

Robert Altman's Film Adaptation of Raymond Carver's Short Cuts

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The characters in Robert Altman's film adaptation of the Raymond Carver anthology *Short Cuts* think they're islands entire of themselves. They suspect their lives and their worlds of isolation, alienation, separation, in [multiple](#) senses of the words. They fail to see, or perhaps purposely ignore, connections between themselves and those around them, between their actions and the ramifications of those actions. And while a typical director of a [slice](#)-of-life work might be content to show all these people in their ignorance of connections, what makes Altman's final product so marvelous is the way he toys with them, and the comments he makes about them.

The obvious route to take when turning an [anthology](#) into a single, (more or less) cohesive piece is to show that "it's a small world, after all," that everyone's life is intertwined with everyone else's. In the particular case of *Short Cuts*, this task is relatively easy, since Carver's characters generally live in similar geographical regions and come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Altman does not fail to take advantage of this opportunity. It

shows in his camera work, in the way that so many scenes begin and end with the camera zooming, panning or tilting towards or away from the focal characters. The scene in which Casey gets hit by Doreen's car ends by panning off to a street sign warning drivers to watch for pedestrians; the film itself ends with a pan across the Wymans' patio, then across the city itself (reminding us, perhaps, that any whole can only be viewed from a perspective). Pans back and forth within scenes reinforce this effect; frequently the camera seems to be shaking its head, following ch...

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