

[The Social Network](#) viewed at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#)  
Reviews by [Anne Ryan](#), [Simon Belt](#) and [Fat Roland](#) October 2010

Directed by Oscar-nominated filmmaker David Fincher (*Se7en* and *Fight Club*) and written by *The West Wing*

's creator Aaron Sorkin, this absorbing drama chronicles the rise and fall of the three founders of the social-networking phenomenon Facebook, following them to the heights of their success and the depths of jealousy and greed.

### [Anne Ryan](#) 's view...

So what do you do if you're a nerdy kid at college and looking to get laid? Well if you're a girl you might dye your hair, lose weight, have a makeover – even consider getting implants – but if you're a boy, and specifically if you're Mark Zuckerberg – you invent Facebook.

In David Fincher's new film we see that the ultimate social network was created so that the ultimate computer geek could go to bed with models. Bill Gates uses his talents to save humanity – and Facebook allows you to catch up with people you have successfully avoided since school. Aaron Sorkin's literate script must skirt around the fact that he is writing about Facebook (lawyer alert) – and he is facing a fundamental problem that these are not actually very interesting people.



The young cast of familiar faces perform well – Justin Timberlake landing the plum role of the only really multi-faceted character Sean Parker and showing yet again that for a singer he is a very good actor. For those who are in love with Facebook and want to discover the story behind it – if they have not already kept up to date through the news – this will be a rewarding film. For the less committed it is as entertaining as one would expect from the creators of Seven and the West Wing.

But a film whose main character is a teenage boy who rates women on a website and thinks it is cool to walk around in a dressing gown and beach shoes in the depths of a Harvard winter is

only interesting because he is now the Forbes' second richest man. In the end this is a story of rather boring people who use the world's greatest technology to tell each other about their rather boring lives – yes – it's Facebook.

### [Simon Belt 's view...](#)

Chances are that you're reading this review after being prompted by a link on a Facebook wall - primarily down to the unrivalled functionality and usability of the world's premiere social networking website and the power it has in helping to organise people's activities. That's a big change from 10 years ago when chances are it would have initially appeared in printed media. **The Social Network**

is a traditional format movie that attempts to bring the Facebook story to life on screen. This tension between traditional media and social organisation, and new forms of communication media and social organisation is definitely apparent throughout this film - drawing you in and perhaps unsurprisingly leaving you wanting more, about and from digital media. The tension and sense of alienation around the new forms of media throughout this film may also come from how the story was written as it was sourced and spiced from information in publicly available legal documents rather than more intimate insider knowledge.



The greatest tension this movie brings to the fore though is laid out delightfully in the opening scene - a dramatic wake-up call that the film is about individuals who are keen to operate with a heightened sense of speed, purpose and agility, coming up against personal barriers of personality, social structure, and norms of behaviour that don't obviously lend themselves to a quick technical fix. Attempts to deal with the personal rejection from a date through online blogging and inviting others to comparatively rate photos of college students leads to an

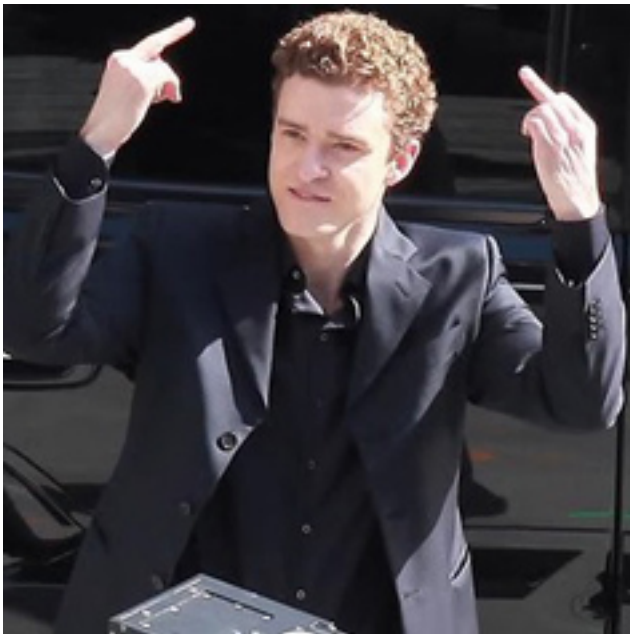
immediate sense of achievement and interest across college, and most importantly from the very establishment figures that the technical driver behind Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg played superbly by Jesse Eisenberg, is so alienated from.

Within weeks of Zuckerberg being dumped in the opening scene, Facebook was conceptualised and formed. This started as a counter blast to the exclusive clubs the creators of Facebook were eager to get into, but whilst embedding the concept and mock exclusivity at an inter-personal level through becoming friends online. The desire to step outside of more snobbish and old money forms of identity through connections, club membership and social position to more 'of the moment' fluid creations of identity facilitated through new technology is captured through Facebook with delightful dexterity. Indeed, the Facebook group for the [Manchester Salon](#) is one of the best organising tools I use for sharing information about and co-ordinating invitations to public events.

The opening scene comes back to haunt throughout the film, so pay attention to it - Mark Zuckerberg being cold shouldered by humanity personified with great warmth and calm reason by Erika Albright (Rooney Mara), causing a burning desire to show them, show them all that he is worth something, has insights and something to offer. The haunting, unnerving, edgy, sometimes unhinged and definitely isolating soundtrack captures the time period musically but also invites you to empathise with the supposed mood and mindset of Zuckerberg. I don't know enough about music to explain what it is about the soundtrack that gives it that contemporary Joy Division feel but it certainly captures the message of alienation writ large for me.

Like the date that never was, it takes two to tango, and there's a void in the script and story for me that yearns to be filled and that's the gap that Facebook is attempting to fill. The audience for Facebook are characterless both individually and collectively, and the mediation between the user base of the website and the coders creating the website doesn't exist. Initially Mark

Zuckerberg codes the initial elements of the website - and even then in total isolation from any background that developed his skills. The jump to having a housefull of coders working in isolation with no direction is alarmingly detached from the process of working out what to code which is never dealt with, indicating a traditional media alienation from the digital world, other than for marketing purposes. I know it's the movies and all but this disconnect is more telling than the story line of jilted personality becoming a business success.



The Social Network is extremely thin on both the social and the network, the social only really being represented by the various protagonists in the legal scrap by those claiming to be involved in Facebook's creation wanting some financial spoils from the capitalisation of Facebook, and the network only being represented by Napster co-creator Sean Parker (Justin Timberlake) and his Angel investor contacts. Hollywood may be familiar with venture capital bearing angels but this should surely have been the point of introducing the mediation between Mark Zuckerberg / Facebook and the audience. Alas, and maybe it's the film genre but we're left with the shallow notion that a date that went wrong led to Facebook having a user base of some 500 million because Mark Zuckerberg directed his energies into coding a website. That's just not good enough and expresses a complacency in traditional media circles that'll come back and bite them in the proverbial, exemplified by the website for [The Social Network](#) which forces the visitor to sit through quotes about the film whether they want to or not.

A common theme of comments I've had made to me about Facebook and **The Social Network**, by people who may or may not use the network, or seen the film, is that they both trivialise everyday life. There is at some level a yearning across society for an experience with greater depth, meaning or social value. Many criticisms seem to want a deeper analysis of what drove Mark Zuckerberg to create Facebook - was it being an outsider of the 'Final Club', or an outsider of the in crowd, or an inability to form relationships with women. The idea that Mark Zuckerman created the phenomena that is Facebook is the lunacy of the megalomaniac - it's a social phenomena facilitated by Facebook and not the other way around, and it's the social phenomena that's interesting not Mark Zuckerman per se - though no doubt he is actually interesting in a way that the very dull 'is he likeable, or a nerd or a woman hater' framework misses writ large.

Despite the content being frustratingly lightweight on analysis of social trends, I did really like the film. I think the acting was very good and bodes well for films of depth the actors move onto. The delivery of some stunning one liners absolutely terrific and contempt for tradition holding back technological progress a real breath of fresh air from the ants of the world unite brigade. The cinematography was maybe a little too clinical for me but meant that the film flowed very well, and it had to because the rapid-fire script was waiting for no-one and got the direction it deserved. My preferred social networking tool for business is perhaps LinkedIn, but then there's no glamour, gossip and personality on that, so nothing for Hollywood to try and sensationalise there. Maybe a good topic for discussion at a future Salon - go see **The Social Network** and then Facebook me about it!

### [Fat Roland 's view...](#)

When Ron 'Da Vinci' Howard forgot about his cod catholic conspiracy nonsense long enough to produce his take on the Frost/Nixon interviews, he showed that a director on slow-burn could be a beautiful thing. **The Social Network** is David Fincher taking it down a key or two, only instead of Frost he has Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, and instead of Nixon, he has, er, everyone.

The story of the battle around the founding of Facebook is essentially two hours of intellectual property law distilled through a pair of lenses: that of Fincher, and that of scriptwriter Aaron Sorkin. The latter brings his machine-gun scripting to the fore so strongly in **The Social Network** that it threatens to stifle, especially in the opening boyfriend-dumping scene when your ears aren't quite used to it.

And so we have buckets of sarcasm and huge reams of script laid down at record speed by a bunch of cleaner-than-thou Harvard jocks, each more difficult to like than the last. Seriously. We never see these guys wash once, but they look like they've been scrubbed spotless for sixteen hours a day.



Zuckerberg, a revelatory performance by Jesse Eisenberg, is borderline autistic and an “asshole” who “doesn't have three friends to rub together to make a fourth”. Everyone around him is more successful than him, such as Facebook co-founder Eduardo, who soars socially where Zuckerberg only flounders, the rival Winklevoss twins who seem to be genetically perfect, and Justin Timberlake's gloriously horrific inventor of Napster who is the uber-Zuckerberg in ambition, looks and unlikeability.

In the hands of any other director, Eisenberg's character would have been a disaster, but Fincher knows what to do with an awful lead. Take the aggressive Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, the arrogance of Detective Mills in *Se7en*, or the obsession of the stalker-esque Graysmith in *Zodiac*.

As the legal recriminations bat around the screen – the film doesn't stay in one time-frame – it's the humour that flies out at you. Beguiling notes of originality keep the momentum going. Where else would you find a legal drama where, as throwaway points, a chicken is fed its own kind, the Harvard president dryly asks his secretary to “punch me in the face” and a Jewish Caribbean night seems like the most natural thing in the world?

**The Social Network** struggles to keep logged on in the final act, where it becomes apparent that despite the bitter dispute between almost every party in the film, there are two basic failings. Firstly, how high are the stakes, really? A nice side of Zuckerberg's personality is he didn't pimp Facebook for the money, but that leaves you wondering why he didn't just walk away before things got too bad.

And there's no real threat. The Winklevoss twins claim Zuckerberg stole their idea, but they seem too distracted with fighting it out in the Henley Regatta to give all their attention to social networking. Another threat, which I won't spoil for you here, is flattened in a mundane legal trap that seemed more like swatting a fly than crushing an enemy.



Despite its faults, **The Social Network** gets a big “like” from me and represents a brave return to form for David Fincher after the Oscar-baiting drudgery of Benjamin Button. It also brings Eisenberg to a bigger audience than Zombieland gave him, and gives weedy geekdom its new movie king. Michael Cera, watch your back.

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Screening for at least 2 weeks at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#) from Friday 15 October