more realistic. It makes them more creative, to use small cameras.

What about digital imagery, in film? Digital imagery has existed in film since—you know, 1980 or so. But the last 20-some years, or maybe the last 30 years, have seen its proliferation. And at this point, digital imagery is accessible to, you know, a lady sitting at home on her home computer who doesn't even need that many specialized skills. So, like you cover—for example—the new *Planet of the Apes* movies. What is the value of being able to create visuals completely within the world of a computer, rather than just having to capture them with a camera?

00:32:39 Mark Guest Well, you know, I'm broadly—I am for digital imagery. I know there are some filmmakers like Christopher Nolan who want to keep shooting on film. And good luck to them; that's great. I will continue to see their films. But the advantages so outweigh the disadvantages. It's—the advantages are substantially what we've been talking about a moment ago, the democratizing of the process. So, anybody can make films. And there are other advantages, because the cameras are—the digital cameras now are so sensitive that you sort of don't need lights anymore. Or you can just light with a *[inaudible]* and you can shoot in candlelight, etc., all that's great.

However, those are I would call second order problems. The main—the primary question is always how do you give your image weight or meaning or originality. And there's a slight danger with a digital image that it feels—I don't know what the right word is. Lighter? You know, less grounded to the earth in some way. You know, because it's pixels. It's zeros and naughts. And so, the filmmaker always has to overcome that problem and make imagery that is something... if possible, sincere or profound in it. You know? And that's the simple question that we all have to learn if we're doing anything. Like, when you and I are chatting here, we're trying to avoid being boring or banal.

[They chuckle.]

And we've succeeded to some extent, I'm sure, but not entirely—at least in my case! But you know, your imagery that you're making, you have to avoid banality. And in your story and your film overall. It's always the same question: how do I avoid banality? And it's slightly easier to be banal with a digital image. Let's talk about excitement and its opposite. Um.

00:34:30 Jesse Host

[They chuckle.]

00:34:42 Mark Guest

So—
That's a very good sentence! I can't wait to hear what's coming next!

00:34:43 Jesse Host

I don't know. Maybe my favorite movie that I've seen in the last 20 years in a movie theater was *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

00:34:50 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:34:51 Clip Clip

[Mechanical clicking and whirring.]

Music: Ominous, resonating chords.

Nux: Oh, what a day! What a lovely day!

00:35:01 Sound Effect Transition

[Engines rev and fade into the distance.]
Music swells and fades.

00:35:02 Jesse Host

I don't think I had ever seen something like that. I'm not even like a huge action movie guy. Like, I like action movies as much as the next person, but probably not more. And I remember walking out of the movie theater and being like, "Oh my goodness! That was un-be-lieeeeivable!" And just feeling like I'm going to be processing that

for years to come. You cover that movie in your film. What do you think is special about that? And what do you think is innovative about that in, you know, one of the most important kinds of cinema in the world?

00:35:45 Mark Guest

Yes. So, as we know, action cinema isn't just fast cutting. It isn't just crashing cars or car chases or—you know, spaceships colliding with each other or zapping each other. Action cinema has to have a kind of coherence to it. We need to have—you just can't do a kaleidoscopic of fast stuff, 'cause it's meaningless and boring and you don't know what's up and what's down and what's left and what's right.

What was brilliant about *Fury Road*, and it's quite a simple story—they travel up the road, and then they travel down the road again! *[Laughs.]* And so, we always knew, brilliantly, where we were. Now, it is cut extremely fast by a brilliant female editor whose name I've just forgotten—sorry about that—but brilliantly edited. But coherently so. It feels physical. It's going back to the thing that we were saying a moment ago about grounded. You feel the dirt. You feel the weight of those vehicles. You feel the gravity, the kinetic energy of it all. And that's why it works so brilliantly, I think. And it was—you know, I know you said you haven't seen anything like it before and I agreed. I was mesmerized by it. But it was influenced by a Buster Keaton silent film which had some of the same story and some of the same weight to it. You know?

00:37:10 Jesse Host

It mattered, those vehicles. We felt we were in them. *Fury Road* is a movie that requires you to submit to it by being as—you know—an intense barrage of cinema as could possibly exist. You know? A maximum amount of visual information and loudness and visual and subject violence and—like, it's just—you couldn't sit in a movie theater and space out. You know?

00:37:38 Mark Guest

No, that's true.

00:37:39 Jesse Host

You also cover, in your new film, movies that take great advantage of slowness.

[Mark confirms.]

Can you give me an example of a film that is innovative in that reverse—in that manner that is the reverse of *Fury Road's* excitement?

00:38:05 Mark Guest

Yes. For example, I focus on a film called *Cemetery of Splendor*. And it's about some soldiers who are in a local hospital, and they've been hurt in the war. And they're basically sleeping. It's a film about falling asleep. And one soldier has a nurse—an older nurse—who's looking after him. And so, he falls asleep and then she seems to fall asleep, and they meet in their dream lives in a way. It all happens very gently. You almost feel that you, yourself, are falling asleep. But it's mesmerizing, and I would actually say it's the best film I've seen in the last decade. And it's interesting; when many people use the word "cinematic", they think it means big and loud and big vistas and *Lawrence of Arabia* and lots of action.

But I think cinematic can often be the opposite of that—just very slow, very gentle. The sort of thing that, in your home—you know, when your children are running around or the phone's going or you

have to cook lasagna or something, you don't have time just to stop everything and look at almost time passing. You know? That kind of somnambulant, dreamlike feeling which is really nourishing. And so, some of the best films of the last decade have been slow like that, have been gentle like that, have rewarded patience. And I would say that's very cinematic.

00:39:29 Jesse Host

It must be inspirational to you, a guy who's asking people to submit to two hours and 40 minutes of you talking about movies from Thailand that they haven't seen.

00:39:41 Mark Guest

Yes. Yeah, it is. You know. And I think that, of course, people—a lot of people find my films boring. And a lot of them, the opposite. You know? It's weird. Like, I'm stopped—I'm not a famous person, but even me, I'm stopped like four or five times a day on the street by people saying, "Look, you got me see cinema in a different way. You know, I didn't know about Indian cinema. I thought I—you know, I found more films to love." Etc., you know. So, it's sort of like sharing the love. And if you believe in the audience. If you believe that people are interested as well fast entertainment in a kind of enrichment and something slightly less easy to describe and numinous.

00:40:40 Jesse Host

And I do believe that. I believe that everybody listening here will be touched by something. You know, waking up at dawn and seeing the sun come up. Something gentle and poetic. And I—because I believe that, then that's the sort of way that I take my movies.

Well, Mark, I will tell you that my life has been very much enriched by your films. I'm very grateful for them.

[Music fades in.]

00:40:50 Mark Guest

And I'm grateful that you took the time to come be on *Bullseye*.

00:40:52 Music Transition

What a lovely thing to say, Jesse. Thank you so much.

00:40:58 Jesse Host

Whimsical music with a syncopated beat.

Mark Cousins. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* is available to rent or stream on Hoopla, Apple, Fandor, and a number of other platforms. His newest work, an update on the series is called *The Story of Film: A New Generation*. You can rent it now.

00:41:21 Music Transition

[Music fades out.]

00:41:24 Jesse Host

Relaxed, chiming synth.

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. This week, here at my house was the week when we put the Christmas tree out on the curb and the trash people came and collected it. Thank you, city of Los Angeles.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers, Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellows at Maximum Fun are Tabatha Myers and Bryanna Paz. We get help booking from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. He and I are gonna go see Brenton Wood and Barbara Mason next month, in Long Beach. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to them and to their label, which is Memphis Industries.

00:42:39 Promo Promo

Bullseye is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us in any of those places, follow us. We share all our interviews there. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]