

'Some lines shouldn't be crossed' - The Resurrection in Joel Schumacher's film 'Flatliners'

by Christof Wolf, May 2004, www.christof-wolf.name

'In the end we all know what we have done.' (Flatliners, DVD 38:45)

Introduction

In 1990 Columbia Pictures presented the Oscar (Best Effects, Sound Effects Editing) nominated film 'Flatliners' (directed: Joel Schumacher, script: Peter Filardi). Nelson, the hero in 'Flatliners', and four of his fellow medical students test how long they can remain brain-dead, 'quite simply to see if there is anything beyond death. Philosophy failed. Religion failed. Now it's up to physical science. Mankind deserves to know.' (DVD 16:45) What mankind deserves to know is nothing less than the answer of physical sciences to the ancient question: What happens after death?

It is significant and surprising that this theme is the explicit leitmotiv of a film, since no such leitmotiv can be found even in the genre of Jesus films. As far as one can see there is no genre: 'life after death films', although this question and answer is part of 'all stories [...] known collectively as **The Hero's Journey**.' (Vogler 1992, 1) In Christopher Vogler's model of twelve stages they (Heroes) 'experience a RESURRECTION, and are transformed by the experience' (stage eleven, 26). How far does Vogler's model work on a film that not only has an element of resurrection in it, but whose leitmotiv is to find out what – if anything – exactly happens after death?

What at first looks like a modern enlightened scientific approach becomes understandable only with the Christian teaching of the resurrection. In 'Flatliners' it is not so much the obvious discourse about resurrection, but their 'fruits' such as atonement and forgiveness and the truth, that one cannot redeem oneself. In the first part I will focus on possible answers to the question 'What happens after death?' and especially on what is probably its most influential – and uniquely Christian – answer. That will provide us with the grid for our film analysis and interpretation in the second part.

What happens after death? – Six basic theories

The question, what happens after death is an ancient one and each culture has a different approach. The Philosophers Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli describe six basic theories about what happens to human beings when they die.

'1 Atheistic materialism: Nothing survives. Death ends all of me. [...]

2 Ancient Paganism: A vague, shadowy semiself or ghost survives and goes to the place of the dead, the dark, gloomy Underworld. [...]

3 Reincarnation: The individual soul survives and is reincarnated into another body. [...]

4 Pantheism: Death changes nothing, for what survives death is the same as what was real before death [...] We are drops of the cosmic ocean, pieces of God-stuff. At death the drop returns to the sea. There is no real individuality. [...]

5 Immortality: The individual soul survives death, but not the body [...] what survives is an individual, bodiless spirit. This is Platonism, often confused with Christianity. [...]

6 Resurrection: At death, the soul separates from the body and is reunited at the end of the world to its new, immortal, resurrected body by a divine miracle.' (Kreeft, Tacelli 1994, 226f, 260).

Though it would be worthwhile to investigate all six theories in depth, that would go beyond the scope of this essay. But the six different theories do provide us with an excellent starting and vantage point. Very often films and other forms of contemporary media use the *language* of one of these six theories – for example the word ‘resurrection’ in ‘Fight Club’ – but the meaning has little if anything to do with a Christian understanding of resurrection. Still, contemporary usage does shape perception and analysis—sometimes creating deep conceptual confusion. Through a description of the characters of ‘Flatliners’ I will enter into detail on this point.

Christ’s Resurrection

Until today one of the most influential approaches to the question of life after death – at least in western culture – is the belief in Christ’s resurrection.

‘The message that flashed across the ancient world, set hearts on fire, changed lives and turned the world upside down was not “love your neighbour.” Every morally sane person already knew that; it was not news. The news was that a man who claimed to be the Son of God and the Saviour of the world had risen from the dead.’ (Kreeft, Tacelli 1994, 176).

Scripture itself claims that the Resurrection is central, as seen in chapter 15 of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: ‘if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.’ (RSV 1 Cor 15:14). The resurrection is the basis for the catholic faith that we will share a ‘glorious’ life with God or as Paul said: ‘our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.’ (Phil 3:20-21, cf. Rev 21:1-22:5).

Resurrection in the Old Testament and at the time of Jesus

The common tradition in the Old Testament speaks only of this life. God rewards, punishes, protects and rescues His people from death during their earthly life (cf. Psalm 23). Some faith in a bodily resurrection from the dead, adumbrated in Isaiah 26:19f and Job 19:26-27f, is explicitly formulated in 2 Maccabees 7: ‘And when he

was at his last breath, he said, “You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe *will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life*, [my emphasis] because we have died for his laws’ (2 Macc 7:9, cf. also verses 11, 14, 23, 29, 36) as well as in Daniel: ‘And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, *some to everlasting life* [my emphasis] and some to shame and everlasting contempt’ (Dan 12:2). God gives a new life as a reward for Jews who suffered martyrdom for God’s law. These passages look forward to a future judgement, when God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. That is the common understanding in this tradition of resurrection, though there is, on the other hand, in Wisdom 3:1-9, a resurrection soon after we die. ‘In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; *but they are at peace*. For though in the sight of men they were punished, *their hope is full of immortality*’ (RSV Wis 3:2-4, my emphasis). In the New Testament time after a long history of persecution and suffering some of the Jews especially the Pharisees believed that God will raise up and reward good people who had suffered in this life. ‘For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.’ (Acts 23:8)

Resurrection in the New Testament

The main source for an account of the resurrection is the New Testament. There are some non-Christian authors in the first and second century like Josephus Flavius, Suetonius and Tacitus, who write about Jesus, but they do not – apart from a possible mention by Josephus – refer to the resurrection. Thus one is left with the writings of the New Testament (Meier 1995, 1317). It is important to bear in mind, that the gospels are most probably grounded in oral traditions and written between 40 and 60 years after the events. Raymond Brown states that the gospels do not present an exact memory of Jesus and consequently that the text cannot be taken as a literal account (Brown 1991, 55-58). And so the gospels have no biographical ambition in terms of a complete and consistent description of Jesus’s life, death and resurrection.

There are different scholarly approaches to Jesus’s resurrection. According to Roger Haight: Resurrection is ‘not a return to life in this world, [...] not a resuscitation of a corpse, [...] not a resumption of an existence contained by the space-time con-

tinuum. Rather, Jesus's resurrection was a passage into "another world" (Haight 1999, 123f). Karl Rahner likewise asserts that the resurrection occurs neither in time nor in space. If one follows this line of thought, it seems that the empirical sciences cannot have anything decisive to say on this matter. In other words, though a film like 'Flatliners' claims that only science can answer the question about life after death, in fact science cannot prove anything one way or the other – not even about something so *prima facie* 'empirical' as the resurrection.

Some theologians like Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth advocated a thoroughly non-historical account, one that reduces the faith in the resurrection to matter of 'existential', subjective commitment (Butler, 48). One recent contribution to this debate is Nicholas Thomas Wright's extensively detailed book 'The Resurrection of the Son of God' (2003). Wright takes the bodily resurrection of Jesus literally. In opposition to Bultmann or Barth, Wright presents an account that is thoroughly historical. But it would be hard to dismiss Wright as a fundamentalist. What Wright insists is that the biblical metaphors are grounded in concrete historical events.

He sharply identifies four 'surprises of the Resurrection Narratives' (Wright 599):

- '(i) The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Stories' (599ff),
- '(ii) The Strange Absence of Personal Hope in the Stories' (602ff),
- '(iii) The Strange Portrait of Jesus in the Stories' (604ff) and
- '(iv) The Strange Presence of the Woman in the Stories' (607ff).

(i) There is a lack of any biblical tradition in the four resurrection narratives. That is surprising, because the early Christian tradition has seen Jesus's resurrection in 'accordance with the scriptures' (1 Cor 15:3). But there is no supporting quotation from Daniel or Maccabees, no claim of prophecy fulfilled – except that Jesus, 'beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [...] interpreted to them in all scriptures the things concerning himself' (Lk 24:27). But about what Jesus said, the scripture is silent.

(ii) It is 'extremely interesting, that at no stage do they [gospels] mention the future hope of the Christian. [...] Instead, we find a sense of open-ended commission *within* the present world: "Jesus is risen, therefore you have work ahead of you."' (603) That is different to Paul and the rest of the New Testament, where the resurrection of Jesus is connected with the community. (Cf. 1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 4, 5; 1 Th 4:14 and Rom 8:9-11). Now Paul in Romans is indeed using the resurrection as validation of

Jesus' Messiahship, of the claim that Jesus is the 'Son of God', without making a direct link to the community. But he also sees the risen Messiah as destined 'to rule the Gentiles; *in him shall the Gentiles hope* [my emphasis]' (Rom 15:12).

(iii) One could expect that the resurrection stories echo 'the kind of things that the favourite "resurrection" passages in the Old Testament had been saying. [...] Jesus is never depicted [...] as heavenly being, radiant and shining.' (604) The evangelists do not use any of these depictions as part of a demonstration that the scripture has now been fulfilled. 'Jesus appears in the narratives as [...] a human being among human beings' (605).

(iv) Despite the fact that women were not acceptable as legal witnesses in Jesus's days, all four narratives rely on the witness of women, and even present events from their point of view. 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?' (Mk 16:3). Obviously Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were convinced that the witness of the women was trustworthy. If they were legend-writers 'they could have invented stories of fine, upstanding, reliable male witnesses being first at the tomb, they would have done it.' (608)

Because of these four surprises, Wright concludes that

'both the evangelists themselves, and the sources to which they had access, whether oral or written, which they have shaped to their own purposes but without destroying the underlying subject-matter, really did intend to refer to actual events which took place on the third day after Jesus' execution.' (680)

Wright argues along the same line that although second temple Judaism provides the concept of resurrection, the Christian concept of resurrection could not naturally have arisen from it; neither the empty tomb, nor the appearance of Jesus is sufficient to explain the resurrection belief on its own. But both accounts together need an explanation. In Wright's view the best answer is 'that the Easter events were real, not fantasy; historical as well as historic' (680) Wright, in order to describe the relationship between empty tomb and appearances, states that 'together they constitute, with qualifications, a sufficient condition for the rise of the early Christian belief [...] and] they also constitute a *necessary* [my emphasis] condition' (688). Which is to say, no other explanation will do.

Since the common understanding of belief in the resurrection was linked to the last day or judgment, the disciples did not expect the resurrection of Jesus (Lk 24:12-34). The resurrection of Jesus was unexpected. It was an utterly new experience of

God's saving power that God raised the human Jesus from death and gave him a new bodily personal existence. 'The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet" (1 Cor 15:26f). What a just God gives in response to the sacrifice of his son is justice (cf. Seidel 1998, 25). It is remarkable that all the Easter stories in the New Testament (1 Cor 15:3-11; Mt 27:57-28:20; Mk 15:42-16:8 or 9-20; Lk 23:50-24:53; Jn 19:38-21:25 and Acts 1:1-11) stress this aspect, and at the same time they insist that the wonder of the resurrection is accompanied by doubts (cf. Andresen/Ritter 1999, 13). It is not just that disciples do not believe the first witnesses, the women (Lk 24:11; Mk 16:11); they are so shocked that Jesus has to show that he is more than a mere ghost (Lk 24:36ff) – or they want the level of empirical proof Thomas demanded (Jn 20:24-29).

Wright gives a good summary of the understanding of the Christian resurrection-belief. It consists basically of

'Jewish belief (bodily resurrection) and four key modifications from within that point: (1) resurrection has moved from the circumference of belief to the centre; (2) "the resurrection" is no longer a single event, but has split chronologically into two, the first part of which has already happened; (3) resurrection involves transformation, not mere resuscitation; and (4) when "resurrection" language is used metaphorically, it no longer refers to the national restoration of Israel, but to baptism and holiness.' (681)

Without doubt Paul is one of the key figures to develop such an understanding, especially (2) and (3). He believes that the Messiah would rise first and that, at the 'parousia' all his people would rise. For Paul resurrection is not only bodily, it must be connected with some kind of transformation. Interestingly there is no single word that can describe this transformation. Wright suggests 'transphysical' (Wright 477) – less a description than as a convenient label for it. From Wright's 'transphysical' account it follows that Jesus was not a ghost, nor a hallucination, nor a myth concocted by the disciples. He was visible, touchable, sometimes not recognizable at the first moment, and sometimes the laws of physics did not apply to him (Jesus could go through doors). He was indeed the Son of God (cf. Wright 2003, chapter 19).

It is a great challenge to describe the resurrected Jesus, because of the uniqueness of the resurrection event. That opens the door for all sorts of flights of imagination – of a kind we can see not only in Jesus films, but in other films like 'Flatliners'. No matter how this may be, there is one important link to make. In the words of Paul: 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, *that Christ died for our sins* [my emphasis] in accordance with the scriptures' (1 Cor 15:3). As we have

seen, Jesus's resurrection is unique, but it is not understandable without Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross (cf. Mt 26:27). The belief and teaching of the forgiveness of sins is one of the essentials of Christianity. It is not only the reason for Christ's sacrifice, it stops the hubris of human self-redemption or self-salvation. That is the Spirit, which the first apostles had, when they said: 'Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you' (Acts 13:38). Or as Paul put it: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins' (1 Cor 15:17).

Film Analysis and Interpretation

I am following Werner Faulstich's 'strukturalistischen Zugriff' (structure analysis, Faulstich 1995, 16; for implications of Faulstich's method see Wolf 2002, 10f). It is one precise instrument, which focuses primarily on structure and coherence, and regards films as autonomous. The basis of each 'structure analysis' is a film protocol, which I did not here provide in all details. For our purpose it is enough to investigate the storyline and specific artistic features of the film. The technical terms of Cinematography are according to William Phillips (2002, 72-92). The protocol follows the chapters of the DVD, and although one could raise legitimate questions about this procedure, the DVD chapters do provide an acceptable structure. In the analysis I pursue the fourfold grid: 'story', 'characters', 'special effects' and 'values, norms' (Faulstich 1995, 18). My special interest is in the following questions: Are there special effects or features which signify crossing the line of death? What is the portrayal of the main characters? What answer does the film give to the question: What happens after death?

The Story

Is there life after death? What happens yonder? Nelson and four of his fellow medical students want to know. 'Philosophy failed. Religion failed. Now it's up to physical science' (DVD 16:45) to answer that question.

Steckle, the only one who does not 'flatline', is writing his 'Genesis of a Young Surgeon' (DVD 3:54). After Nelson and Joe have had their Near-Death-Experiences (NDE), he reflects upon the experiment in his apartment: 'It was as if we felt no fear. As if we were already dead, and had nothing to lose by dying, because we lived life so well, and loved life so much that we imagined ourselves immortal. Overwhelming

the powers that be with our passion for science' (DVD 40:54). But the NDEs are nothing like what they had expected. It is not what the patients tell Rachel at the very beginning: 'I saw myself and everything. I started to float out into the hall. Then into this tunnel toward this light. It was the most beautiful light I ever saw. I heard this voice. It was the most beautiful voice I ever heard' (DVD 4:52). Instead of the most beautiful light and voice, Nelson is confronted by something nightmarish from his past – by the sight of him and his friends hurting a boy, Billy Mahoney. Billy escapes up a tree, but the friends and above all Nelson throw stones at him, so finally he falls to his death. Nelson never really felt sorry for what happened. He self-pityingly remarks: 'I was taken away from my family when I was nine years old. I was sent to Stoneham School for Boys. I thought I'd paid my dues!' (DVD 1:29:40). Joe is the second candidate. His NDE starts like a movement through a dark tunnel toward the light, but then he sees all the women he's secretly heaped during sexual encounters. Joe describes his visions as 'friendly. It was something vaguely feminine guiding me' (DVD 32:52), but the 'friendly' images pursue him everywhere, complaining: Joe, what have you done to me? The third one is David, the only atheist. In his NDE he is taunting Winnie, a classmate from the primary school. He is pursued by Winnie, who mocks him. Rachel is the last one who 'goes under'. She sees her father, who committed suicide and pursues her to find forgiveness.

The story has its biggest crisis when Nelson decides 'to go under again', because he 'can still make amends' (DVD 1:29:40) for Billy. David, Rachel, Joe and Steckle run to the lab, but Nelson has been dead for about twelve minutes. In the showdown the film switches between Nelson's second NDE and the desperate attempt by his friends to reanimate him, to bring him back to life. In Nelson's NDE, Billy and he exchange roles. Now it is Billy who hunts Nelson and throws stones at him. Only now he feels at the first time really 'sorry' (DVD 1:40:56). Billy Mahoney then forgives him. Nelson is successfully revived.

The Characters

There are five main characters in the film. Although not explicitly stated it seems that they have a religious background – even David who calls himself 'an atheist' (DVD 25:05). All use religious vocabulary. For example, after Nelson's first NDE Steckle says: 'You did it. Jesus Christ' (DVD 22:38). Again: at the end, after bringing Nelson back, Steckle prays 'Hail Mary, praise Jesus and all that stuff, thank you Jesus'

(DVD 1:44) or Joe swears to 'God' (DVD 1:03:00). Nelson has the deepest understanding of Christian 'words' (concepts), though he uses them in a very cynical way. Nelson: 'Come on, they are your sins. Live with them. I do.' (DVD 1:25:00) or 'Atonement, gentlemen' (DVD 1:25:41). Rachel sometimes seems to presume a God – for example, when she asks David: 'The atheist now believes in God?' (DVD 54:18). The most interesting development concerns David. He is the only one who explicitly does not believe in any God. After his NDE even he can swear to 'God' (DVD 1:03:00) and he has no problems in using words like 'Jesus' (DVD 1:14:13). At the end he expresses an insight, which is in its own way a very Christian one. 'I am sorry, God! I am sorry we stepped on your f---ing territory! I am sorry! Isn't that enough?' (DVD 1:42:02).

In order to analyse the main characters Nelson, Rachel, David, Joe and Steckle my interest is in the following questions: What is their cinematographic portrayal? What are their main features? How do they each stand to Nelson's enterprise and what is their Near-Death-Experience?

Nelson

Nelson (Kiefer Sutherland) is the hero of 'Flatliners'. The idea for the whole enterprise is his. It is remarkable that the first shot, which shows us the hero is not a close-up (as one would expect), instead the camera – starting in an extreme long shot from a high angle and in a long move towards him – stops on a shivering Nelson in a medium close-up. (DVD 1:56) His first close-up is interrupted by a beautiful sunrise. The camera presents our hero in a rather distant and strange way – as distant and strange as the film's first words: 'Today is a good day to die' (DVD 2:02). Another remarkable detail: Nelson at this moment takes off his sunglasses and smiles into the sun. This recalls that very old parable of Plato's cave (Plato 1957ff, Republic, book VII), where human beings are bound, watching the shadows of a fire on the wall of a cave, and assume that these shadows are the reality, the truth. One of them frees himself and makes his way out of the cave, seeing the sun at its first time. At first he is blinded by the sun, the real truth. Not so Nelson. Of course the light of an early sunrise is not as blinding as the mid-day sun. But his gesture can be read as a desire to face the truth.

Nelson seems at the first moment as an arrogant young man who is convinced that he can give an answer, where philosophy and religion have failed. 'Now it's up to

physical science. Mankind deserves to know.’ Joe: You’re doing this for mankind?’ Nelson: ‘This letter absolves you of any responsibility.’ Steckle: ‘This isn’t for mankind. This is for Nelson. You want to get on “60 Minutes” - sandwiched between Andy Rooney and the commercials. Tonight! A brilliant young medical student who experienced death and came back.’ Nelson: ‘Fame is inevitable.’ Rachel: ‘That’s the wrong reason.’ Nelson: ‘It’s the right idea.’ One can doubt whether the million-strong audience of Andy Rooney’s (CBS) show ‘60 minutes’ would agree with Nelson on this matter. After his flatline, his first NDE, Nelson is really surprised and irritated. It seems as if he had nothing more than a bad dream. No tunnel, no light etc. He envisioned a scene from his youth. Nelson’s friends, Champ (a dog) and himself are hunting another boy, Billy Mahoney. Billy can rescue himself by climbing a tree, but all the boys hit him with stones. Crying, he begs the others to stop, but it goes on. Nelson then throws the decisive stone at Billy, with the consequence that Billy falls down and dies. As we mentioned, Nelson seems to have a religious background. He has an understanding of sin, atonement and salvation though he uses this language in a very cynically way, not exactly after the fashion of a faithful, pious Catholic. He gets his conversion very late at the end of the film, where he is rescued by his friends and brought back to life. Nelson first words after his rescue: ‘It wasn’t such a good day to die’ (DVD 1:45:12) close the circle to the beginning. Nelson’s character has been changed through this NDE. He now can say – without any cynicism – ‘Thank you!’ (DVD 1:45:12).

Rachel

Rachel (Julia Roberts) is the only one, who is portrayed by the camera-eye in a close-up for the first time. We see her hands taking notes, then the camera pans smoothly up to her face in the same distance of a close-up (DVD 4:52). She is asking patients about their NDEs and the camera gives respect to this very intimate situation. Though we see her profile, Rachel is looking away from the audience, as if she has a bad conscience: as if she is being watched as she asks people. She is the only female main character and plays her role with great depth. Rachel is very sceptical at the beginning: ‘I have no interest in watching you kill yourself’ (DVD 8:17). Nevertheless she tries everything to get this experience too. Rachel shows in a dialogue with David, that she has done some serious research: ‘How do you explain the similarity in death experiences all over the world? People from different cultures see

the same things in the same order' (DVD 36:45). David: 'So why this obsession with death?' Rachel: 'It's just an interest. It's a personal interest' (DVD 37:23). In chapter seventeen she answers David 'Look, I've lost people that are close to me. I just want to make sure they've gone to a good place. Is that so trivial?' (DVD 53:36). Indeed, she lost her father in very tragic circumstances when she was a child. He had returned from the war in Vietnam and was taking heroin to cope with his war-experiences. Rachel's mother forbade her to go into the bathroom where he did his kick, but once she did so. This incident may not be the decisive reason for her father committing suicide. Nevertheless he jumped out and shot himself. But her mother blamed her for his suicide. In her NDE she sees her father again and is frightened. All their results of NDE research are come to seem highly questionable. Rachel: 'Death is beautiful. What a bunch of crap. How are you doing, Nelson? Okay? Because I'd like to thank you for the nightmare.' (DVD 1:23:53). David tries to help her. 'I don't know if this will help, but going to see Winnie Hicks today, I mean, I can't explain, but it lifted somehow just asking for forgiveness.' Rachel: 'Winnie Hicks is alive. My father is dead.' (DVD 1:26:41) How can one receive peace and forgiveness, if the other one is already dead?

David

David (Kevin Bacon) works in an emergency room. He is someone who is encouraged, who risks his career as a doctor for life. Because of the shortage of available doctors he operates on people 'illegally', because he is still a student, but in doing so, he saves the life of a woman with a life-threatening haemorrhage. Consequently the camera portrays first his hands – where he is holding down an insane patient, who suffers from a crack – then pans towards David's head in a medium close-up. We see his face from a slightly low angle that makes him appear a bit bigger and stronger than he would if shot from above. After that he runs to help the bleeding woman. His first close-up is after the whole successful life-saving action (DVD 3:09), where it is clear, that he will get into serious trouble for this (he does not lose his scholarship altogether, but he gets a four-month suspension). David is portrayed as a reasonable character, who has a sense of responsibility.

He is very sceptical about Nelsons enterprise. He is the only convinced atheist among the group: 'You're looking for answers where there are none. You just saw what you wanted to see. Give it up. It's too dangerous' (DVD 34:49). In order to

demonstrate his conviction he becomes the next candidate. After his NDE he is faced with a deed of his youth. He mocked on and taunted his classmate Winnie Hicks (Kimberly Scott), so that she was in tears. David makes one of the most dramatic developments in the film. An atheist becomes a 'believer', or at least someone who understands what (Christian) forgiveness is about. Rachel talks with him about their NDE. 'Things from our past want revenge?' David 'I am not exactly sure how it works. But if you see anything, I want you to talk to me about it.' Rachel 'Is it people who we've hurt or wronged in some way?' (DVD 1:06:58) After that dialogue the next scene we see with David is him drawing a red line under a telephone book entry, looking for Winnie Hicks (DVD 1:13:31). Finally he gets her address and can visit and ask her to forgive him, because he felt really sorry and would never do it again. After that moment his visions stop to pursue him and '[...] it lifted somehow just asking for forgiveness' (DVD 1:26:24). In the climax he shows his conviction, that if someone shows real sorrow, that God should forgive her or him. 'It's not fair and it's not right. I am sorry, God! I am sorry we stepped on your f---ing territory! I am sorry! *Isn't that enough?* [my emphasis]' (DVD 1:42:10).

Joe

Joe (William Baldwin) is one of Nelsons friends. He is introduced as the last one, after about 7 minutes. The camera-eye shows him in a distant way. It moves towards him in a medium shot at the moment, when he is asking Rachel for a date. In his first close-up, we see him from his back and not from the side or front like the other ones. Joe is portrayed as a lady-killer. 'I've heard all the rumours and nicknames about you, Rachel. I'm sure you're a very warm woman. Not in the least bit frigid or repressed' (DVD 7:40). He has a video camera, and is suppose to tape everything which will happen during the experiment.

Joes is the second one doing the experiment. His vision is the only one in black and white. We see it through the finder of his camera (which is a black and white model only). Though his first experience 'was almost erotic. [...] I don't want you to think it was casual wantonly sexual by any means. [...] It was friendly. It was something vaguely feminine guiding me' (DVD 33:18). But what follows is something Joe has never dreamt of. 'I thought it was brain damage' [...] 'I've been haunted by images of women that I videotaped without their knowing. They are all members of the Joe Hurley Video Library' (DVD 1:03:30). 'Joe Hurley's video library' is a collection of hid-

den shots of every woman whom he had sex with. In the film he is perhaps the most tragic figure, because he really loses a beloved one, his girlfriend. Once she has figured out what 'Joe Hurley's video library' means, she leaves him. The reason she gives Joe is remarkable. She realises that Joe has 'no understanding of trust' (1:13:15) in secretly taping all those women during moments of such intense intimacy. The film does not show how Joe's relationship develops. One could argue, because of the heaviness of his sin it has deepest impact. He is the only one not faced with a story from his childhood past, and therefore of less than adult responsibility. Even Nelson's killing a classmate is less than fully responsible.

Randall (Steckle)

Randall (Oliver Platt) called by his nickname 'Steckle' – that is his surname – is the only one who does not do the experiment. He is an excellent student and portrayed as a freak. We see him at the first time with his Dictaphone, considering the best title for his 'Diary of a Surgeon' (DVD 3:26). The camera starts from a low angle, long shot – showing Steckle's room, which has two levels – and moves upwards to him in a medium shot, as he takes a cup of coffee and comes up with the final title: 'Randall Steckle "Genesis of a Young Surgeon." Brilliant!' (DVD 3:54). Steckle is introduced as the third one, who is good for a laugh. It is indeed ironic, if the only one who doesn't risk a thing composes a 'Genesis' of a young surgeon, a clear echo of the bible, perhaps more for the audience than for Steckle.

He is hesitant about Nelson's idea. 'Nelson, about tonight. It's because I like you as much as I do. But I have to decline on moral grounds.' (DVD 6:45) Having said his objections he nevertheless joins the group. It is significant that he does not undertake that experiment because he seems to be the only one who keeps his attitude. The reason for this is obvious: he does not have this extraordinary experience like the others. And there is no doubt that NDEs are life-changing (cf. Moody 1988, chapter 2). Consequently Steckle remains double-sided. He is the first one who likes to give up, but in the next moment when the situation changes, he is the first one who works on his 'Genesis'. For example when Nelson nearly dies at the end, Steckle is the first to give up: 'It's been 12 minutes! He is dead. [...] We're all responsible for this' (DVD 1:41:30) and after they bring Nelson back he is the first one, who has in mind to record this extraordinary moment 'I've got to get this on tape.' (DVD 1:45:00).

The Structure

In 1992 Christopher Vogler wrote a classic book 'The Writer's Journey' about the 'simple idea: **All stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies.** They are known collectively as **The Hero's Journey**' (Vogler 1992, 1, see Appendix I for the full model). It is hard to apply Vogler's model to 'Flatliners' because first of all we have five or at least four main characters (without Steckle, who does not have any NDE). Secondly there are some gaps. For example, if Nelson is our hero, then there is no stage one to four. He is not 'introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD [stage one], where they receive the CALL TO ADVENTURE [stage two] They are RELUCTANT at first or REFUSE THE CALL [stage three], but are encouraged by a MENTOR [stage four] to CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD [... stage five]' (26). The first time we see Nelson, he stands in front of the Lake Shore Campus. There is no scene, where we know where and how he lives. The next time we see him with the others in the Pathology class, where he calls others, who refuse the call or are reluctant, he encourages them, so that he can cross the first threshold. It would be interesting to do a detailed analysis of all five main characters. At the moment it is enough to focus on Vogler's other formal criteria, which are enlightening for us.

Vogler distinguishes the Hero's journey in three formal acts. Act I finished by the 'FIRST THRESHOLD' (stage 5), act II - the longest part of the film - finished between 'REWARD' (stage 9) and 'THE ROAD BACK' (stage 10) and act III is the shortest part in the film after stage 10. There are two other important features: crisis and climax (Vogler 1992, 161). The crisis is either in the middle = 'central crisis' or in the end of act II = 'delayed crisis' (162). The climax is the crowning moment of act III.

Though there are some stages missing, the three-act structure, the feature of crisis and climax applies to 'Flatliners'. If we take Nelson's decision to go under again as crisis, that is after 89 minutes ('I can still make amends', DVD 1:29:40) we have a delayed crisis according to Vogler's model. The climax is as Nelson 'experience[s] a RESURRECTION' (Vogler 1992, 26) at the moment when he really feels sorry and Billy can forgive him, so that he can come back to life (DVD 1:42:58). So Nelson's first NDE (after 19 minutes) is the ending of act I, when he crosses the 'FIRST THRESHOLD and enters the Special World' (stage 5). The decision to go under again could be the beginning of act III (after 89 minutes).

As I said, one of the problems of applying Vogler's model is that we have five main characters. We may compare the length of the chapters and discern a hierarchy of time for our heroes, where the story focusses only on each one. Nelson gets about 40 minutes for his story, the most time. Rachel and David each get half of that, about 21 minutes, Joe gets about 9 minutes and Steckle, the only one without NDE, about two minutes. One of the most interesting features of Vogler's model is stage 11 'They cross the third threshold, experience a RESURRECTION, and are transformed by the experience' (Vogler 1992, 26). That is more than just a structural feature, therefore we will discuss Vogler's 'resurrection experience' in the last part.

Special effects

To say something significant about transitions like cuts, match cuts, jump cuts, fade-ins, fade-outs, lap dissolves or fast and slow cutting requires a very detailed analysis: one far more detailed than this essay could allow, and one that, in any case would take us far beyond our present focus. Nevertheless there are some relevant observations worth making.

As I have remarked above, the film's characters are rarely shot in close up. A close up, by its very nature—and depending on how it is combined with styles of cutting (e.g. a fade-out or smooth transition)—is usually intended to bring someone very close to the audience. We can see every little detail in the skin, every hair. Of course a close-up is not our daily life experience and must therefore be used very carefully. Only at the end in chapter 34 do we get short close-ups of everyone. I see two reasons for this. The film does not tell us much about the characters' lives. We know very little, or at least only one particular story from Nelson, Rachel, David, Joe and Steckle. But that is not a negative feature; the film, after all, has by design a binary focus: Near-Death-Experience and its impact on our heroes' lives. In this context there are some black and white shots and scenes (confined to Joe's NDE and to shots when Joe is filming the experiment). What we see is exactly the black and white picture he saw through his (black and white) video camera. The other reason for the lack of close ups may lie in the fact that our five friends are not such a harmonious group at all. They have many mutual tensions, much internecine aggression, and their tone is often cynical and ironic. The story does not portray the group as the best of friends; neither therefore does the camera.

What happens after death?

The opening credits set up the story. The camera moves over Lorado Taft's 'Fountain of Time' – where time stays, but humanity moves. Our question is ancient and ever-new. The close-ups of the 'Museum of Science and Industry' in Chicago show where to seek for answers—in 'scientia' (lat. knowledge, insight, science), 'religio' (lat. consideration, conscientiousness, religion) or 'medicina' (lat. art of healing, medicine). Before one has time to process the meaning of these shots, Nelson makes his statement 'Today is a good day to die' (DVD 1:56). There is a hard cut into an emergency room containing a variety of people in danger of death. We learn that the medical ethical code of a doctor to save life applies only to the fully trained, not to those in training. Before the plot-line comes fully into view, we're privy to a "classical," kind of Near-Death-Experience. A patient tells Rachel about it. 'I saw myself and everything. I started to float out into the hall. Then into this tunnel toward this light. It was the most beautiful light I ever saw. I heard this voice. It was the most beautiful voice I ever heard. And it said: "I am going to take your baby. But you are going back." And I woke up [...]' (DVD 4:42).

In his first book 'Life after Life' (1976), Raymond Moody established the term Near-Death-Experience. Twelve years later he developed new insights in 'The Light Beyond' (1988), where he famously defined the features of a NDE:

'a sense of being dead, peace and painlessness even during a "painful" experience, bodily separation, entering a dark region or tunnel, rising rapidly into the heavens, meeting deceased friends and relatives who are bathed in light, encountering a Supreme Being, reviewing one's life, and feeling reluctance to return to the world of the living.' (Moody 1988, 2)

He qualified this: '[I]t's important to note that not all people who undergo a near-death experience have all of the following symptoms. Some might have one or two, others five or six. It is the *presence of one* [my emphasis] or more of these traits that define the NDE.' (Moody 1988, 7) Of course Moody is not the first one to give us an account of NDEs. 15th century artist Hieronymus Bosch painted a picture 'The Ascent into the Empyrean'. It is perhaps one of the earliest imaginations of NDE. In the foreground are dying people. They are surrounded by some spirits who draw their attention upwards. There is a tunnel, in which other people move forward to the light. After passing through the tunnel they kneel devoutly.

Our five medical students undertake what they do because of medical ethics. They begin to experiment with life after death by medically killing and then reviving

each other. They are even competing with each other over who will do it longer. Nelson, who comes up with the idea, tries to get his friends aboard, but although they are fascinated by it, they have deep doubts. Steckle: 'There is enough atrocity in the world without your own little horror.' Nelson: 'Horror? It's ignorance we fear. When did truth and knowledge become a horror? Especially to a scientist and a genius like yourself' (DVD 6:45). His answer to Steckle sounds like a self-fulfilling prophecy and indeed, a horror will happen to Nelson. I am not sure whether that was the reason 'Flatliners' was classified as a horror thriller. Without any doubt the film is a thriller, but if it is a horror film, then its horror is of a unique kind.

It is deeply ironic that our medical students set up their 'secret' lab in the 'Museum of Science and Industry' (Chicago), which is under reconstruction at that time. As Nelson joins the place, there are blinking alarm signals in front of the Museum. They are blinking in a close-up as if to say, you enter unsafe territory. Steckle and Joe prepare the set. Rachel who arrives a bit late will do the injections. The following dialogue reveals significant diversity in motivation among the group. Steckle: 'Quite simply, why are you doing this?' Nelson: 'Quite simply to see if there's anything beyond death. Philosophy failed. Religion failed. Now it's up to physical science. I think mankind deserves to know.' Joe: 'You're doing this for mankind?' Nelson 'This letter absolves you of any responsibility. Steckle: 'This isn't for mankind. This is for Nelson. You want to get on "60 Minutes" - sandwiched between Andy Rooney and the commercials. "Tonight, a brilliant young medical student who experienced death and came back."' Nelson: 'Fame is inevitable.' Rachel: 'That's the wrong reason.' Nelson: 'It's the right idea. Dr. Hurley, electrodes. Don't you want to be on "60 Minutes"?' (DVD 16:01-17:51). A right idea is enough to justify the whole enterprise. At this point, they do not show any deeper thinking, about what they are doing. David arrives after this dialogue, but he operates from no deeper or higher level of 'reasons'.

Judged by Moody's criteria, Nelson, Joe, David and Rachel each have an NDE. All four are confronted with some sin, which happened in their past (reviewing one's life), but there is no 'bodily separation', no 'tunnel' (though David's vision takes place in a subway tunnel and he does have a kind of 'full review' of his life—in the form of a fast cutting flashback), no 'meeting of deceased friends and relatives *who are bathed in light* [my emphasis]', or the 'encountering a Supreme Being'. Instead of this, the images from the other side begin to haunt and even hurt them. This is

something which Moody didn't describe. It is invented by the film. Nelson gets it worst. He is almost killed by Billy Mahoney, whom he had put to death long ago. Joe is faced with images of women, whom he filmed during sex without their knowledge. Rachel still feels guilty about her drug-addicted father's suicide. David is haunted by visions, in which he taunts his former classmate Winnie. He is the one who figures out that the only way to stop these visions is forgiveness. Nelson is apparently the only one, who has not really felt sorry for the things he's done in life. A woman on the street, who surprisingly knows his name, sets up his agenda: 'Right Nelson? In the end we all know what we have done?' (DVD 38:45). Though he is seriously hurt by Billy, he mocks and even dares him (DVD 1:06:13). But Nelson does not win the game. He gets so desperate that he becomes obsessed with the notion of really dying: 'Dave's right. I can still make amends' (DVD 1:29:40). At the same time Rachel has her vision: a scene of forgiveness with her father. In the dramatic showdown, Nelson is going under again – because he really feels sorry and feels Billy can forgive him – and David, Joe, Rachel and Steckle end up bringing him back to life. Nelson: 'It wasn't such a good day to die' (DVD 1:45:12).

With the exception of Steckle, all the characters undergo a deep personal transformation. As Vogler would say, the resurrection experience helped them to appropriate the lesson of forgiveness and atonement.

Concerning Vogler's account of resurrection experience, let us now consider how congruent it is with the grid of chapter one, the Christian resurrection.

'For a story to feel complete, the audience needs to experience an additional moment of death and rebirth, similar to the Supreme Ordeal but subtly different. This is the **climax** (not the crisis), the last and most dangerous meeting with death. Heroes have to undergo a final purging and purification before reentering the Ordinary World. Once more they must change.' (203)

In the chapters of his book described below, Vogler develops various characteristics of a resurrection experience—though his description has very little to do with resurrection in a specifically Christian sense. (It should be noted in passing that the term 'resurrection', however frequently or ardently invoked, does not necessarily mean what Christians believe by it.)

According to Vogler, a resurrection experience possesses the following features:

(1) 'A New Personality[:] A new self must be created for a new world' (203).

(2) 'Cleansing[:] One function of Resurrection is to cleanse heroes of the smell of death, yet help them retain the lessons of the ordeal' (204).

(3) 'Two Great Ordeals[: ...] the Resurrection is the final exam. Heroes must be tested one last time to see if they retained the learning from the Supreme Ordeal of Act Two' (205).

(4) 'Physical Ordeal[:] At the simplest level, the Resurrection may just be a hero facing death one last time in an ordeal, battle, or showdown. [...] But the difference between this and previous meetings with death is that the danger is usually on the broadest scale of the entire story' (205).

(5) 'Death and Rebirth of Tragic Heroes[:] Conventionally heroes survive this brush with death and are Resurrected [...] some tragic heroes actually die at this point [...] they are 'Resurrected in the sense that they usually live on in the memory of the survivors, those for whom they gave their lives' (207).

As said, Vogler's understanding of resurrection is not confined to Christian understanding. He comes closest to a Christian understanding in (1) – whatever a 'new self' and a 'new world' mean – and part, especially the second part, of (5).

The Bible gives us two prominent examples for (1). The meeting with the resurrected Lord changes one's life, one's very identity. The Acts of the Apostles tells us the dramatic conversion of Saul:

'From them [the high priest and the whole council of elders] I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do"' (Acts 22:5b-10).

In his Damascus experience, Saul becomes Paul, the great persecutor becomes one of the great apostles. Another momentous conversion is that of Peter. Though one of Jesus' closest friends, he denied him three times (Mk 14:53-72, Mt 26:57-75, Lk 22:54-71). But after meeting with the resurrected Lord, Peter becomes the rock, the leader of the early Church (Jn 21:15-19). Both, Peter and Paul are in the end so deeply changed that they are ready to give their life for Christ.

Especially in the genre of Science Fiction, it is this kind of resurrection that sparks the imagination of filmmakers and storytellers. One popular example will suffice—the death of Neo in 'The Matrix' (1999). He is physically dead but through the love of Trinity he gets his life back. And not just his ordinary life: now Neo can control and change the Matrix, which no other human being could do before. Though this might be one of the closest cinematic parallels to the Christian idea of resurrection,

Neo in 'Matrix Reloaded' and 'Matrix Revolutions' (both 2003) is vulnerable and can really die (again).

Vogler's point (5), the 'death and rebirth of tragic heroes', seems a very interesting one, because the hero really dies and does not *continue* her or his *old* life. (Cf. Quint in 'Jaws' (1974).) Resurrection here does not mean that our heroes *reappear*, but rather they are honoured for giving their lives for others. That is partly what in Christian tradition Jesus is understood to have done. He gave his life for our sins. But without his really rising from the dead his death would be meaningless. And if he really had just died on a cross, Christianity would hardly have arisen. Of course people of Jesus' generation would remember the crucifixion, but in the long run his memory would surely have faded. A lot of people, after all, were crucified at that time.

Against this background, what makes 'Flatliners' really special is this: all four main characters have their resurrection experience, but one cannot fully understand them without a Christian concept of resurrection. Nelson, Joe, Rachel and David are confronted with their 'sins' (DVD 1:25:00), they have to seek forgiveness for their 'sins' or to do 'atonement' (DVD 1:25:00) in order to obtain 'salvation' (DVD 1:27:46).

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Filmography

DVD

Flatliners 1999. Columbia Tristar Home Video.

Films (title, country, year, directed)

Flatliners. USA 1990. Joel Schumacher.

Fight Club. USA, Germany 1999. David Fincher.

Jaws. USA 1974. Steven Spielberg.

The Matrix. USA 1999. Andy and Larry Wachowski.

The Matrix Reloaded. USA 2003. Andy and Larry Wachowski.

The Matrix Revolutions. USA 2003. Andy and Larry Wachowski.

Appendix I – The Hero's Journey

Mythic structure for storytellers and screenwriters (Vogler 1992, ^{2nd}1999, 26)

Stages

- 1 Heroes are introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD, where
- 2 they receive the CALL TO ADVENTURE.
- 3 They are RELUCTANT at first or REFUSE THE CALL, but
- 4 are encouraged by a MENTOR to
- 5 CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD and enter the Special World,
- 6 where
- 7 they encounter TESTS, ALLIES, AND ENEMIES.
- 8 They APPROACH THE INMOST CAVE, crossing a second
- 9 threshold
- 10 where they endure the ORDEAL.
- 11 They take possession of their REWARD and
- are pursued on THE ROAD BACK to the ordinary World.
- 12 They cross the third threshold, experience a RESURRECTION,
- and are transformed by the experience.
- They RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR, a boon or treasure to benefit
- the Ordinary World.

| No. | Chapter | Length | timecode | camera, visual effects (colours) | short description, key dialogues and annotations |
|-----|-----------------|--------|----------|--|---|
| 01 | Start | 4:25 | 0:00:00 | medium shot | Figures of 'The Fountain of Time' by Lorado Taft, the Columbia Statue at Jackson Park, opening credits, close-ups 'scientia' (lat. knowledge, insight, science) 'religio' (lat. consideration, conscientiousness, religion) 'medicina' (lat. art of healing, medicine) of the 'Museum of Science and Industry' Chicago. The Lake (Michigan) Shore Campus with D'Arcy Museum and the 'Madonna della Strada Chapel' at Loyola University Chicago in sunrise light; in the following scenes all the main characters will be introduced. |
| | | | 0:01:56 | camera – starts in an extreme long shot from a high angle and in a long move towards him – stops on shivering Nelson in a medium close-up. | Nelson thinking about his idea of an experiment of brain-death. 'Today is a good day to die' (first sentence of the film, 0:02:02), cut to an emergency hospital |
| | | | 0:02:04 | The camera first portrays his hands – where he is holding down an insane patient, who is suffering from crack addiction – then pans towards David's head (medium shot, lower angle). | David is working in an emergency. Because of the shortage of available doctors he is operating 'illegally', because he is still a student, but in doing so, he saves the life of a woman with a deadly haemorrhage. |
| | | | 0:03:26 | The camera starts from a low angle, long shot – showing Steckle's room, which has two levels – and moves upwards to him in a medium shot. | Randall (Steckle) is considering the best title for his 'Diary of a Surgeon' final: 'Randall Steckle "Genesis of a Young Surgeon." Brilliant!' |
| | | | 0:03:54 | | |
| 02 | 'I saw myself.' | 2:01 | 0:04:25 | close-up | head of an old man in half profile |
| | | | 0:04:52 | close-up to Rachel's hands, then the camera pans smoothly up to her face at the same distance close up. | Rachel is listening to one of the patients, whom she asked to tell of their 'Near Death Experience': woman: 'I saw myself and everything. I started to float out into the hall. Then into this tunnel toward this light. It was the most beautiful light I ever saw. I heard this voice. It was the most beautiful voice I ever heard. And it said: "I am going to take your baby. But you are going back." And I woke up. [...]' old man: 'I was legally dead for 4 1/2 minutes, but I didn't see no tunnel and I didn't see no light.' 4:43-5:45 Nurse: 'Why are you always asking the patients about death?' Rachel gives no answer. |
| 03 | Pathology class | 6:43 | 0:06:26 | close-up | The head of a dead man on a table. |
| | | | 0:06:45 | | During the pathology class Nelson is trying to convince Steckle, Joe and Rachel of the experiment. Steckle: 'There is enough atrocity in the world without your own little horror.' Nelson: 'Horror? It's ignorance we fear. When did truth and knowledge become a horror? Especially to a scientist and a genius like yourself.' |

| No. | Chapter | Length | timecode | camera, visual effects (colours) | short description, key dialogues and annotations |
|-----|---------------------|--------|---|--|---|
| | | | 0:07:14 0:08:17 0:10:00 0:12:00 0:12:15 0:12:57 | The camera moves towards him in a medium shot at the moment, where Joe is asking Rachel for a date. On his first close-up, we see him from the back. | Joe is asking Rachel for a date. 'I've heard all the rumours and nicknames about you, Rachel. I am sure you're a very warm woman. Not in the least bit frigid or repressed.' (- 7:40) Rachel is very sceptical at the beginning 'I have no interest in watching you kill yourself.' Nelson is begging David to be aboard: 'I don't want to die. I want to come back with the answers to death and life.' One of Rachel's patients Mrs. Amsler died (bad omen?) Joe has sex with one of his women, enjoying to do it before his 'hidden' camera Nelson at home, watching himself in a mirror in his bath |
| 04 | Setting up | 6:47 | 0:13:09 0:16:01 0:19:00 | close-up/long shot | blinking alarm signals in front of the Museum of Science and Industry Steckle and Joe are preparing the set. Rachel is a bit late, but in time, she will do the injections. Steckle : 'Quite simply, why are you doing this?' Nelson: 'Quite simply to see if there's anything beyond death. Philosophy failed. Religion failed. Now it's up to physical science. I think mankind deserves to know.' Joe: 'You're doing this for mankind?' Nelson 'This letter absolves you of any responsibility. Steckle: 'This isn't for mankind. This is for Nelson. You want to get on "60 Minutes" - sandwiched between Andy Rooney and the commercials. "Tonight! A brilliant young medical student who experienced death and came back."' Nelson: 'Fame is inevitable.' Rachel: 'That's the wrong reason.' Nelson: 'It's the right idea. Dr. Hurley, electrodes. Don't you want to be on "60 Minutes"?' (- 17:51), Joe and Steckle want to get out, just let Nelson sleep. Discussion about aborting the experiment, but David is doing it. He has nothing to 'lose', because he is suspended anyway. flatline 55" |
| 05 | Nelson's visions | 2:54 | 0:19:56 0:22:56 | medium shot/camera moves towards (colour) | a field of cornflowers Nelson's vision: a field of cornflowers 17", cut back to the stretcher, a fast double montage Nelson and his friends and Billy Mahoney, the seconds in bold = Nelson NDE = 49" 19:56: 17" 9" 8" 4" 3" 5" 2" 5" 3" 5" 4" 11" 4" 11" 4" 12" 4" get Nelson back , they are fighting for his life. |
| 06 | Something out there | 2:27 | 0:22:50 0:23:43 | long shot | 'Madonna della Strada Chapel' by night (Lake Shore Campus) All are happy that Nelson is back to life. They are driving to a late night cafeteria. Nelson is the hero. Steckle : 'Can you recall any specific emotion? Heat, cold, anything like that?' Nelson: 'You can't break it down in the specifics.' Rachel: 'Did you see a tunnel |

| No. | Chapter | Length | timecode | camera, visual effects (colours) | short description, key dialogues and annotations |
|-----|-------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| | | | 0:25:05 | | of light of the end?' Nelson: 'no, no, but there is something out there. It's comforting' Nelson: 'You're not buying any of this.' David : 'You forgot ... I am an atheist.' They are leaving Nelson alone for a moment ... |
| 07 | Bidding war | 0:52 | 0:25:17 | medium shot | Rachel ... and discussing the case with David: 'He is back like Lazarus' and who is going next. Joe and Rachel are in competition, Joe ('Yes I'd like to be famous, too.') will be the next with 1:30, ten seconds longer than Rachel. |
| 08 | Dog in the alley? | 1:18 | 0:26:09 | medium close-up | Nelson alone, he gets afraid of graffiti on the walls, which are dead horror faces. He is hearing and seeing injured Champ (the dog), the audience doesn't know why yet. |
| 09 | Bad dream | 2:35 | 0:27:27 0:27:54 0:28:40 | medium shot/tracking camera to left, colour medium close-up | Nelsons vision 30" : His friends and he, together with Champ (dog) hunting Billy Mahoney. Cut to one of the later visions, Nelson is falling from the tree. – 27:57, he wakes up, Rachel is with him. Joe watching the video from his engagement party with Anne Coldren, his girlfriend, at the same time makes a last call to her before he gets his NDE. Last picture on the engagement party is Joe kissing Anne. |
| 10 | Joe's visions | 2:48 | 0:30:02 | black, fade in a single light spot (black & white) | flatline 94" , Joe's NDE, it starts as if moving toward the light of a dark tunnel, then he is seeing women, whom he taped without their knowledge during intercourse. Joe's NDE is interrupted only once. Two long sequences 62" and 32" long. The others have problems bringing Joe back, Nelson is almost crazy, hitting on Joes breast, David stops Nelson and tries to get Joe back. |
| 11 | Defining great | 4:48 | 0:32:52 | long shot, low angle, camera moves towards | The group in a night bar. They are the only ones. Joe: 'It was great. Here it comes' Rachel: 'Define great' Joe: 'I don't know, it's not thinking about the past or the future. [...] It was almost erotic. [...] I don't want you to think it was casual wantonly sexual by any means. [...] It was friendly. It was something vaguely feminine guiding me.' The discussing who is going next. David is trying to stop it. 'Nobody's going next. You're looking for answers where there are none. You just saw what you wanted to see. Give it up. It's too dangerous.' But Rachel wants go first, to prevent her, he is bidding over her 1'50" 2' 2'10" 2'20" and he gets it. Both then discuss their motives. David wants to stop it, because 'if I see there's nothing out there, there's no reason for us to go any further.' For Rachel at this point 'It's just an interest. It's a personal interest.' |
| 12 | An alley & tunnel | 3:04 | 0:37:40 0:38:45 | medium shot | A police care is moving from left to right, Nelson is lighting a cigarette, walking through the night. People on the street watching him, one of the women, who surprisingly knows his name: 'Right Nelson? In the end we all know what we have done?' = point of the |

| No. | Chapter | Length | timecode | camera, visual effects (colours) | short description, key dialogues and annotations |
|-----|---------------------|--------|--|---|--|
| | | | 0:40:08 | | film. He is than seeing Champ again and follows him in a tunnel of the underground channel system. Nelson is meeting Billy Mahoney for the first time in reality. He has been brutally beaten by Billy. |
| 13 | "Halloween morning" | 1:40 | 0:40:44 0:40:54 0:42:07 | medium shot | Halloween morning, sunset over the Museum of Science and Industry. Steckle in his apartment in the student house is reflecting upon the experiment so far 'it was as if we felt no fear. As if we were already dead, and had nothing to lose by dying, because we lived life so well, and loved life so much that we imagined ourselves immortal. Overwhelming the powers that be with our passion for science' Joe is talking to Terry, who had an NDE too. He is trying to get her. But suddenly on the TV, which shows a football match, he is seeing himself from one of his videos. And the woman is asking him: 'Why did you do this to me, Joe?' |
| 14 | Trick or treat | 1:27 | 0:42:24 | medium shot | The subway is moving from left to right, Nelson at home, sewing his wound by Billy Mahoney in his face and has another nightmare: Billy is following him, and in a dead end there is no Billy, but kids asking 'Trick or treat' |
| 15 | "Party Town" | 2:18 | 0:43:51 0:45:56 | long shot | The Halloween party in front of the Museum of Science and Industry. Nelson is a bit late. Joe is coming in a Halloween costume of a skeleton filming. David's last words: <i>Hoka hey</i> . flatline 70" |
| 16 | Dave's vision | 6:08 | 0:46:09 0:47:37 0:49:37 0:49:48 0:50:44 0:51:59 | extreme close-up/fade (monochrome blue, colour) | into Dave's eyes time-lapse until Dave as embryo, then the beautiful Rocky Mountains 36" Nelson is aloud thinking: 'What if he didn't make it back?' NDE 16" or even to extend his time for five or ten seconds. Joe is seeing one of his girls in the monitor. 'Joey, I trusted you. NDE 10" 20" NDE 8" Joe is seeing another girl in his camera 'You lied to me, Joe' it is almost getting out of control, Steckle , 'That was way too close' David : 'Hoka hey' = war cry of the Sioux Indians. It means "Today is a good day to die." Nelson: 'So was it, Dave?' [...] Dave: 'Just a dream or just a bunch of stuff stored up inside my mind.' Nelson: 'You are brain-dead' [...] 'It's like being paranoid without the fear. Like being watched. You guys were standing over me. Nelson wants to go again. Rachel is jumping in, but now she has to do it for longer than 3'50" (David's time). She is bidding with Nelson 4'25" 5' is his answer, but the others are about to mutiny in favour of Rachel. Nelson is jealous of the others, they are only 'tourists', it was his idea. Steckle is talking with Joe about what just happened. They are passing a TV shop, where Joese sees another girl 'You shit. Joe' 'You said you loved me, Joe' |

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| | | | | | the last one is Anne, his girlfriend, 'I love you, Joe' |
| 17 | Playing hockey | 2:18 | 0:52:17 0:53:36 0:53:58 | medium shot: | Nelson is arriving at night at home. He has installed a security camera, but the screen shows the entry hall empty. Billy Mahoney is waiting for him and hitting him with a hockey stick and spying on him. Nelson cries, cut, sleeping – awaking David. He looks at Rachel (slow shutter speed) Rachel is going to the early shift in the hospital. David : 'Why are you doing this?' Rachel: 'Look, I've lost people that are close to me. I just want to make sure they've gone to a good place. Is that so trivial?' David: 'To tell you the truth, it's the best reason I've heard yet for going.' David : 'I had this feeling that if I had gone any further that there was something out there protecting me. Something good. So you don't need to go under.' Rachel: 'The atheist now believes in God?' |
| 18 | What the voices say | 1:12 | 0:54:35 | medium shot, high angle | Rachel on the bed of an old woman. Old woman: 'I am dying. Don't lie to me.' [...] Rachel: 'What voices?' 'They say, "Have you done enough? Have you told everyone you love them?" 'I have.' Rachel: 'They're friendly voices. They're telling you what you need to know.' 'What?' 'That you have someplace to go.' 'Do you believe that?' 'Yes, I do.' |
| 19 | Train names | 2:29 | 0:55:47 0:56:59 | medium shot, low angle (cf. chapter 14): subway is moving from left to right | David in the Subway. It is the same tunnel, which he has seen in his NDE. Young girl Winnie is mocking David in the coach. Preparation for Rachel's NDE. David is missing. He is late and with his arrival he immediately reanimates her. Crisis: Though the others protest, David seems to have the highest authority. |
| 20 | Rachel's visions | 7:57 | 0:58:16 1:00:02 1:02:43 1:03:23 | close-up (colour) | flatline 122 ", profile of Rachel's face. She is seeing her father, 'welcome home party' from war, young family idyll. NDE 40 " cut discussion others 23" cut NDE 47 " Rachel is going up to the forbidden bathroom, where her father takes heroin, he runs away to shot himself, her mother: ' It is your fault ', cut they try to bring her back 12" cut NDE 16 " Rachel and her mother following the father, cut, they cannot bring her back, the electricity system of their 'lab' is collapsing, Nelson tries to get her back. NDE 3 " we see the pistol, cut 5" reanimation, cut NDE 16 " the mother is crying out, cut reanimation it is getting out of control, David is doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. David finally gets her 'She is back' After that he is explaining, why he was stopping her: because of his experience with Winnie in the subway. Joe reveals: 'I thought it was brain damage' [...] 'I've been haunted by images of women that I videotaped without their knowing. They are all members of the Joe Hurley Video Library'. Nelson is hunted by Billy Mahoney, Joe: 'this is too weird' Nelson: 'Weird? We've experienced death. Now somehow we've brought our |

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| | | | 1:05:22 | | sins back physically.' The others are protesting, Nelson: 'Jesus Christ! I thought we were doctors, scientists.' Steckle: 'It's reckless, immoral and unethical for you to withhold your findings.' Nelson still believing that they getting fame: 'Rachel Mannus may have the answers to life and death. Five minutes, imagine, she was under for five minutes. Now, if she walks out of that ladies' room with those answers, the whole world will worship her.' Rachel in the ladies' room, there is writing on the tiles: 'God is dead. Nietzsche', she sees her dead father. |
| 21 | Daring Billy | 1:48 | 1:06:13 1:07:18 | close-up | Nelsons screwing hands, he is locking his doors and mocking and daring Billy Mahoney. Rachel asks David: 'Things from our past want revenge?' David: 'I am not exactly sure how it works. But if you see anything, I want you to talk to me about it.' Rachel: 'Is it people who we've hurt or wronged in some way?' |
| 22 | Billy's best shot | 0:53 | 1:08:01 1:08:27 | medium shot, low angle | Nelson sitting with his screwdriver, cut Nelson's vision as a young boy, throwing stones at Billy Mahoney, 'We gonna get you Billy Mahoney' cut back in Nelson's room, Bill smashed him like Nelson did one second before as young boy. |
| 23 | Too late | 0:49 | 1:08:54 1:09:33 | medium shot | Rachel wakes up, closing the door and seeing her father in the mirror. She is going to the hospital to talk to Mrs Amsler, 'Her voices were wrong. There's nothing beautiful out there.' |
| 24 | Taunting Winnie | 3:47 | 1:09:43 1:10:38 | medium shot, lower angle | kids playing in a place, David went back to the playground of his old school, seeing the scene again, how he was taunting Winnie, Joe is coming home. 'Don't you remember me, Joe', he sees all his girls on the way up to his apartment. Anne is waiting there, she has figured out the 'Joe Hurley Video Library' and is leaving him. |
| 25 | Calling Mrs. Hicks | 2:50 | 1:13:30 1:14:38 1:15:28 | close-up medium shot, Bird's-Eye view | to the telephone book, with red crossed lines, Dave is looking for Mrs. Earl R. Hicks (with daughter Winnie). Finally he gets her address. On the way to her, he is 'picking up' Nelson, who won't be alone. At the class room. The students have to dissect the kidney. Rachel's test body is becoming her father, she leaves the classroom in panic. |
| 26 | Visiting Winnie | 2:37 | 1:16:20 | medium shot | The Jeep arrives at Winnie's house. Nelson is waiting outside in the car. |
| 27 | Dave apologises | 2:47 | 1:18:57 1:21:20 | medium shot, low angle, tilt down | At Winnie's greenhouse David says sorry to Winnie. |
| 28 | Picking on Nelson | 4:13 | 1:21:44 1:22:00 1:23:48 | medium shot, low angle, (same colour like Nelson's vision = autumn orange, yellow) | outside Winnie's house, Nelson has to fight Billy Mahoney, it looks like a fight of death or life, Billy tries to put the hoe into Nelsons face. Outside of Rachel's apartment. She feels 'Fine, for somebody who keeps seeing |

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| | | | 1:24:10 1:24:44 1:25:00 | | her father who's been dead 20 years.' Death is beautiful. What a bunch of crap. How are you doing, Nelson? Okay? Because I'd like to thank you for the nightmare.' Nelson: 'You were so eager to jump on my coat tails. Welcome aboard.' Rachel: 'You withheld information, this is the same as lying.' Nelson: 'I am sorry you are so upset.' Joe: 'You're not the only one who risked a goddam thing!' Steckle: 'I always felt this was unnatural.' [...] Joe: 'Shut up Steckle, you didn't risk a thing.' Nelson: 'Come on! What happened to you? Caught with your videotapes down (Joe). And you (David) swore at a little girl in a playground. You're having bad dreams about your daddy. I'm really sorry!' Rachel: 'You don't know anything about me.' [...] Nelson: 'Come on, they are your sins. Live with them. I do. (to Rachel) You want to see death? Take a good look. It is beautiful.' David is asking Joe and Steckle to find Billy Mahoney ... because David: 'Young Dr. Dave thinks he's solved our karmic problems. Atonement, Gentlemen, Atonement.' |
| 29 | "Father shot himself." | 1:02 | 1:25:57 1:26:24 | medium shot, low angle | Rachel in her apartment. Rachel is talking to David: 'My father shot himself.' David: 'And you feel responsible?' She tells him about the circumstances. David: 'I don't know if this will help, but going to see Winnie Hicks today, I mean, I can't explain, but it lifted somehow just asking for forgiveness.' Rachel: 'Winnie Hicks is alive. My father is dead.' David: 'Your father is in a good place. He wants you to let him go.' Rachel: 'Then why is he back?' David has no answer, he takes her into his arms. |
| 30 | Shortcut | 8:11 | 1:26:59 1:27:46 1:28:26 1:28:37 1:29:40 1:31:46 1:34:14 | medium shot monochrome red | The car with Nelson, Joe and Randy. At the neighbourhood of his youth Nelson leads them to the graveyard, where Billy Mahoney is buried. Climbing over the wall of the graveyard, Nelson cynical: 'Come on, boys, salvation just ahead' He is showing him the grave 'This is where Billy lives. Wake up, you little shit, you've got company! I knew he was here because I put him here.' cut Nelson's vision: Billy is begging him to stop, but Nelson is enjoying Billy's fear. He is throwing the decisive stone at Billy and he is falling from the tree to his death. Champ (dog) is hurt from a falling heavy branch. Nelson: 'I was taken away from my family when I was nine years old. I was sent to Stoneham School for Boys. I thought I'd paid my dues!' He decides to 'go under' again: 'Dave's right. I can still make amends. ' After he showed them the grave, he abandons them out and takes the car alone back to the lab. Rachel and David in her apartment. Rachel sees her father, David is picking Joe and Steckle up. Rachel is having her NDE again, but his time as herself, not as a child, going up |

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| | | | 1:34:47 | | the stairs and seeing her father taking Heroin. It is the first time, that she is facing him. Father: 'I am sorry. Forgive me', they embrace each other. The red changes into normal colour. David picks Joe and Steckle up. They are speculating how Nelson can make amends. They are assuming that he is going alone to have a flatline, driving to the lab. |
| 31 | Nelson calls | 2:03 | 1:35:10 1:35:30 | medium shot, high angle | Rachel in her apartment. Nelson is calling her to say sorry: Nelson: 'I wanted to say I was sorry, Please tell David. I am sorry I got you into this.' Rachel: 'No, none of that matters now' Nelson bitter laughing: 'Rachel, everything matters. Everything we do matters. That's why I'm going under again' [...] 'I am really sorry.' With organ music Nelson is going into the lab. David, Joe and Steckle are going with the car, Rachel is running to the lab. |
| 32 | Going under again | 4:14 | 1:37:13 1:38:04 1:38:31 1:39:01 1:40:56 | medium shot | Nelson is going under again 'Okay, Billy Mahoney, come on.' Nelson's NDE starts , he is seeing many of the flashbacks from earlier scenes with Billy Mahoney, but now he is hunted by Billy. The flatline goes after 27" . David, Joe and Steckle arriving and trying to get him back. NDE 3" 5" 3" 5" 3" 31" 10" 46" 21" = 67" + 61" = 128" 'I am sorry' (Nelson as a boy) Nelson starts falling in boy age, but at the end he is himself now. |
| 33 | 12 minutes | 1:31 | 1:41:27 1:42:10 1:42:57 | close-up | profile of Nelson's face (turned away) 'Starting CPR!' David and the others try everything, but they cannot bring Nelson back. It gets crazy (cf. same scene chapter 10, Joe's version) David is hitting Nelson's breast, Rachel stops David. Steckle : 'We are all responsible for this.' Joe : 'Maybe we deserve this.' David : 'No. It's not fair and it's not right. I am sorry, God! I am sorry we stepped on your f---ing territory! I am sorry! Isn't that enough?' Steckle: 'Apparently not' Joe: 'I'll call the police'. Rachel: '[...] Nelson felt he deserved to die.' David: 'Bullshit! It was a mistake. He was just a little kid.' and with the words: 'He doesn't deserve to die' David reanimates him. |
| 34 | Atonement & return | 2:41 | 1:42:58 1:44:08 1:44:50 1:45:00 1:45:12 | medium shot, frame edged, high angle | NDE 61" Nelson is lying on the grass, Billy Mahoney forgives him and he is running back to life. They bring Nelson back. Steckle prays: 'Hail Mary, praise Jesus and all that stuff, thank you Jesus,' Rachel: 'Hi, don't try to talk' Steckle : 'I've got to get this on tape.' David puts away Steckle's Dictaphone. Nelson : 'It wasn't such a good day to die.' Camera shows everyone in a close up, at least Rachel with tears, Nelson to Rachel: 'Thank you!' (last words) |
| 35 | End credits | 0:51 | 1:45:39 | medium shot | of the group, the camera pulls back, lap dissolve into a painting in the Museum's hall. Prometheus with his torch of fire and the angry Zeus. The camera pulls |

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| | | | | | back, all scaffolding is removed, the pictures are restored in new glance. |
| 35 a | End credits | 3:06 | 1:46:30 – 1:49:36 | camera moves back out of the museums hall, fade out into black | credits |