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Artist Statement

In recent years I have struggled with my feeling that film serves no concrete need within society. It doesn't put a roof over anyone's head; it doesn't cure disease; it doesn't end wars; films with broad audience appeal aren't even art by conventional standards. My work is evidence of this underlying struggle and the hope that someday I arrive at an ability to produce films of social worth.

I still have no answer to this conflict. I still wonder whether I am anything more than a blight upon society. But I have grown to understand what need it is that film, done properly, can fulfill. Our medium—at its laziest—is a mouthpiece for the xenophobia and paranoia of a culture gone mad on its own precocious power. Films have refused to take responsibility for the content they present.

We as a culture have become obsessed with simple stories that are easy to tell and easy to watch. In our fascination with the technical and our idolization of lazy storytelling by the likes of Spielberg and Rodriguez—storytelling that relies upon stereotypes and violently refuses to be anything but another big box-office gross—we have become comfortable. We now honestly believe that lighting and camera placement define the soul of a film. Not that these things aren't of utmost importance, but do they create drama? If you put a bright light behind your actor and stick your camera on a Panther dolly, can a weak performance be made strong?

No. Movies are about people and the stories they create. People are not simple animals, and nuance is important. I feel that comedies needn't always be funny, and dramas should be able to laugh at themselves. As a director, I see it as my responsibility to emphasize the human aspect of my films. Without genuine pathos, a film is nothing. I see and admire this pathos in the films of Altman and Stevens, as well as contemporary directors like Richard Kelly and the Coen brothers, but just as much in the writing of Vonnegut and Brautigan.

What originally seduced me about film was its ability to lie convincingly. I now see that it is the responsibility of movies to tell the truth. Narrative fiction has much more free reign in speaking truth than do documentaries, which are shackled by a responsibility to remain *factual*. I see every one of my films as a parable—not intended to instruct, but to bear witness to a fundamental truth: that the world is amazing and complicated. Joy is found in unexpected places; despair exists where there should be hope; there is kindness in suffering.

We live in powerful times—times of crisis, both within the film industry and the world at large, and if film is to stay relevant it must learn to tell the truth. It is no longer acceptable to entertain, or be artful, or “present interesting ideas.” For now, the best we can do is offer our audience a rare chance for self-reflection—an important service in a world where few such opportunities exist. I no longer believe that film can single-handedly change the world, but it can help. We can gently massage the global psyche to think differently about a lot of things. Shocking the audience is not the way. Neither is making “issue” pictures with overt moral lessons. We can change the world by giving people the opportunity to examine themselves. I have been given a tremendous and undeserved opportunity to show the world something important, and I do not take that responsibility lightly.