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# THE MOB AND THE MOVIES: A CINEMATIC HISTORY OF THE ALL-AMERICAN CRIMINAL

Andrew Graves

## Week 8: Mann's World

### Michael Mann

- Mann's most memorable features burn with aesthetic smarts, they are tense, intelligent noirish capers born out of the MTV era.

*"It said to my whole generation of filmmakers that you could make an individual statement of high integrity and have that film be successfully seen by a mass audience all at the same time. In other words, you didn't have to be making Seven Brides for Seven Brothers if you wanted to work in the mainstream film industry, or be reduced to niche filmmaking if you wanted to be serious about cinema. So that's what Kubrick meant, aside from the fact that Strangelove was a revelation."*

**Michael Mann**

*"What I try to do – I mean 'try,' because you don't get there all the time – is to have impact with content. It's those moments in which you're trying to bring people beyond filmed theatre. If I have an ambition, it's that."*

**Michael Mann**

- His shtick can seem like a throwback to the eighties.
- But a more trained eye will be able to discern something more elegant.
- For to link Mann purely with the past is to do him a disservice.
- While we may associate his style with a certain period, we only do that because Mann was so utterly confident in inventing that look and feel in the first place.
- What we might sometimes consider eighties-isms can be more accurately described as Mann-isms.
- In short, it's an all-encompassing visual smartness which oozes cinematic cool, without being vacuous or overly superficial.
- Mann, regardless of where we are in history, will always make a feature which will unquestionably transport us to his world.
- Like many of the best directors, he can give us who he *is* and what his films *are* in one easily recognisable transaction.

### THEIF (1981)

#### MICHAEL MANN

- Directed by Michael Mann
- Written by Michael Mann
- Based on *The Home Invaders* by Frank Hohimer
- Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and Ronnie Caan
- Cinematography by Donald E Thorin
- Edited by Dov Hoenig
- Music by Tangerine Dream

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**THE JERICHO MILE**  
**MICHAEL MANN**

- Tells the story of lifer Rain Murphy, convicted for murder
- He keeps himself sane by running
- In the end, he gets so good he could in fact qualify for the Olympics

*“It probably informed my ability to imagine what Frank’s life was like, where he was from, and what those 12 or 13 years in prison were like for him,”*

**Michael Mann**

**THIEF (1981)**  
**MICHAEL MANN****Frank**

- Frank has spent much of his twenties in prison
- Out of time, trying with desperate determination he’s trying to make up for the years he’s lost, and build a respectable life for himself, with a house, wife and child.

*“The idea of creating his character, was to have somebody who has been outside of society. An outsider who has been removed from the evolution of everything from technology to the music that people listen to, to how you talk to a girl, to what do you want with your life and how do you go about getting it,”*

**Michael Mann**

*“However, in the absence of social growth, Frank has become the consummate professional in his job cracking safes. And he would be the first in a series of men in Mann’s films who are obsessively focused on their work, and getting the job done with an exacting perfection, defined by their own personal code of conduct.”*

**Kevin Jagernauth**  
**IndieWire**

*“If you project Frank’s mental state—how does he think? how does he feel in the world he occupies? what is that world? —to him, the city isn’t this flat place, with streets at right angles to each other, like a grid. To him, in his mental projection, he moves through a place that’s almost three dimensional...filled with danger, it’s filled with opportunity, he has to avoid discovery, there’s secret places where he keeps the tools of his trade. To me it became like a three-dimensional maze. It’s very much kind of a complexity, kind of like an arcology more than a two-dimensional city plan.”*

**Michael Mann**

- With *Thief* and *Collateral* (2004), the director strips away any romantic or charismatic versions we may have seen before, offering us instead more clinical insights into the world of the professional criminal.
- And while we are never given one-dimensional characters, it is often the mundanity of their existence which is most appealing.
- Yet because their tiny lives play out against a wondrous panorama, his features never dip into kitchen sink presentations.

- Beautifully edited and lusciously composed, his night shots bristle with menace and wonder where car taillights bleed into the distance and neon flashes merge with the rolling oceans that lap against the rocks of a beguiling narrative.

**MANHUNTER (1986)****MICHAEL MANN**

Directed by Michael Mann

Screenplay by Michael Mann

Based on the novel *Red Dragon* by Thomas Harris

Produced by Richard A Roth

Cinematography by Dante Spinotti

Edited by Don Hoevig

Music by Michael Rubini

- In *Manhunter*, his icily effective psychological thriller, Mann dissects the serial killer archetype focussing on not one but two exponents.
- With the Tooth Fairy, he suggests a lost soul brutally twisted and spiritually out of control but with Lecktor, the confined killer he presents us with a coldly efficient unrepentant cannibal.
- With the Tooth Fairy, he suggests a lost soul brutally twisted and spiritually out of control but with Lecktor, the confined killer he presents us with a coldly efficient unrepentant cannibal.
- It's brutal and stylish
- Clinical and human
- However, Lecktor, The Tooth Fairy and Graham all seem to occupy the same dark territory, physically and emotionally

**PUBLIC ENEMIES (2009)****MICHAEL MANN**

- Directed by Michael Mann
- Screenplay by Ronan Bennett, Ann Biderman and Michael Mann
- Based on *Public Enemies: America's Greatest Crime Wave and the Birth of the FBI, 1933–34* by Bryan Burrough
- Produced by Michael Mann and Kevin Misher
- Cinematography by Dante Spinotti
- Edited by Paul Rubell and Jeffrey Ford
- Music by Elliot Goldenthal
- Bryan Burrough had originally started researching John Dillinger
- Initially, he had intended to create a miniseries
- HBO snapped up the idea, however, Burrough had no experience in scriptwriting and his initial drafts were 'very bad'
- He began to write a non-fiction book on the topic which he felt more comfortable with and HBO slowly lost interest in the project
- The book was due to be published in 2004 and Burrough asked HBO if they would relinquish the rights, which they agreed to do
- The idea was then resold to companies who also represented Michael Mann and Leonardo DiCaprio
- DiCaprio was initially considered for the Dillinger role before he left to work on *Shutter Island*

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## **PUBLIC ENEMIES CONT...**

- Michael Mann was bought on as director, having worked on similar projects which never got off the ground, he agreed to adapt Burrough's book
- Though the film tells an explosive true-story and is loaded with excellent performances and attention to period detail
- The presentation of the film is let down by the decision to change the shutter angle on the Sony digital cameras to 360 degrees
- This gives the look of being filmed at 30fpm
- Usual cinematic films are filmed at 24fpm
- The end result makes it feel like a 90s TV show