

[The ASI's best of 2011: Sam Bowman](#) [1]

Written by [Sam Bowman](#) [2] | Thursday 29 December 2011



Sam Bowman, Head of Research:

It was a pretty good year for films, both because of some excellent rereleases (**Apocalypse Now**, **Jurassic Park**, **The Lion King** ? thankfully shown in 2D as well as 3D) and terrific independent films. **The Guard** was the funniest film I saw this year, about a rural Irish policeman teaming up with a black FBI agent to bust up a gang of drug smugglers, although some of the humour may be lost on a non-Irish audience. (I usually side with the drug smugglers in films like these, but they were suitably nasty in this one.)

Drive was extremely slick, and had a great soundtrack ? it wasn't the most profound film ever, but it was a good watch. **We Need To Talk About Kevin** was well-made but deeply unpleasant to watch, and its polar opposite **My Week With Marilyn** wins the Most Enjoyably Frothy award from me. I should also give special mention to **Attack the Block**, which I haven't seen yet but may be in one scene as a background extra. (I'm a big fan of its director, Joe Cornish, from his TV shows and radio programmes with Adam Buxton.) The most outstanding film of the year, for me, was **Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy**. Mark Kermode insists that it's a film about the tense relationships between men (and not, as you might think, about spying), so the fact that every man at the ASI has chosen it as one of our films of the year might say something about us!

Most books I read this year were released before 2011. Of the 2011 crop, Detlev Schlichter's **Paper Money Collapse** [3] was one of the best. Schlichter reframed the Misesian theory of the business cycle for modern times, giving a stark prediction about a Weimar-like future for the world's fiat currencies. Of the fiction I read, the most enjoyable were the fantasy **A Song of Ice and Fire** books (on which the **Game of Thrones** TV series is based). I'm working my way through Tony Judt's history of Europe since 1945, **Postwar**, but it is so vast that I tend to dip in and out.

It wasn't as good a year for music as some previous years, but there were still a few notable releases. **Kate Bush's 50 Words for Snow** ([sample song](#) [4]) was a languid, dreamy snowscape, and a return to form after the disappointing **Director's Cut**. From Britain, the only outstanding album for me was **Metronomy's The English Riviera** ([sample song](#) [5]). **St Vincent's Strange Mercy** ([sample song](#) [6]), **Lykke Li's Wounded Rhymes** and **Bon Iver's Bon Iver** were all pretty good, but I wasn't grabbed by many albums this year overall.

Most of my favourite TV at the moment comes from the US. **Game of Thrones** proved that HBO could do fantasy, fusing the epic setting of the Lord of the Rings with the characterization of *The Wire* or *The Sopranos*. I finally saw **Band of Brothers**, which was brilliant. But the best show I saw this year was **Parks & Recreation**

, a hilarious successor to the US Office set in a small town local government department which also included possibly the first openly libertarian character on TV. (If you decide to try P&R, skip the weak first season.)

My favourite YouTube video was [Nicholas Cage Losing His Sh*t](#) ^[7] (video may be NSFW). That's pretty much how I feel whenever I read the newspaper nowadays and see stories [like this](#) ^[8]. I don't have a favourite politician of the year, but I like Gary Johnson and hope he does well on the Libertarian Party ticket in 2012. Ron Paul has an ugly past, but I like him and hope he does well in the GOP primaries.

What to hope for in 2012? I think the silent film **The Artist** will be great and loved [the trailer](#) ^[9]. If I'm lucky, **Joanna Newsom** might do another album, and musicians I love like **Of Montreal**, **Janelle Monae** and **Dirty Projectors** are all expected to as well. And I'm hugely enjoying my advance copy of Daniel Klein's book **Knowledge and Coordination**, in which he makes the case for a liberalism based on a synthesis of Adam Smith and FA Hayek, and which I will review on the blog when it is released.

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