

CINÉPHILIA

THE BOND UNIVERSITY FILM JOURNAL

EDITORIAL

FOUR ON FILMMAKING

by Matthew Clayfield

As it's the beginning of the semester and people haven't really had a chance to get their heads back into "essay-writing" mode as yet, I decided to make this [far less cerebral] issue of *Cinéphilie* a bit of an "inspiration issue," focusing on the broad cross-section of films and filmmakers that have impacted upon some of the film students here at Bond.

Of course, the four students who have written miniature autobiographies [and lists] for this issue are by no means supposed to be looked upon as representatives of any and all film students – after all, each of us have different tastes, goals and passions, all of which are completely our own, and these just happen to those of the four students who have written. If anything, this is really just a naval gazing issue.

It's really not an "inspiration issue," however, as much as it is a "film student issue". Although not representative of everyone and everything, some common threads do begin to emerge in these pieces – the prominence and initial importance of camcorders in the early parts of our lives, for example!

This issue also contains the first instalment of Sam Adelman's behemoth four-part essay on the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Douglas Sirk. Check out the library people! Their films are in there, and you ultimately need to see them if the essay's going to make any sense...

– m.

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE INSPIRATION ISSUE

By Austin Andrews, Matthew Clayfield, Nathan Dean Fetzer and Zaac d'Almeida

1. AUSTIN ANDREWS

Introduction

I wanted to make movies long before I ever had any aspirations to become a filmmaker. When I was even, my friend and I would play Hide-and-Seek on sleepovers, using Nightshot-mode on the video camera to track each other down in the dark. After we found the little red record button, we began making horror movies entirely in pitch black with Nightshot, editing in camera and stealing techniques we'd seen on the big screen. I became obsessed. No matter what the form or subject was, if it involved manipulating it with a camera then I'd be there.

Musical Inspiration

My love for film itself lagged behind my fixation with what my little camcorder could do. Unlike most filmmakers starting out, I had no *Star Wars* (d. George Lucas, 1977) or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (d. Steven Spielberg, 1981) to inspire me to stand out and bellow "I WANT TO MAKE MOVIES!" for everyone to hear. While I can certainly play "be-the-film-student" and rattle off a list of directors whose works I admire, I have yet to find that one filmmaker who shares the same views and perspective on the world that I do. If I did, I suppose, there'd be nothing left for me to say. It's the desire to express that which I'm only starting to understand, coupled with a love for exploring the limitless possibilities of our medium, that drives me to go all out.

I'm finding that even now, seven years after I first picked up my parents' old Hi-8 camera, that most of my inspiration is still coming from outside film. My addiction to the emotions associated with my favourite music has fuelled the imagination for many late-night brainstorm sessions. If I can someday transpose the rush of imagination I get from The Church's "Telepath" or Slowdive's "Machine Gun" onto film and give it meaning, I will die happy. What I am developing here at Bond, unfortunately more through my own readings and projects than through the classes themselves, is an appreciation for placing these definitively "filmic" moments within the trappings of a story.

Films

The one film that's inspired me the most this past year [and, none too coincidentally, is also my favourite film], Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo* (1992), is an anomaly. A concentrated burst of imagination from a filmmaker who would never direct again, it's the only film to ever cause me to sit back on the first viewing and watch all my intentions and aspirations unfold on screen beautifully fully formed. These days, though, the one thing that drives me to give it my all is that ever-present [and growing] possibility of failure, and the fact that I'm simply not any good at anything else. Whether that means I'm making movies for the wrong reason, I don't know [or care], but so long as I've got enough good music and cinema to keep me fed and happy then I'll be in this for the long haul.

2. MATTHEW CLAYFIELD

Introduction

I didn't originally want to be a filmmaker: I wanted to be a swagman. After a couple of months of pursuing this relatively

unfruitful endeavour, it was pointed out to me that there wasn't much really much call for professional bums, and so my attention shifted to acting [in school plays to begin with] instead. But isn't that the way it always goes? From acting, of course, I moved on to making short films on VHS-C with my brothers in the starring roles. I have three brothers, you see, and they're all younger than I am, and thus they had to be directed, right?! Yes, one might say that I became a filmmaker by default, and others might say that I just hogged the camera and let the power run to my head...



Films

I can remember my first movie going experience – I saw *The Adventures of Milo and Otis* (d. Masanori Hata, 1986) with my younger brother and my cousins – as clearly as I can remember most anything else from my childhood, but it was *Jurassic Park* (d. Steven Spielberg, 1993) when I was in second grade that had the biggest impact upon my understanding of what "the movies" were. I don't consider it to be one of the very greatest movies ever made or anything, and it's impact upon me now is suitably less profound, but it was the first "event picture" that I ever saw, and it redefined a lot of things for me.

Recently, of course, there've been a whole lot of films that have changed my way of thinking, and more often than not, they're filmmaker-specific as well: the inspiration doesn't just come from the film itself, but it comes from the film's place within a filmmaker's body of work as well. It seems that I've become a rampaging auteurist. Major influences have included *Magnolia* (d. Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999), *Taxi Driver* (d. Martin Scorsese, 1976), *Lawrence of Arabia* (d. David Lean, 1962) and – more recently – films like *Crimson Gold* (d. Jafar Panahi, 2003), *Lost in Translation* (d. Sofia Coppola, 2003), *Full Frontal* (d. Steven Soderbergh, 2002) and so on...

Filmmakers

Apart from the obvious entries into the canon – your Scorseses and your Kubricks, for example – most of my inspiration in recent years has come from a group that I've affectionately dubbed the "neo-auteurs" of Hollywood. Wes Anderson, Paul Thomas Anderson, David O. Russell and,

for a long while [but not so much anymore] Quentin Tarantino.

More recently, this year, filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Jim Jarmusch and Richard Linklater have begun to make a sizeable impact upon me – an impact that, I think, is ultimately more important and "life changing" than any impact that's been made upon me in the past. With these guys, it's not just a matter of the films that they made or are making, but the whole mentality behind their way of working as well. But this isn't the time or the place to start spouting my idealistic pro-independence radicalism, so let's just say that they never fail to inspire me...

Conclusion

Since coming to Bond, my plans for the future have changed on an almost semester by semester basis. Unlike many of those who have written in this issue of *Cinéphilie*, I have just as large an interest in film criticism as I do in filmmaking itself, and while my own projects, of course, are going to be my primary objective in the future [projects that, by the very nature of who I am as a person, are bound to be at least quasi-autobiographical in nature] the watching of and writing about cinema is going to continue to be an important – indeed, and integral – aspect of my "career".

What's more, I'm very much an idealist: the words "independence" and "autonomy" feature very heavily in any discussion of my future career goals. But I don't want to take up much more space here. A discussion of my creative ideals will have to wait for another day, when my debut feature proves to the world that they're sound and valid and that they actually work...

3. NATHAN DEAN FETZER

Introduction

Like the craft itself, it has been a collaboration of moments, and interests, good friends and painful memories that have turned my sight towards making movies. If I had to pinpoint where my passion for creating started, I would blame it all on my big red box of Lego. Twenty minutes with those random plastic bricks transported me into a miniature world where I had complete control over every race car and spaceship I built. Lego became my excuse to play make-believe, to physically manifest my imagination. With them I became a daydreamer enthusiast.

My addiction to day dreaming has never stopped yet somewhere past the age of ten and before my fourteenth birthday, my thinking started to change. My make-believe time was no longer being spent on green aliens and robots in plastic spaceships, but

instead fantasies of a much more exotic nature involving the most alien creatures mankind has ever been confronted with: girls. As exciting as a box of colourful interlocking bricks can be, they didn't quite supply the ocular satisfaction I often searched for. Besides, they hurt like the devil whenever you stepped on them without shoes.

The conservative Orange County home I grew up in meant two things: we had cable television, and any channels that played uncensored movies were blocked. Luckily, we did receive the Independent Film Channel (IFC) and Sundance, two art house stations that slipped under the moral radar. They showed movies in their unabridged entirety, boobies and all. During my many pubescent searches for a few flickering moments of raw flesh, I ended up watching hours of well-made films. Needless to say, it wasn't long before I became distracted from satisfying my sexual hunger and fully engrossed in the films themselves. Often I would watch IFC with the sound at near mute so not to wake my parents. As a side affect, this isolated my attention to the visual aesthetics of motion pictures. Today I find myself captivated by cinematography. The camera has replaced my box of Lego as the ultimate toy to manifest the imagination.

Films

Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) has been that one film for me that still transcends beyond on any other. I'm a sucker for cool camera work and match cuts, and it has heaps of them. But as technically genius as the film can be, the off-beat mood I get from watching the film is what I enjoy the most. For me, *Brazil* is an original. It's weird, it's funny, it's violent, it's disturbing. It's all these things, yet not by intention. The success of the picture is that it isn't an action flick, or propaganda saturated documentary, it's simply a fantasy brought to life in fluid image and sound. *Brazil* embodies for me what every film should contain, but is made in a way few other films can replicate.

Conclusion

Now, as I reflect upon my time spent in film school, I can't help but have a sense of urgency to do more, to be prolific. I have learned that there is no substitute for the dreams imagination supplies us, but I find creating films the closest thing.

4. ZAAC D'ALMEIDA

Introduction

Unlike many filmmakers who felt the call of cinema from a young age, my inspiration to make films was not so preconceived. Up to the age of seven I was quite sure

RANT

IN PRAISE OF FREAKS

By K. P. Farrell

"I am bound to ramble."

My life is filled with composition, exposure ratios, visual integrity, aesthetic value, protagonists, hooks and mise-en-scene. I am part of a select people affectionately referred to as "film freaks". Since my arrival at Bond I have heard we freaks spoken down to, mocked, and accused of being glorified coach potatoes. Such quips can only anger and sadden me as I struggle to understand the narrow mindedness of such accusations.

Like so many of my fellow "freaks," my love affair with this artistic medium started at a young age. Exotic worlds, eccentric characters, adventure, magic made real and great storytelling inspired dreams, attitudes and desires, lending form to what would otherwise have been no more than the over active imagination of a child. My brother's and I spent countless hours in assumed roles of "The Dread Pirate Roberts," "The Goblin King," "Robocop," and of course [being children of the 80s] "Atreyu," acting out scene after scene in what was a never tiring obsession for film. As we "freaks" grow and mature, so does our love for all that is cinema, until we reach a point in our lives when there is no alternative but to spend the rest of our days dedicated to its study and creation. Encouraged by a family that shares my passion and an overwhelming need to be anything but another commerce graduate floating through the world, I and those like me, find ourselves here at Bond University, a part of the FITV family.

On a daily basis we cram our brains attempting to absorb a fragment of the magnitude of knowledge presented to us. Despite the uninformed opinion of people outside our faculty, we do not spend our time "just watching videos;" we work, and we work hard, so that we may gain the ability to create film, rather than fodder. We spend our days and nights venting obsession in the vain hope that we may one day inspire the same passion that was invoked in us all those years ago, the type of inspiration desperately lacking in cinema lately.

So, the next time you insinuate that a film student's days are spent lazing on a couch in a semi-vegetative state staring blindly at a screen or you find yourself labelling someone a 'film freak,' remember that it reeks more of condescension than affection. When the question "is filmmaking even a real degree?" gets asked, spare a thought for all the moments of life that have been inspired by; relayed and retold through; and ultimately shared by film. Then remember that all you have seen, felt and yearned to be a part of can be traced back to not one, but a team of 'film freaks'. Freaks that live to work, because their work is their love and their purpose. Try to appreciate all the

energy and heartache that goes into all that you see and feel when you sit before a cinema screen. Do not mock what you cannot understand.

FILM ANALYSIS

IMITATION OF SIRK

Part One

By Sam Adelman

The German director Douglas Sirk began his career in America with the film *Magnificent Obsession* in 1954. His movies in America, including classics such as *Written on the Wind* (1956), *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), and *Imitation of Life* (1959) (all discussed in this paper) were, and sometimes still are, dismissed as campy melodramas. They were often referred to as women's pictures, films produced and marketed for the predominantly female audience (Sterritt). He worked within a genre that never had the mass appeal of the western or film noir. Universal Studios, in addition, had a reputation for being a "cheesy" studio that produced stories written by unknown "hack" writers. Also, with stars like Rock Hudson and Jane Wyman, his movies were often thought of as star vehicles rather than cinema worthy of analysis.

It was the European directors, such as Godard and *Cahiers du Cinema*, who came forth and praised Sirk as the auteur that he really was. It was clear that Sirk was using melodrama as a platform for social criticism. As a contract director for the studio, he was handed sappy, overly sentimental stories, but instead of dismissing them he "embraced them as pop-culture expressions of his own dark view of life shaped by the chaos of World War II and his acute awareness of contemporary selfishness and injustice" (Sterritt). Take for example, his classic *All that Heaven Allows*, in this film one of the many themes involves Jane Wyman overcoming her social prejudices for the sake of being true to herself and true love. By exploring this theme Sirk is able to not only tell a story but also comment on the sense of affluence and materialism that swept across the nation in the 1950s. By using melodrama as a vehicle Sirk managed to subtly add social commentary to stories that could easily be compared to as cheap, sappy romance novels.

Today when the word melodrama is used in description to a film it has many negatives connotations. The word has taken on a different meaning today; it is often associated with manipulative direction, sloppy writing, and cheap sentimentality. However, the reason why Sirk's

films work so well, and don't contain any of the above, is because he uses melodrama in its purest form. The Greek root of the word basically means music plus drama, which is exactly what Sirk did (Halliday). Music served almost as a punctuation mark to the emotional state of the film, not just the orchestral accompaniment (Mayne). His films had a very surreal quality to them, almost artificial, which brings about a Brechtian quality to them. Instead of limiting himself to a realistic tone he allows the films to be dictated by the emotions of the characters. Sirk himself has often been quoted as saying "the camera angles are my thoughts, and the lighting my philosophy" (Sterritt). In a way, it's the over the top and artificiality of the film that makes the statement. In Roger Ebert's review of *Written on the Wind* he quotes David Kehr, "[Sirk] draws attention to the artificiality of the film medium, in turn commenting on the hollowness of middle-class American life." Through extreme lighting, vibrant colours, deliberately fake sets, and "pulpy" story lines, Sirk was able to turn the artificiality of his films into social criticism.

According to director Todd Haynes, the New German Cinema movement was made up of politically conscious films which rejected the classic Hollywood narrative and formed a critique on German society. Rainer Werner Fassbinder was a forerunner of New German Cinema. He came onto the scene with his first feature *Love is Colder than Death* in 1969. Much like Godard's *Breathless* (1959), which started the French New Wave, Fassbinder's first film started something completely new and fresh, giving new life to German cinema. Made on a shoe-string budget with a fairly simple plot structure, Fassbinder's film stressed style, or rather technique, over substance. Like Godard, he used hand held cinematography, jump cuts, and also shot on location with unknown actors. The underlying theme of this film, like many of his others, was to directly defy social and filmmaking conventions. In the years that followed, Fassbinder continued making avant-garde films.

It was in the later 60s and early 70s that Fassbinder discovered the films of Douglas Sirk. In his essay, *Imitation of Life: The Films of Douglas Sirk*, he states, "I've seen six films by Douglas Sirk, among them were the most beautiful I've seen in the world." Fassbinder was immediately influenced by the fellow German director and stated him as one of his primary influences. In his essay, Fassbinder quotes Sirk as saying, "You can't make films about something, you can only make them with something, with people, with light, with flowers, with mirrors, with blood..." (Anarchy). He also points out that Sirk's films were by a man who truly loves human beings and "doesn't despise them as we do." This statement is true to Sirk in that there is rarely a character that

is completely unsympathetic. As Fassbinder says, there is a sort of "direct tenderness" about a Sirk film. It was this "direct tenderness" that would influence Fassbinder and cause him to change his aesthetics and ideas as a director.

Before his Sirk's influence, Fassbinder's films were shot in stark black and white and used long takes with a fairly static camera. During his pre-Sirk phase, Fassbinder's roots in the theatre are apparent because his films were much more theatrical than cinematic. After Sirk's influence, however, Fassbinder's camera became more mobile and his editing more confident. His films also started to contain more vibrant colours and symbolic imagery that he used to suggest things not directly told through the narrative. Like Sirk, Fassbinder also used mirrors and reflections to manipulate images, demonstrate a new filmmaking aesthetic, and also as a story telling device. The shift between pre-Sirk Fassbinder and post-Sirk Fassbinder, is most apparent by looking at the differences between *Love is Colder than Death* and *Merchant of Four Seasons* (1974), as Fassbinder adds more cinematic qualities in comparison to *Love*.

As stated before, Sirk once said, "camera angles are my thoughts, and lighting is my philosophy." In his films, the lighting and colour develop and support the story and character development just as much as the narrative. Many of Sirk's films are almost colour coded in that the colours reveal the inner emotions or desires of a character.

Take for example, the lighting scheme in *All that Heaven Allows*, during which Carrie's daughter apologises to her mother her break-up with Ron. The room is lit through a stained glass window, casting a rainbow colour scheme across the characters. This use of colours reveals insights into the characters as well as the film in general. In this scene light hits the daughters face casting a rainbow upon it. It's as if the rainbow is showing the audience that the daughter is a multidimensional character as she reveals her "true colours". The use of the rainbow colour scheme also demonstrates a Brechtian influence in the film. It is immediately clear to the audience that the colours and lights are artificial. In this case, the colour scheme for that scene reflects the artificiality of the daughter, as well as the artificiality of the middle class in general.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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that I was going to become a Ninja Turtle and the idea of becoming a filmmaker never really crossed my mind. It was not until I was in primary school that film took my interested through the use of my Dad's Handy Cam [which was more like a brick than anything handy]. During the school holidays my Dad would encourage me to make little movies [probably to keep to entertained and away from the sugar], so that's what I did.

Films

There has never really been one film that has inspired me to make films. Being a child of the eighties however, I was exposed to lots of fantasy/Muppet films, which seemed to be a trend of the time. So films like *The Goonies* (d. Richard Donner, 1985), *The Never Ending Story* (d. Wolfgang Petersen, 1984) and *Labyrinth* (d. Jim Henson, 1986) used to intrigue me, but also freak me out [no thanks to David Bowie in Spandex]. However *film noir* films had a more direct influence on me when it came to making films. During my high school days I was exposed to many *film noir* films during media classes and both the era and the visual style interested me greatly. I use to love watching films like *The Maltese Falcon* (d. John Huston, 1941), *Double Indemnity* (d. Billy Wilder, 1944), *Detour* (d. Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945) and *Chinatown* (d. Roman Polanski, 1974) as they were like nothing I had seen before. Their bleak and disillusioned worlds influenced me greatly and this was reflected in my earlier films [which were all shit].

Filmmakers

There are several filmmakers now whose work and creativity I deeply respect, such as Michel Gondry, whose work is so far out there it's scary; Francis Ford Coppola, for the *Godfather* series (1972, 1974 & 1990); Alfred Hitchcock, master of suspense; Guy Maddin; and of course Martin Scorsese.

Conclusion

Hopefully, when I finish my degree, I will have enough money to travel back to the Middle-East, going through Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, and the Mediterranean. I also want to complete a Masters down at VCA and also do an Advertising/Marketing degree at some point. At the moment I have no idea in what part of the industry I want to work in, but I have a feeling it will be on the business side of things.

I recently read somewhere that student filmmakers are being constantly criticised for their "self-reflective" films. The piece said that because we study films themselves our work has become very "introspective" and no longer displaying truths or opinions of the world; instead our films regurgitate ideas and beliefs of pre-existing films we have viewed...