

# Being John Malkovich

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*Being John Malkovich* is a 1999 American black comedy-fantasy film written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze.<sup>[2]</sup> It stars John Cusack, Cameron Diaz, Catherine Keener, and John Malkovich, who plays a fictional version of himself. The film depicts Craig Schwartz (Cusack), a puppeteer who finds a portal that leads into Malkovich's mind.

It was nominated for the 72nd Academy Awards in three categories: Best Supporting Actress for Catherine Keener, Best Director for Spike Jonze and Best Original Screenplay for Charlie Kaufman.

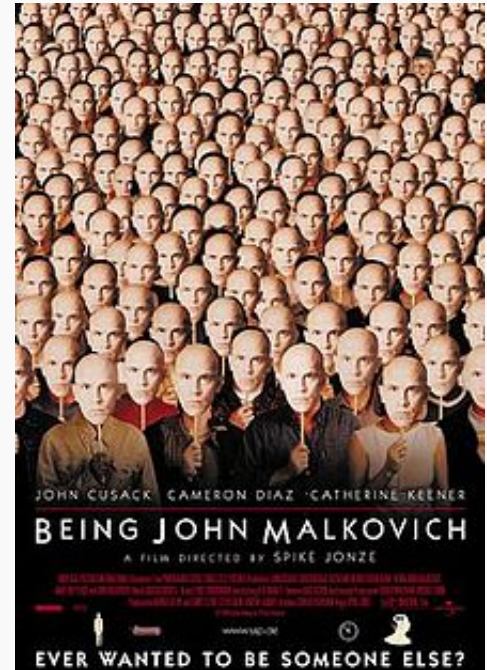
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## Plot

Craig Schwartz (John Cusack) is an unemployed puppeteer in a forlorn marriage with his pet-obsessed wife Lotte (Cameron Diaz). Gaining a file clerk job through Dr. Lester (Orson Bean) at LesterCorp, in the strange Floor 7½ low-ceiling offices of the Mertin Flemmer Building in New York City, he develops an attraction to his co-worker Maxine (Catherine Keener), who does not return his affections.

### *Being John Malkovich*



Being John Malkovich movie poster

<b>Directed by</b>	Spike Jonze
<b>Produced by</b>	Steve Golin Vincent Landay Sandy Stern Michael Stipe
<b>Written by</b>	Charlie Kaufman
<b>Starring</b>	John Cusack Cameron Diaz Catherine Keener Orson Bean Mary Kay Place John Malkovich
<b>Music by</b>	Carter Burwell
<b>Cinematography</b>	Lance Acord
<b>Editing by</b>	Eric Zumbrennen
<b>Studio</b>	Gramercy Pictures

Schwartz discovers a small door behind a filing cabinet which he enters, finding himself in the mind of actor John Malkovich; able to observe and sense whatever Malkovich does for fifteen minutes before he is ejected and dropped into a ditch near the New Jersey Turnpike. Schwartz reveals the portal to Maxine and they decide to let others use it at \$200 a turn.

Schwartz tells Lotte, who becomes obsessed with the experience, allowing her to live out her transgender desires.

Lotte becomes attracted to Maxine and they begin a relationship by having Lotte inside Malkovich, and Maxine dating him. Schwartz, forsaken by both women, locks up Lotte in a cage. Unbeknownst to Maxine, he then enters into Malkovich's mind and dates her. Drawing on his puppeteering, Schwartz discovers that he is able to control Malkovich's actions while in his head, causing the actor to become paranoid. After consulting with his friend Charlie Sheen, Malkovich trails Maxine to the Mertin Flemmer building, where he finds and tries the portal and is placed in a world where everyone looks like him and can only say "Malkovich"; he is ejected and meets Schwartz by the turnpike, and angrily demands that the portal be closed, to which Schwartz refuses.

Lotte escapes and phones Maxine, revealing that Schwartz was dating her. Maxine is annoyed but accepts it as she enjoyed the experience. Lotte seeks out Dr. Lester for help who, with a room dedicated to Malkovich, is well aware of the portal. He explains that the person connected to it becomes "ripe" for occupation on the eve of their 44th birthday. However after turning 44, the portal moves to its next host, an unborn child. The former allows one to increase their life before moving on to another host while the latter means being trapped within the unborn child. Dr. Lester, who has been using the portal to prolong his life, reveals his plan to use Malkovich for himself and several of his friends. Offered the chance to join Lester's group, Lotte warns him that Schwartz has control.

Meanwhile, Schwartz finds he is able to remain in Malkovich indefinitely. He spends the next eight months in Malkovich's body and through his control, turns Malkovich into a world-famous puppeteer, revitalizing puppetry. Malkovich also gets married to Maxine and learns that she is pregnant, as their relationship grows distant. Malkovich's 44th birthday approaches so Dr. Lester and his friends capture Maxine, threatening to kill her if Schwartz does not leave. Lotte loses hope and attempts to kill Maxine, but they end up at the turnpike after falling through the portal and Malkovich's shame-ridden subconscious. Maxine reveals that she conceived when Lotte was inside Malkovich's body, and kept the child because it is theirs. The revelation cements their love for each other.

Eventually, Schwartz leaves Malkovich's body voluntarily, hoping to win Maxine back. Malkovich finds that he has regained control of himself but his joy is cut short as moments later Dr. Lester and his friends enter the portal. Schwartz, discovering that Lotte and Maxine are together again, enters the portal in an attempt to become Malkovich and regain Maxine, but is too late and finds himself in the next host: Emily, the baby of Maxine. Schwartz is permanently imprisoned and must now spend the next 40 years watching Maxine and Lotte live happily ever after through Emily's eyes. Later, an aging Malkovich, under the collective mind of Dr. Lester and his friends, reveals to a now aged Sheen a plan to prolong their lives through Emily.

<b>Distributed by</b>	USA Films
<b>Release date(s)</b>	October 22, 1999
<b>Running time</b>	112 minutes
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	US\$13 million <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Box office</b>	\$32,382,381 (worldwide) <sup>[1]</sup>

## Cast

- **John Cusack** plays **Craig Schwartz**, an unsuccessful puppeteer. Cusack read the film's script after he had asked his agent to present him with the "craziest, most unproduceable script you can find". Impressed with the script, he asked his agent to follow its progress and book him an audition, with which he won the role.<sup>[3]</sup>
- **Cameron Diaz** plays **Lotte Schwartz**, Craig's pet-obsessed wife. Diaz's make-up artist Gucci Westman described styling Diaz in the role as "a challenge, to make her look homely".<sup>[4]</sup> The script included minimal physical descriptions of characters, and thus when Diaz took up the role she did not know that "people weren't going to recognize me".<sup>[5]</sup>
- **Catherine Keener** plays **Maxine Lund**, Craig's co-worker. Keener cited *Being John Malkovich* as an instance of her taking up a role based on the director's previous work. She had heard about Jonze's experience with music videos and took up the part of Maxine although she initially disliked the character and did not feel that she was right for the part.<sup>[6]</sup>
- **John Malkovich** plays **a fictional version of himself**, albeit with the middle name Horatio instead of Gavin.<sup>[7]</sup> Charlie Kaufman said that there was never another actor in Malkovich's place in the script: "The screenplay was always 'Being John Malkovich,' even before I had any expectation that John Malkovich would even read the script."<sup>[8]</sup> He chose Malkovich because he believed there to be "an enigmatic quality about him that works",<sup>[9]</sup> though Malkovich was partly chosen because of the sound of his name in repetition. Kaufman explained that "When we were thinking of alternatives, we found that a lot of them weren't fun to say."<sup>[10]</sup> Jonze's then-father-in-law Francis Ford Coppola was able to contact Malkovich,<sup>[11]</sup> and Jonze flew with producer Sandy Stern to Malkovich's home in France. Stern said that Malkovich was "half intrigued and half horrified" when he first read the script, but he eventually agreed to star in the film.<sup>[12]</sup>
- **Orson Bean** plays **Dr. Lester / Captain Mertin**, the head of LesterCorp.

## Cameos

Charlie Sheen appears twice in the film, as a lifelong friend of Malkovich's. Spike Jonze makes a cameo appearance as Derek Mantini's assistant. Brad Pitt also has a half-second-long cameo, as a miffed star in the documentary on Malkovich's career. He seems to be on the verge of saying something before the shot ends. Sean Penn also appears in the film as a fan of Malkovich's puppeteer work. Film director David Fincher makes an uncredited appearance as Christopher Bing in the American Arts & Culture pseudo documentary on John Malkovich. Winona Ryder, Andy Dick, and the members of Hanson can be seen in the audience of a Malkovich puppet show.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Development

Charlie Kaufman's idea of *Being John Malkovich* originated simply as "a story about a man who falls in love with someone who is not his wife". Gradually he added further elements to the story which he found entertaining, such as floor 7½ of the Mertin Flemmer building; in his first ideas, John Malkovich was "nowhere to be seen".<sup>[10]</sup> He wrote the script on spec in 1994 and though it was widely read by production company and movie studio executives, all turned it down.<sup>[11]</sup> Hoping to find a producer, Kaufman sent the script to Francis

Ford Coppola, who passed it on to his then-son-in-law Spike Jonze.<sup>[14]</sup> Jonze first read the script in 1996 and had agreed to direct the film by 1997.<sup>[8][11]</sup> Jonze brought the script to Propaganda Films, which agreed to produce the film in partnership with production company Single Cell Pictures.<sup>[8][11]</sup> Single Cell producers Michael Stipe and Sandy Stern pitched the film to numerous studios, including New Line Cinema, who dropped the project after chairman Robert Shaye asked "Why the fuck can't it be *Being Tom Cruise*?"<sup>[12]</sup>

With a budget of US\$10 million,<sup>[15]</sup> principal photography of *Being John Malkovich* began on July 20, 1998 and continued through August.<sup>[8][16]</sup> Filming took place primarily in Los Angeles;<sup>[16]</sup> specific locations included the University of Southern California campus and on board RMS *Queen Mary*.<sup>[17][18]</sup>

## Reception

The film received nearly universal acclaim from critics with a 92% "Certified fresh" rating on Rotten Tomatoes<sup>[19]</sup> and ranked 441st on *Empire* magazine's 2008 list of the 500 greatest films of all time.<sup>[20]</sup> The film was widely praised for its originality, both in terms of the script, which won Kaufman the Independent Spirit Award for Best First Screenplay, and Jonze's direction.

Critic Roger Ebert's review was four out of four stars. His comments of praise included: "Rare is the movie where the last half hour surprises you just as much as the first, and in ways you're not expecting. The movie has ideas enough for half a dozen films, but Jonze and his cast handle them so surely that we never feel hard-pressed; we're enchanted by one development after the next" and he also felt that "Either *Being John Malkovich* gets nominated for best picture, or the members of the Academy need portals into their brains."<sup>[21]</sup> Other top critic Peter Rainer commented "Dazzlingly singular movies aren't often this much fun" in his review,<sup>[22]</sup> and Owen Gleiberman boldly stated that he felt it was "The most excitingly original movie of the year."<sup>[23]</sup>

John Malkovich's performance as himself in *Being John Malkovich* is ranked No. 90 on Premiere Magazine's 100 Greatest Movie Characters of All Time.<sup>[24]</sup>

### American Film Institute Lists

- AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies (10th Anniversary Edition) - Nominated<sup>[25]</sup>
- AFI's 10 Top 10 - Nominated Fantasy Film<sup>[26]</sup>

## Distribution

### Theatrical release

*Being John Malkovich* was given limited release in U.S. theatres on October 22, 1999 and opened across 25 screens. On its opening weekend, the film grossed US\$637,731 across 25 screens with a per-screen average of \$25,495.<sup>[27]</sup> It expanded to another 150 screens the following week,<sup>[27]</sup> bringing in \$1.9 million with a per-screen average of \$10,857.<sup>[28]</sup> In its third week, the film's release widened to 467 locations and grossed \$2.4 million, averaging a lower \$5,041 per screen with a cumulative gross of \$6.1 million.<sup>[29]</sup> It moved into a wide

release the next week, expanding to 591 screens, and grossed \$1.9 million with a 20% drop in ticket sales.<sup>[30]</sup> Its fifth week brought in \$2.2 million with a 17% increase in ticket sales,<sup>[31]</sup> which dropped a further 33% the following week despite further expansion to 624 screens.<sup>[32]</sup> It finished its theatrical run after 26 weeks with a total gross of \$22,863,596.<sup>[33]</sup>

The film opened in the United Kingdom in March 2000, earning £296,282 in its debut week<sup>[34]</sup> and closing after fifteen weeks with a total gross of £1,098,927.<sup>[35]</sup> In France, the film opened in December 1999 with a gross of US\$546,000 from 94 venues and went on to further success due to positive reviews and word of mouth.<sup>[36][37]</sup> It grossed \$205,100 from 109 screens on its opening weekend in Italy and ticket sales dropped by 37% the following week with a cumulative gross of \$480,000 from 82 screens.<sup>[36][38]</sup> Its German release brought in a total of \$243,071.<sup>[39]</sup> *Being John Malkovich* had a total foreign gross of \$9,523,455, combined with its domestic gross to give an international total of over \$32 million.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Home media

*Being John Malkovich* was released on DVD on May 16, 2000. The disc's special features included a theatrical trailer, TV spots, cast and crew biographies, the director's photo album and featurettes on floor 7½ and puppeteering.<sup>[40]</sup> The Special Edition DVD was released later in 2000 and included, in addition to the aforementioned features, an interview with Jonze and two behind-the-scenes featurettes.<sup>[41]</sup> The film was released in VHS format on October 31, 2000 where it was available in both a regular edition and a Limited Edition Collector's Set.<sup>[42][43]</sup> It was released on HD DVD in 2008.

## Soundtrack

### Track listing

Source: Discogs<sup>[45]</sup>

All songs written and composed by Carter Burwell, except where noted.

No.	Title	Length
1.	"Amphibian" (Mark Bell Mix, written by Björk)	2:47
2.	"Malkovich Masterpiece Remix" (Written by Spike Jonze, performed by John Malkovich)	2:22
3.	"Puppet Love"	2:02
4.	"Momentary Introspection"	1:07
5.	"You Should Know"	0:34
6.	"Craig Plots"	3:40
7.	"Malkovich Shrine"	0:45
8.	"Embarcation"	1:46
9.	"Subcon Chase"	2:03
10.	"The Truth"	1:21

### *Being John Malkovich* Soundtrack



Soundtrack album by Various artists

**Released** 1999

**Genre** Electroternative, jazz, soft rock

- |   |      |
|---|------|
| 11. "Love On The Phone"   | 0:46 |
| 12. "To Lester's"   | 0:26 |
| 13. "Maxine Kidnapped"  | 1:15 |
| 14. "To Be John M"  | 1:59 |
| 15. "Craig's Overture"  | 1:00 |
| 16. "Allegro from Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, SZ106" (Béla Bartók) | 7:21 |
| 17. "Carter Explains Scene 71 To The Orchestra"                                   | 0:29 |
| 18. "Lotte Makes Love"  | 1:28 |
| 19. "Monkey Memories"   | 1:32 |
| 20. "Future Vessel"   | 3:40 |
| 21. "Amphibian" (Film Mix, written by Björk)                                      | 4:37 |

<b>Label</b>	Astralwerks
<b>Producer</b>	Various

Professional ratings	
Review scores	
Source	Rating
Allmusic	<span>★★★★★</span> <sup>[44]</sup>

## See also

- Cartesian theater

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## External links

- *Being John Malkovich* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120601/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- *Being John Malkovich* (<http://www.allrovi.com/movies/movie/v180993>) at AllRovi
- *Being John Malkovich* ([http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/being\\_john\\_malkovich/](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/being_john_malkovich/)) at Rotten Tomatoes

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