

## Notes on *Cloverfield*

### THE FILM

- Bookend: “It’s already a good day.” “I had a good day.”
- Coney Island = *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*.
- Does this stretch the credibility of the setup/motif?
- Of course Rob is going to Japan—that’s where all the best kaiju live!
- Vice president of what?
- “You’re, like, my main dude.”
- Men are brutally honest with each other.
- Some call the first 20 minutes “boring,” but you need the naturalistic “real life” for the extraordinary to have an impact.
- We see crazy things happen (the Statue of Liberty’s head gets thrown), but we still don’t know what’s going on.
- The wall of dust is the most-9/11 thing in the movie.
- Clover’s hand originally hit the Brooklyn Bridge, but it was changed to his tail to look less intentional.
- The crossfire scene really puts the military engagements of Japanese kaiju films into perspective.
- There a lot of product placement for Nokia in this.
- “Whoa! You know who Superman is?” “You know who Superman is?! Are you aware of Garfield?”
- “Flaming homeless guy.”
- The parasite scene reminds me of the Legion babies attacking people in the sub way in *Gamera 2*.
- Infirmary scene with casualties, just like *Godzilla* (1954).
- The shot of the military boots and high heels is an interesting image.
- Marlena’s death isn’t easy to watch...and we don’t know what happened to her. One of several things that go unexplained.
- The empty carriage being pulled by a white horse is eerie.
- We get it, Hud. You’ve seen a few kaiju movies. Ancient creature, alien, experiment.
- They beat *Inception* to the tilted set.
- The bigness of the monster and the ongoing dread makes him scary.
- I will never understand how women can run in heels.
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### *Commentary by Matt Reeves*

- Abrams got the idea for this while promoting M:I3 in Japan and went to a toy store and saw it full of Godzilla toys. He saw that Godzilla was the “national monster” and that the U.S. needed one.

- Abrams wanted to start Bad Robot with *Cloverfield* and gave it to Reeves. Reeves was interested in doing an outrageous movie naturalistically.
- They shot the movie with handycams. They used a \$1,500 camera, and it looked too good, he worried, on film.
- He gave the camera to the actors sometimes to make it feel authentic and even voyeuristic.
- Drew wrote an extensive outline for the film. The flashbacks are meant to be parallel stories. The monster footage is recording over it.
- They improvised several insert scenes to make the film less structured.
- The actors were cast before the script was finished. Secrecy was that tight. Some people thought they were auditioning from *Star Trek*. They didn't want anyone to know they were making a monster movie. They used scripts from *Alias* without character names in auditions. Some actors thought they were making a 20-something handycam drama.
- The trailer helped the crew learn how to do special effects on handycam. The party footage in the trailer wasn't scripted.
- They did guerilla-style filmmaking on the subway.
- Reeves watched a lot of YouTube to understand how to shoot this. There was a party video in particular he watched. He wanted to meld spontaneity and storytelling.
- The cinematographers had to learn not to make shots look as "perfect." No autofocus or bad autofocus.
- They worked to hide cuts so it looked like it was mostly unedited. Things like fast turns of the camera served as points for cuts.
- The film switches from scenes shot in New York, LA, and on set.
- The film was shot in 35-36 days.
- They had little overtime on the movie.
- Filming with a handycam required a special sort of choreography to get the story beats, performances, and invisible cuts.
- Any time there was an accident—camera operator trips—they prized them.
- The scene where the characters are driven underground by Clover was inspired by an online video of U.S. troops in Iraq getting bombed. It was obscured and by terrifying.
- Reeves watched *Children of Men* and drew inspiration from it. It taught him how to build ongoing dread.
- The tradition of long takes goes all the way back to Hitchcock's *Rope*.
- They had the "best rats in the business." They were *Pirates of the Caribbean* rats.
- When the parasites attack, they originally used puppets, but they didn't look real. They pantomimed and used CGI.
- The parasites were designed by Neville Page. He had a "wall of terror" with disembodied animal body parts.
- JJ's "ball of yarn" theory: find a way of making a big story with some slight of hand (i.e. inexpensively).
- The movie is a metaphor for priorities: we go from the party over career to caring about a fractured relationship.

- They were aware of the 9/11 aesthetic. It was a way to deal with the anxiety of the time. That was the entry point. Genre films allow one to deal with those in a safe environment. Making it about a monster allows the film to be its own thing.
- It doesn't matter if the characters live or die at the end. The important thing is Rob tells his girlfriend he loves her and they're together.
- Having Hud turn the camera on himself in case it was the last things anyone saw of him was done because they thought they wouldn't be able to afford to build a roof set. They needed up being able to, but they kept the line.
- The apartment set was tilted, not the camera.
- They did everything to make Rob an unheroic hero.
- The second parasite scene was filmed in post because they resonated with people.
- There was a pipe explosion in New York, so it wasn't until the last day of shooting that they were able to film parts of the helicopter take off.
- Double Negative, the special effects company, also did *United 93*. Reeves wanted them to do something similar for the helicopter crash.
- They considered changing the movie's title to "Greysbot" after one of the bridges where they filmed.
- Spielberg was shown the movie and suggested the use of sirens at the end. Countdown.
- Giacchino is a huge monster and Godzilla fan, so he was excited to make an Ifukube-style track for the credits.
- Reeves recorded a voiceover as part of the trailer. He said, "It's alive! It's huge!" Fans did a spectral analysis of his voice, and people thought he said, "It's a lion! It's hue!" so some people said this was Voltron.

*"Document 1.18.08: The Making of Cloverfield"* (blu-ray)

- They started filming June 18—which means the trailer was made in a month!
- Reeves: It's like you're watching through a soda straw."
- Abrams: We live in fear of "something else" happening.
- YouTube videos of 9/11 was used as inspiration.
- The actors would intentionally get themselves exhausted (breathing hard, jumping rope, etc.) before each take.
- After an hour of using the puppet, they dropped it, but it did let the actors know what it looked like and how to deal with it.
- One codename for the film was "Cheese." It didn't last for a day.
- The last day of shooting was for the first scene of the film.

*"Cloverfield Visual Effects"* (blu-ray)

- There's a lot of greenscreen in this. Lots of reference images were integrated into the footage.
- Pre-visals were used a lot, too.
- A technique called "match looping" was used. A technician would survey the set with a camera that would then be overlaid into the footage.

- They added another parasite in Beth's apartment because they liked them and had come under budget.

*"I Saw It! It's Alive! It's Huge!" (blu-ray)*

- People keep saying America needs its own monster—forgetting about King Kong, for the most part.
- Abrams liked the black, iris-less shark eye. You can't tell what it's looking at.
- Neville Page says Clover is a baby. That's why it's frightened in this alien environment.
- When Clover roars, it's not a threat display. It wants its mother.

*Deleted Scenes w/ Matt Reeves' Commentary (blu-ray)*

- Several cuts were made to the party for the sake of time.
- Some flirting between Hud and Marlena was cut.
- A chat between Marlena and the other girl about Jason was cut.

*Alternate Endings with Matt Reeves' Commentary (blu-ray)*

- They considered having a final shot where Beth and Rob are chasing a train. They decided the original written ending of them on the Ferris wheel in Coney Island was eerier.
- It was Abrams' idea to have the last line be, "I had a nice day."
- The other ending made the film seem like more of a puzzle than an emotional profession of love.

*Hantke*

- This film is a return to the traditions of the 1950s: it intends to be a catharsis for trauma. In this way, it is like the original *Godzilla* (1954). It's serious and unironic, unlike many other Hollywood productions that homage '50s and '60s sci-fi at the time (i.e. *Mars Attacks!*). "Contemporary recreations of 1950s films are not trying to be craptacular—they are trying to be sublime, involving their audiences in "the majestic, the awe inspiring, and the literally overpowering [speaking] the languages of excess and hyperbole to suggest realms beyond human articulation and comprehension" (Bukatman).
- This "end of irony" came about because of a sensitivity to images of destruction in cinema. It seemed exploitative, in poor taste. Instead, it return to the self-seriousness of 1950s films (Sontag: "Decided grimness").
- "To the same degree that these films—through their imagery—allowed the audience's masochist surrender to (or even wallowing in, one might argue) their own worst fears, they also—through their plots—converted masochist passivity into sadistic reassertion of individual, collective, and institutional control. In contrast to critical accounts that highlight one of these two facets over the other, it is important to see this progression from masochist submission to sadist reassertion as the dynamic that drives these films."
- The erasure of the previous footage of a happy couple on the tape by the disaster footage shows how "trauma trumps happiness."

Other sources:

- [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1060277/trivia/?ref=tt\\_trv\\_trv](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1060277/trivia/?ref=tt_trv_trv)
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloverfield>
- A teaser trailer without a title was issued with *Transformers*. The production was kept secret. Some theories as to the story included an adaptation of an HP Lovecraft story and a new entry in the Godzilla series. *Slusho*, *Colossus*, and *Monstrous* were discussed as possible titles.
- The viral marketing campaign included MySpace pages for the major characters (that stopped being updated on release day). Other facets focused on Slusho soda and the fictional company Tagruato. A number of websites, including Ethan Haas Was Right, were attributed to the film, but only its official website was confirmed. The Tagruato included a phone number that could be called, but it only had a recorded message. Slusho appeared in *Alias* and several other Abrams productions.
- “A four-installment prequel manga series by Yoshiaki Togawa titled Cloverfield/Kishin (クローバーフィールド/KISHIN, Kurōbāfirudo/KISHIN) was released by Japanese publisher Kadokawa Shoten.[46] The story focuses on a Japanese high school student named Kishin Aiba, who somehow bears a connection to the monster.”
- There’s no soundtrack, but an album of the music played at Rob’s party was released.
- “The running time of the film, without credits, is about 80 minutes, the length of a long-running MiniDV tape, a common format used in consumer camcorders.”
- “The head of the Statue of Liberty is shown about 50% larger than actual size. CG supervisor David Vickery said in an interview that many people imagined the head being much bigger than it actually is, and that the size was increased due to complaints that the head looked too small in the trailer.”
- “During the first weekend of the release, many theaters posted signs warning guests that the hand-held camera movements may cause motion sickness.”
- “The decapitated head of the Statue of Liberty in the street is inspired by the poster for John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981), which depicts the head of the Statue of Liberty lying in the middle of the street.”
- “The DHARMA Initiative logo, a fictional research project featured in the television series *Lost*, can be seen briefly at the start of the film.”
- “Most people took issue with how one of the main characters, Rob, could use his cell phone in the subway station. This, however, was a savvy case of Truth in Television, since the MTA is actively wiring subway platforms for cell service, specifically so riders can use their phones during emergencies. Indeed, after much of Manhattan had been smashed into oblivion, the subway station might be the only place where you can still get cellphone service.”
- “Jamie and all of the main characters have MySpace pages. The producers made these pages to advertise on MySpace. The characters last logged into them on January 18, 2008, the film's release date.”
- “Images from *King Kong* (1933), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), and *Them!* (1954) are hidden within the film. Each image is seen extremely briefly, for only a single

frame, during a camera edit. The "Them!" picture is shown at 00.24.06, the "Beast from 20,000 Fathoms" picture is shown at 00.45.27, and the "King Kong" picture is shown at 1.06.55. A brief clip of Rob and Beth at a train station is seen with the "King Kong" image at 1.06.51."

- "The title was initially a codename for the movie. It's named after Cloverfield Boulevard in Santa Monica, California, where the Bad Robot production offices were located while making the film."
- "When the teaser trailer with the head of the Statue of Liberty was shown without a film title, but a reference to J.J. Abrams, many J.J. Abrams fans looked to the internet to find out as much as possible about the upcoming, mysterious film. J.J. Abrams launched a viral campaign using multiple internet websites to promote this film, each providing background details of the plot. However, given the mysterious nature of the film and the viral websites, a number of theories were promoted on the blogosphere that were eventually proven untrue; for example, one hypothesis involved three Biblical monsters, one each for the sea, the land, and the air, instead of the single monster that came onto land from the depths of the sea."
- "The creature Hud mentions being discovered in Madagascar is the coelacanth, an order of fish known from the fossil record and thought to have been extinct since the end of the Cretaceous era (about 70 million years ago), a classic example of what is known as a "Lazarus taxon", a species thought to have been extinct but found to still be alive. The first modern coelacanth was actually discovered off the eastern coast of South Africa (not Madagascar). Today, coelacanths are found in Madagascan waters as well. Some think that the creature Hud mentions might have been the megamouth shark; however, megamouth sharks were not known to science at all and, thus, not thought to have been extinct before being discovered. The first specimen of the megamouth shark was discovered near Hawaii, the other side of the world from Madagascar."
- "About 104 recorded people left the theater due to dizziness and motion sickness."
- "Visual effects supervisor Eric Leven refers to the monster as "Clover"."
- "Prints were shipped to some theaters under the name "Bertha"."
- "The movie is viewed primarily from the point of view of Hudson "Hud" Platt, the character who uses the camera the most. H.U.D. is also short for "Heads-Up Display", a method for overlaying information onto a view of one's surroundings such as timestamps on video footage."
- "Whenever something scary or big is about to happen, groans of buildings and stomps can be heard, or even something as small as the hum of fluorescent lights. The sound effects are used in a subtle fashion, but listening closely, it's easy to see the filmmakers are manipulating them as a score."
- "In the manga series, we learn the monster attacked Japan and Manhattan. When the film was released on DVD in Australia, videos of the monster attacking Sydney and Melbourne appeared."
- "T.J. Miller, a stand-up comedian, was chosen for the role of Hud due in large part to his ability to improvise quickly. Director Matt Reeves felt this allowed the film an added sense of naturalism, since they didn't have to stick to a set script or dialogue. Originally,

Lily's "testimonial" to Rob was going to be a straight testimonial screenwriter Drew Goddard had written, but Reeves felt that, like the non-traditional movie that Cloverfield is, the scene shouldn't begin and end as expected. He would have Miller throw random dialogue to engage the actors or catch them off guard."

- "The words "Oh my God" or some variation (eg 'Oh God') are spoken 85 times throughout the film."
- "Fans gave the monster the nicknames Clovie, Clover, MGP, Darwin."
- "Both Jessica Lucas and Odette Annable starred in DC television shows on Fox and the CW channel; Jessica Lucas in Gotham (2014) as Tabitha Galavan, and Odette Annable as Reign on the CW show Supergirl (2015) and T.J. Miller starred in the Marvel movie Deadpool (2016) and its sequel Deadpool 2 (2018) as Deadpools sidekick Weasel."
- "After the closing credits there is a mysterious broadcast voice. When played in reverse, the broadcast says, "It's Still Alive.""
- "The Cloverfield monster has two minutes and 37 seconds of screentime."
- "Near the end of the film (at around 1 hr 13 mins) when they are at the fair you see something drop from the sky in the right-hand side."

#### TOKU TOPIC: The Aftermath of 9/11

##### • EVENTS

- This was a three-pronged attack orchestrated by al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. 19 men hijacked four passenger jets, crashing two into the World Trade Center towers and one into the Pentagon, with a fourth one crashing in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after the passengers attempted to overpower the hijackers. Some 2,750 people died during the attacks.
- Over 1,500 first responders, ironworkers, engineers, and other workers worked tirelessly at Ground Zero to find survivors. They were hindered by two feet of soot at the site. Only 20 were found. "The task of removing debris and rubble continued well into 2002, with some 108,000 truckloads of 1.8 million tons of rubble removed by May 2002."
- President Bush's approval rating jumped to 86% as Americans rallied around him and the phrase, "United We Stand." Rudy Giuliani, the then-mayor of NYC, gained a high profile—sometimes bigger than the president's—during this time of crisis. He was named "Person of the Year" by *Time*.
- Patriotism ran high. New York City and its people were venerated. So were first responders.
- Hate crimes, sadly, increased against anyone who was believed to look "Middle Eastern." Example: "Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh man...was shot dead on September 15 at the gas station he owned in Mesa, Arizona. Mark Anthony Stroman, a white supremacist, killed two men and injured a third in a shooting spree beginning September 15 in Dallas, Texas. His victims, including Bangladeshi American Rais Bhuiyan, were all targeted because they looked "of Muslim descent". His motive for the killings was revenge for the 9/11 attacks. On

July 20, 2011, Stroman was executed for the crime.” Vandalism against mosques and other Muslim institutions increased 1,600%.

- The collapsed Twin Tower threw 2,500 contaminants into the air, including carcinogens, causing many health problems. Rescue workers filed disability claims, with 1,000 reporting continued respiratory problems with 500 reporting psychological issues by 2004. 18,000 people have developed illnesses from the toxic dust. The 2006 death of NYPD James Zadroga was ruled by the coroner as connected to the cleanup, and detective Luiz G. Alvarez died in 2019 of colorectal cancer that was attributed to him spending three months at Ground Zero. These have sparked legal cases over medical compensation.
- “The attacks caused an estimated overall economic loss to the city of \$82.8-USD 94.8 billion, with the lower number being consistent with the NYC Partnership's November 2001 estimate and the high end being consistent with the New York City Comptroller's October 2001 estimate.[31] It was calculated that the lost human productive value, life insurance payouts were \$2.63 billion, federal payments after offsets were estimated at \$2.34 billion and charitable payments were \$0.79 billion.”
- Airport security was increased dramatically, often leading to accusations of racial profiling on Middle Eastern people and invasive security measures.
- The Patriot Act increased the power of government to investigate anyone suspected of terrorism, such as invading a premises without a warrant, or wire tapping.
- Al-Qaeda attempted many more attacks on U.S. soil in the years that followed, although most were thwarted.
- One of the most far-reaching effects was the War on Terror. This began Oct. 7, 2001, when for the first time NATO invoked Article 5, which allowed for member nations to act in collective self-defense. The U.S. attacked Afghanistan in retaliation against al-Qaeda. They had expected a missile strike, not a full-scale war, in retaliation. In March 2003, as part of President Bush's doctrine of “preemptive war” against what he called “the Axis of Evil” (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea), the U.S. invaded Iraq on suspicion Saddam Hussein was harboring WMDs. Baghdad fell in three weeks. Sadly, both countries would become quagmires, with troops fighting insurgents there for years. It became a second Vietnam War. Sept. 11 mastermind Osama bin Laden eluded U.S. forces until he was found in Abbotabad, Pakistan, where he was killed by SEAL Team 6 May 2, 2011, on orders from President Obama.
- “Jessica Wakeman, who was in New York during the attacks, writes, “Cloverfield nails what that morning felt like: the confusion at first and then fear overwhelms and all you can think about is the possibility of dying and needing to escape by getting out-out-out.” (Stone)
- Stone argues that *Cloverfield* doesn't so much sensationalize 9/11 as much as tap into modern people's perverse excitement at images of destruction even if they're real. People did recoil at it for a while, but “in 2010, while a Web site as conventional as Life.com



points out the “terrible beauty” of atomic explosions,<sup>2</sup> there is no real place in Western culture for an open discussion of 9/11’s dark aesthetic appeal.” Americans spent a hundred years being thrilled by cinematic destruction, and news outlets described 9/11 as being “like a movie.” “In short, we do not halt our enjoyment of violent imagery because it is real.” This thrill doesn’t preclude sorrow or sympathy, but mentioning this duality leads to vilification. (Stone)

- “Perhaps the footage was screened so often because it beggared belief and therefore required multiple viewings to fully comprehend. The scholar Kathy Smith supports this theory, suggesting that repetition of the images of 9/11 signified “a global attempt to admit its possibility and to come to terms with the act.” Patricia Mellencamp, in her classic study of “catastrophe coverage,” argues that repeated viewings of traumatic events such as the assassination of President Kennedy or the Challenger disaster allow us to “acknowledge, then alleviate fear and pain.” She draws on Sigmund Freud’s essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” to argue that the compulsion to repeat can result in mastery over loss.” (Stone)
  - Pew found that 63% couldn’t stop watching news coverage of the events. “A sizable majority of adults (71%) said they felt depressed, nearly half (49%) had difficulty concentrating and a third said they had trouble sleeping.”
- “Cloverfield is the first Hollywood movie not only to dwell on the destruction in Manhattan but also to revel in it. It manages this feat by removing us just far enough from reality that we do not have to confront our fascination with the death and destruction wrought on 9/11. By reconfiguring the event as a science-fiction monster movie, it allows us to experience the terrorist attacks as an exciting spectacle without any attendant feelings of guilt.” (Stone)
- “If the film dwelled on the ideological complexities of 9/11, our experience might be completely ruined. And so, instead of al-Qaeda, we are offered a monster. Unlike terrorists, monsters are not driven by ideology. We do not have to think about why the monster wreaks destruction, it just does. Its violence is “senseless,” a term favored by many a media pundit unwilling to confront the root causes of the attacks.” (Stone)
- “Though the film has little to offer in terms of authoritative statements, and thus never attempts to integrate viewers into a community of knowledge, it goes to great lengths to make up for this lack by offering what one might call ‘a communal experience of experience’” (Hentke). In other words, 9/11.
- “What emerges is an overall image of neither political persuasion: crowd behavior is neither a war of all against all, nor an exemplary display of civic virtue. Carefully calibrating the balance between embracing and critiquing the military, Cloverfield seems undecided where it stands politically.” (Hentke)
- Clover represents the mysterious forces attacking New York for unknown reasons. It’s less about what happened historically and more about how it felt (helplessness, powerlessness, victimization, etc.) The found footage aesthetic emphasizes experience over narrative in this regard. (Hentke)
- “Cloverfield does not need to allegorize its subject matter, because the historical events to which it so unambiguously alludes—the attacks on the World Trade Center on September

11, 2001—already come with all the trappings of allegory. The attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11 constituted an attack not on the buildings or the people in them, but on the buildings and the people in them as a compound symbol of the United States of America. Perfectly attuned to the representational logic of terrorism, Cloverfield functions as a fictional realist representation of a fully allegorized historical event. Instead of engaging in an argument, it merely illustrates the obvious.” (Hentke)

- The found footage motif plays into another post-9/11 concern: private vs. public life. The public disaster impinges on the private life recorded on the camera. The public unveiling of this footage can be seen as a form of transcendence, especially with the voyeurism.
- The question is, is this film a reopening an old wound or is it the end of the discourse on the trauma? Hentke argues it's more interested in profits than catharsis because of its conventionality (although he admits it skirts the line). He goes on to say it disavows political instrumentalization of the event by privileging the private over the public.
- “...Cloverfield is all about exploring (and exploiting) the experience of victimization. Neither does it provide comforting 1950s style visions of disciplined public responses to large-scale catastrophe, nor 1950s style figures of institutional authority setting things straight. It does not grant its characters a clear sense of agency, its love stories a happy ending, or a clear sense of closure that retroactively makes all the bloodshed worth it. In all of these instances of carefully constructed neutrality, Cloverfield could not be more different from the mentality of most 1950s giant creature films.” (Hentke)
  - “Fear was widespread, not just in the days immediately after the attacks, but throughout the fall of 2001. Most Americans said they were very (28%) or somewhat (45%) worried about another attack. When asked a year later to describe how their lives changed in a major way, about half of adults said they felt more afraid, more careful, more distrustful or more vulnerable as a result of the attacks.”
- Given the political divisiveness of 9/11, the film instead focuses on the nostalgia of the trauma of the event with a sensual assault and “strange apathy.” (Hentke).