



The view: The 10 most underrated movies of the decade

As the noughties tick down, let's shine a belated spotlight on the films that never got their due at release in the past 10 years



Better late than never ... Samantha Morton in *Morvern Callar*

With the mood of reflection common to all year-ends magnified by this being the close of a decade, the list-loving world of film is awash with rundowns of the finest moments of not just 2009 but the entire noughties. In this very spot, you'll have already seen the Guardian's crack team reveal the [first 90 titles of their golden hundred](#), with the final 10 being unveiled over the days ahead. But in the spirit of fair play, I thought it might also be worth drafting a top 10 of a slightly different nature – not the decade's best per se, but it's most underrated.

In short, what with this being the season of goodwill and so on, it might be apt to briefly pick out in the spotlight those films that didn't quite get their due when they were first released, whether from critics, audiences or award ceremony judges. And more to the point, those that even now, amid the mass of praises being sung in the last days of the noughties, still aren't getting it.

Of course it's an inexact science – one person's idea of overlooked is another's deserved obscurity. And that fuzzy process is made yet fuzzier by the way the net has become the primary forum for discussing movie culture this decade, meaning that even the most out-of-the-way nugget now has some kind of profile to anyone halfway interested. At the same time, an ever-smaller number of titles make it into British cinemas, leaving a vast layer of films so underrated by the wider industry we never even get to see them.

But among my 10 most underrated, all bar one did spend at least a brief time in UK cinemas – the exception being *Tekkonkinkreet*, a deliriously tough and imaginative 2006 anime, a genre that's offered up a number of marvels this decade while still often being patronised and ghettoised. This is why, odd as it might appear, I also include [Spirited Away](#) here – for all the warm words it receives, it still feels regarded less as a true peer of Pixar than an arthouse curiosity, a situation unfair both on the film itself

and the actual children who should be seeing it.

But for me many of the noughties' most underrated came from directors who at other points couldn't move for bouquets. For instance, even as it became in many ways the decade of [Michael Haneke](#), the one film of his that slipped off the radar is also the one with perhaps the most awful relevance to our future. I speak of [Time of the Wolf](#), a terrifyingly pristine vision of a darkened post-apocalypse that may not be quite as formally exquisite as *Hidden* or *The White Ribbon*, but was just as hard to shake from the bones.

Similarly, in the decade where of all unlikely events [David Cronenberg](#) went mainstream, his fine London-set portrait of delusion, [Spider](#), rarely rates a mention now. I have a feeling the more [David Lynch](#)'s *Mulholland Drive* is (rightly) ushered into the canon, the more [Inland Empire](#) will become an unwatched footnote; and the garlands for *There Will Be Blood* shouldn't obscure [Paul Thomas Anderson](#)'s wonderfully *sui generis* [Punch-Drunk Love](#).

But more unjustly overlooked than any of these, two other films top my list. The first is the auto-biopic [Tarnation](#) – film-maker Jonathan Caouette's breathtakingly raw account of his relationship with his troubled mother, stitched together on an iMac from home movies and answerphone message. The second is [Morvern Callar](#) – Scottish director Lynne Ramsay's dazzling adaptation of Alan Warner's source novel, a movie whose lack of repute has mystified me ever since it was released back in 2002.

While it may seem contrary to name as the most underrated films of the decade one that does feature on the main Guardian list, I couldn't in all good faith put it anywhere else. Here after all is a movie that, in its account of a small-town checkout girl reinventing herself in Spain with her dead boyfriend's literary advance, created a mood as inscrutable and seductive as anything I saw this decade. It conjured up an ambiguity that never once felt like a cop-out, and a whole series of delicately stunning set-pieces as the story segued from dank Oban to sun-bleached Andalucia. As strange and finally unknowable as its heroine (played by the note-perfect Samantha Morton), it wouldn't be fair to paint Ramsay's difficult second movie as completely neglected. But the widespread befuddlement that met it before its director fell into an eight-years-and-counting absence from the screen means I can't think of another film more deserving of a belated hurrah.

And so my 10 most underrated films of the noughties are:

1. [Morvern Callar](#) (Lynne Ramsay, UK, 2002)
2. [Tarnation](#) (Jonathan Caouette, US, 2003)
3. [Tekkonkinkreet](#) (Michael Arias, Japan, 2006)
4. [Spider](#) (David Cronenberg, Canada/UK, 2002)
5. [Inland Empire](#) (David Lynch, US, 2006)
6. [Time of The Wolf](#) (Michael Haneke, France/Germany, 2003)
7. [Spirited Away](#) (Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 2001)
8. [Birth](#) (Jonathan Glazer, US, 2004)
9. [Songs from the Second Floor](#) (Roy Andersson, Sweden, 2000)
10. [Harry He's Here To Help](#) (Dominik Moll, France, 2000)

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