

CINÉPHILIA

THE BOND UNIVERSITY FILM JOURNAL

EDITORIAL



LIVE FROM BRISBANE

by Matthew Clayfield

I am writing this on the ninth day of August, about twelve hours after having returned to Bond from the Brisbane International Film Festival, where I have been living for the past five days (and have been having the time of my life in the process). Notice, won't you, how I say that I've been living at the festival and not merely in Brisbane itself. Believe you me, I've been living *at* the festival, and frankly, I wish that I still was.

Yes, until Wednesday night two weeks ago, with a screening of the (literally) operatic *The Death of Klinghoffer* (d. Penny Woolcock, 2003), I was a film festival virgin. I'd never been to a festival; had never applauded before or after a picture; had never attended a screening where the majority of the people actually stay to watch the credits. This was a whole new world to me, and a world that you should get out to and experience while you still can (while you're still here in Queensland, at least). For like Christmas, my friends, you've got to remember that BIFF doth come but once a year, and just like Christmas, the gifts are plentiful.

Needless to say, of course, that this fortnight's issue of *Cinéphilia* has been compiled with a specific mind to enlighten those of you who might still be festival virgins. Our opening pieces, festival summaries by myself and Mark Daley, implicitly sum up our argument perfectly, and both he and I, having attended upwards of two-hundred hours of cinema in the last fourteen days, have included a number of musings and capsule reviews of films that we've seen and loved and which you should try to track down and experience for yourself. BIFF maybe over this year, my friends, but we're still trying our hardest to get you up there to Brisbane; to get you into the cinema; and to get you excited about seeing what you can see. Even if you have to wait a whole year until you next get the chance.

I've said it once, and I'll say it again: BIFF doth come but once a year, so don't let next year pass you by.

- m.

FEATURE ARTICLE

THE CRÈME DE LA CRÈME

by Matthew Clayfield



1. *Crimson Gold* (d. Jafar Panahi, 2003)

There's no doubt about it: Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi's masterpiece, *Crimson Gold*, is far and away the film of this year's festival, and one of last year's very, very best. Engaging where another jewel of Iranian cinema, Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997), is occasionally tedious, *Crimson Gold* follows a very similar structure to the latter picture (not surprising given that Kiarostami wrote the screenplay) in which an isolated and lonely individual – in this case, a pizza-delivery man named Hussein – is left to “wander” from place to place, episode to episode, actively partaking in (though sometimes merely witnessing) a number of seemingly unrelated events – all of which ultimately tell us more about Hussein, the city and the world at large than any standard movie narrative would (or could) do. All of the film's episodes have something very specific to say about contemporary Iran (standouts include the second of three visits to a jewellery store and Hussein's delivery to a depressed but talkative Iranian man who's just returned from America and is now declaring that Tehran is a “city of lunatics”), but are nonetheless relevant to viewers from other countries as well, especially when they focus – as the jewellery store episode does – on class distinctions and other such topics. *Crimson Gold* is at once both culturally specific and thematically universal, and therein lies Panahi's greatest gift as a filmmaker. *Crimson Gold*, like Kim Ki-duk's *Samaritan Girl* (2004), another of the festival's standout pictures, is able to work on two separate levels – as a work of art that's particularly relevant to Iranians (even though neither *Crimson Gold* nor Panahi's last film, *The Circle* [1999], have been allowed to screened in Iran) and as a work of art that far transcends any traditional ideas of nationality in the cinema. The film speaks loudly and clearly to anyone from anywhere and – without ever becoming heavy-handed, preachy or obvious with its moral judgements – does so remarkably well. Definitely not to be missed.

2. *Samaritan Girl* (d. Kim Ki-duk, 2004)

Along with *Before Sunset* (see below), Ki-duk's *Samaritan Girl* (a.k.a *Samaria*) is most definitely a contender for best picture of the year thus far. The film, which tells the increasingly tragic story of a young girl, Yeo-jin, is visually gorgeous, emotionally moving and exquisitely unique in both its style and ever-shifting tone.

3. *Before Sunset* (d. Richard Linklater, 2004)

A pitch-perfect follow-up to its 1995 prequel, *Before Sunset* is intimate, funny and also profoundly moving – especially towards the end, when things get far more emotional than they ever did in the first film. Wonderfully written, beautifully shot and expertly directed by Richard Linklater, the picture is proof – if proof is even needed – that Linklater is one of the greatest filmmakers (independent or otherwise) currently working in the United States.

4. *11 x 14* (d. James Benning, 1977)

The first experimental film that I've ever overtly loved, Benning's *11 x 14* is very much a cinematic essay on how we – as both audience members and as human beings – use the senses of sight and sound to mentally construct, assume and imagine spatial environments. If this sounds at all oblique, it's probably because this interpretation is my own, and the film's greatest asset is its ambiguity. Benning allows – and even encourages – an audience interaction with the text that ultimately results each audience member taking away from the picture an interpretation that is unique and their own.

5. *Last Life in the Universe* (d. Pen-Ek Ratanaruang, 2003)

Originally, I didn't think that this picture was as completely over-the-moon wonderful as I maybe expected it to be, but it's ultimately stayed with me longer – niggling away and effecting me emotionally – more than most any other film that I saw at the festival. Given the staying power of its gorgeous imagery and haunting atmosphere [actually, to tell you the truth, writing about the picture right now has made me realise just what kind of effect it actually had on me], I'm sure that another viewing will rightly confirm everything that's good and pure about it

Other notable films (really just the other half of my top ten plus four, to be honest) included *The Ister* (d. David Barison & Daniel Ross); *A Good Lawyer's Wife* (d. Im Sang-soo, 2003); *The Magic Gloves* (d. Martín Rejtman, 2003); *Head-On* (d. Fatih Akin,

2003); *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (d. Luigi Falorni & Byambasuren Davaa, 2003); *Intimate Strangers* (d. Patrice Leconte, 2004); *Who Wants to Kill Jessie?* (d. Václav Vorlíček, 1966) from Steven Jay Schneider's wonderfully bizarre Czech Gothic programme; *The Wooden Camera* (d. Ntshaveni Wa Luruli, 2003); and *The Saddest Music in the World* (d. Guy Maddin, 2003).

FEATURE ARTICLE

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

by Mark Daley



1. *Head-On* (d. Fatih Akin, 2004)

In reviewing this year's festival, the highest ranking film for me is ultimately the film that had the most profound and lasting effect, and for me, that film was *Head-On*, which told the incredible story of Cahit and Sibel, two individuals with addictive personalities and suicidal tendencies. Cahit and Sibel meet at low-points in their respective lives; Cahit has just driven his car into a wall and Sibel has tried to commit suicide again. Their chance meeting takes place at a mental hospital where Sibel asks Cahit to marry her – because, like her, he is Turkish, and marrying a Turkish man is the only way to get independence from her family. After initially saying no to Sibel, Cahit concedes after a very public attempted suicide, which ultimately leads our characters into a strange and emotional state of affairs. Sibel wants to have an independent sex life and Cahit is slowly falling for her. Although this is a German film, it has more than enough to say about Turkish culture, while still managing to balance all that with a story that's universal. The performances are excellent, with Birol Ünel as Cahit truly looking like a man at the end of his rope. One of the film's most interesting techniques is its sudden cutaways to a Turkish band at the edge of a river, which act as a kind of narrator to the story. At first, these breaks feel more like musical interludes than moments that further the plot, but ultimately, without them, the film wouldn't have the same effect – its foreshadowing of later events would have fallen by the wayside. Fatih Akin has been lucky enough to direct all his own screenplays thus far, but *Head-On* has also been the first movie that he's produced. A dark comedy with

flawless performances, direction, cinematography and editing, *Head-On* was easily my favorite of the festival.

2. *Crimson Gold* (d. Jafar Panahi, 2003)

One of the best films I've seen all year and easily the best Iranian movie I've ever seen, this movie is remarkable. Panahi, whose last two films have not been shown in his own country, has a lot to say about class structure and pride. This film's asks its audience a very difficult question: if good people do bad things, does this make them bad people? This movie stays with you long after it's finished and has greatly influenced and altered the way that I see cinema.

3. *That Day* (d. Raúl Ruiz, 2003)

Underneath the surface, this may well be an extremely political film, but you really don't tend to notice it – what with all the killing that's happening. An insane man is hired to kill the daughter of a rich tycoon, but somehow comes to befriend the girl instead, and deciding to kill anyone else who comes near her for the duration of the movie. *That Day* is incredibly hilarious with a brand of surrealism that's completely its own. Blood is funny and so are dead bodies – I can't thank you enough, Mr. Ruiz.

4. *The Magic Gloves* (d. Martín Rejtman, 2003)

I'll tell you right now: I'm a sucker for a film that ends with a New Order song. This amazing film from Argentina is about a predominantly pathetic individual, recounting all that happens to him in the months following a breakup. This is director Rejtman's funny and melancholic look at life in general, a universal film with strengths that lie not in the dialogue (even though it's a strong script), but in what remains unsaid by its characters. We understand the events and what's happening to the characters, but at the same time, to a certain degree, they're all a bit of a mystery.

5. *Last Life in the Universe* (d. Pen-Ek Ratanaruang, 2003)

It's not just Chris Doyle's stunning cinematography that won me over. This movie is full of interesting characters and situations that keep you interested and intrigued. The story involves a Japanese librarian living in Thailand who – due to some dead bodies that are hidden in his apartment – hides out with a Thai girl in her house just out of Bangkok. At the heart of this film is a love story that can sadly never be. Full of mental subjectivity, this is masterful work by Pen-ek Ratanaruang.

Other movies that should be noted, as they were really all so close: *Who Wants to Kill Jessie?* (d. Václav Vorlíček, 1966); *The Saddest Music in the World* (d. Guy Maddin, 2003); *11 x 14* (d. James Benning, 1977), my favorite experimental film ever; *Samaritan Girl* (d. Kim Ki-duk, 2004) and *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (d. Luigi Falorni & Byambasuren Davaa, 2003). There were lots of others that were also great movies, and so just quickly I'm going to mention *Buena Vida Delivery* (d. Leonardo Di Cesare, 2004) and *Akame 48 Waterfalls* (d. Genjiro Arato, 2003) as well.

FESTIVAL DIARY



A GLOBAL CINEMA

by Matthew Clayfield

Thursday morning (of the first week) at BIFF started with Kim Ki-duk's incredible *Samaritan Girl* (2004), which has my vote, thus far, for best picture of the year (narrowly edging out *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* [d. Michel Gondry, 2004]). I'd heard only a little about Ki-duk in the past, namely from a number of people who have seen his *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter...and Spring* (2003), which is apparently opening in Brisbane in a couple of months, and thus, while I still had relatively high expectations for the picture, I was pretty much unaware of what exactly to expect.

The film, which tells the increasingly tragic story of a young girl named Yeon-jin, is visually gorgeous, emotionally moving and exquisitely unique in both its style and (ever-shifting) tone. I have been reading Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Essential Cinema: on the Necessity of Film Canons* recently, and one of the primary ideas that I feel keeps emerging is the idea of a "global cinema," in which both "nationality" and "national identity" ultimately become irrelevant. Films like Ki-duk's (and indeed like those of many contemporary Asian filmmakers) are perfect examples of this phenomena at work. To me, *Samaritan Girl*, even though it's a South Korean picture, is a perfect example of what's wrong with Australian cinema at the moment. Ki-duk's film transcends the borders of South Korea and speaks to people of all races, nationalities and walks-of-life, while Australian feature films are so preoccupied with being "Australian feature films" that they actually forget to speak to anyone at all.

Note, however, that I have targeted "feature films" in my attack, as the "Made in Oz" short film showcase (though very uneven in terms of quality)

showed that, for the most part, the idea of moving away from the feeble "Australian-ness" of recent, government funded feature-length projects is an idea that's very much at the forefront of some of our filmmaker's minds (mine and hopefully yours included). Without going into any long-winded description of each of the films in question, the showcase was pretty much dominated by VCA and AFTRS graduate films, the highlights being *Everything Goes* (d. Andrew Kotatko, 2004), which starred Hugo Weaving as guy who's basically selling the entire contents of his house, and *Blue Poles* (d. Darcy Yuille, 2004). The weakest film was unquestionably the last one, *Black Berries* (d. Ema Mulholland, 2004), which was trying to be "important" by saying something or other about racism.

One of the festival's "must-see" pictures was the Australian feature *Somersault* (d. Cate Shortland, 2004), which directly followed Ratanarung's *Last Life in the Universe* and played to a sell-out crowd with its "wunderkind" director in attendance. The film was very well received by the audience, though personally – for me, at least – it was just another example of what's currently wrong with Australian cinema, despite a number of the picture's strong points, which were namely its performances and cinematography. Of course, this isn't to say that *Somersault* was a particularly "bad" picture (because it wasn't), but even with its nice performances (namely Abbie Cornish and Sam Worthington in the leads) and its dreamy cinematography, the insensitive and obligatory focus on social "issues" (none of which are explored in any real depth or treated with any dignity) is just typical of a film that's been made with money (and so-called development "assistance") from the conservative Howard government's increasingly oppressive funding bodies. Then you look at a film like *The Ister*, and finally here's a feature film that doesn't play into the hands of the system! Love or loathe the picture itself, you've got to admit that its makers have balls – their film was made without a scrap of government financing attached to it, and dammed if it's not one of the most singular and unique Australian pictures of the past decade – two traits that, love it loathe it, are becoming a sad anomaly in this country.

The fact of the matter is that the Australian film industry needs filmmakers who, like Ki-duk in Korea, are consciously aware of their place in the "national cinema," but who don't work towards it as the ultimate goal, complying to its every code and convention (though admittedly, half the problem is that the people financing feature film in this country usually demand unequivocal compliance to the standard formula for a "quality" Australian feature). It's not a matter of finding commercial success on an international level either, it's just a matter of telling stories that, like *Samaritan Girl*,

(and a whole slew of other films that have played to captivated audiences here at the festival) can move beyond their geographical borders, in the realm of a truly "global" cinema.

FILM PRACTICE



THE PUBLIC SCREENING

by Daniel Staud

Movies are tampered with in many, many ways before they reach their "final" state, which is the product that you – the viewer – see on the silver screen. Any given picture changes at least four times in a director's head – from the conception to the script; the script to the shoot; the shoot to the edit; and then, finally, when it's shown to an audience. I myself have been troubled by these very changes this semester with my own film, *My Only Miracle*, with location changes, image quality and the feel of my film all being drastically altered in some way, simply to adjust to the resources that are available to a student production crew, each member of which is battling at least three other subjects at the same time.

I recently viewed *The Stepford Wives* (d. Frank Oz, 2004) and enjoyed both the immensely energetic performances and the plot (which had so many holes in it that it could have been classified as Swiss cheese). The film suffered, however, with the execution of its ending, which feels as though it was needlessly tampered with after the completion of post-production. When the film was shown to test audiences, the negative feedback garnered by its ending led the studio to re-shoot the last twenty-five minutes of the picture – the producers were shaking in their boots because of an audience reaction; they went haywire. So, they didn't like the movie's ending. Does that really give them the right to change Frank Oz's version of the film? Should the public really be allowed to participate and interact in the filmmaking process in order to complete the film?

After my long hours spent editing *My Only Miracle* this semester, I have been left with the opinion that a film's director should be responsible for the final product – but can the director be given such responsibility when he is making a film to satisfy the audience (instead of the first two acts of his picture and its characters)?

Reindeer Games (d. John Frankenheimer, 2000) was destined to be released in its "director's cut" form after the theatrical release, due to the fact that Frankenheimer was not satisfied at all with the studio's version. His film suffered from public screenings and audience

tests and had to be cut down by twenty minutes. He constantly reminds us on the DVD commentary track of the film that he shouldn't have been forced to bow down to the producer and cut up the picture, but should have gone through three months of painstaking post-production, the last thing he wants to do is trim down his work even further as the film's producers see fit best.

There are currently seven different versions of *Blade Runner* (d. Ridley Scott, 1982) in existence – the public screening of this film, yet again, resulted in the film being changed. The masterpiece underwent an extreme amount of changes – a voiceover narration by Deckard (Harrison Ford), for example, was brought in after the picture was completed (Ford was completely against having to read it). A narration that was not needed but – due to the confusion of audiences – was added nevertheless.

Should audiences be allowed to participate in the filmmaking process? Every film student, ironically, is force-fed the idea that the director has complete control (and final cut) on their pictures, but when audiences have the power to flip-flop the film, are such notions a healthy thing to be teaching? Who ultimately decides the nature of "final" product? If film is an artistic medium, then surely the director – the artwork's creator – should be the one who decides what is true, right and final.

DEBATE

[The following rebuttal is in response to Matthew Clayfield's "Against Student Film," which appeared in the last issue of *Cinéphilie* (Vol. 1, Iss. 1)].

1. NO OBLIGATION

by "Tony Coca-Cola"

"We must . . . try [to reinvent the wheel]."

Yeah, good luck with that. Bullshit. Just make the bloody film you want. If it's derivative, who cares? If it's what you want, if you're happy with it, that's all that matters. You have absolutely no obligation to anyone as to how or why you make your film.

2. OBLIGATED TO THE ART

by Matthew Clayfield

Yes, you're right, it's true; you're not obligated to anyone but yourself when conceiving and making a picture. You can rip-off whomever you want, whenever you want, and be completely and utterly fine with it – conscience permitting, of course.

But then, you're not obligated to make pictures that try to further the art of cinema either. You can make bland and mediocre rubbish if you really want to. I mean, it's not like there's anyone stopping you. There's no law that says you can't be derivative or that you can't privilege one element of

cinema over another (the visual over the narrative in terms of the student film debate). Hell, there's not even a law that says that you have to make good films.

However, the best filmmakers are those that have asked themselves – truly asked themselves in all seriousness – just what kind of filmmaker they'd like to be. Jafar Panahi, the director of *Crimson Gold*, who I was lucky enough to meet at BIFF, told us during his Q&A that he asked himself, at the end of his film school education, whether or not he wanted to be a commercial director who told lies or a vanguard director who told the truth and was obligated to the further development of the art form that he loves.

You're exactly right – you're not obligated to reinvent the wheel if you don't want to – in fact, you're not even obligated to try – but if you want to make a mark, even as a "student filmmaker," that means more to the cinema than a couple of nicely lit but superficial moments in a banal 16mm showreel, then you've ultimately got to have an obligation to something far greater than yourself – and that's an obligation to the art of cinema itself.

CAPSULE REVIEW

AMORES PERROS

by Rodrigo Urbano

Alternating between moments of brutality and sequences of beauty and poetry, *Amores Perros* (d. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000) defiantly grates against the kind of contemporary cinema that glamorizes criminal behaviour by presenting killers as hip and heroic wiseguys with quirky, "alternative" moral codes. Though on its surface the film covers some of the same territory, exploring the lives of men and women who routinely break the rules, the film does not celebrate violence as being either glamorous or seductive. Instead, *Amores Perros* is a sensitive, probing, and intensely moral portrait of human behaviour in which violence has meaning and consequences. Often Biblical in its approach to storytelling, the movie suggests that there is a moment of reckoning in everyone's life and that the age-old "thou shalt not" commandments are still important. "We try to show that violence has consequences," González Iñárritu explains. "When you create violence, it turns against you."

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