

# CINÉPHILIA

THE BOND UNIVERSITY FILM JOURNAL

EDITORIAL

## SAVING SPACE

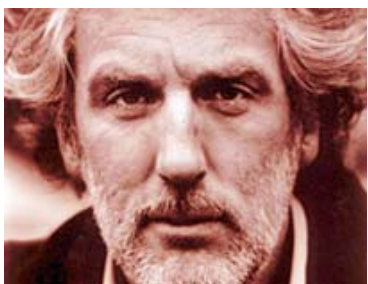
by Matthew Clayfield

This is going to be a very short editorial, because I hope to fit in as much of my so-called “self-detonating” interview with Phillip Noyce as humanly possible. That and no-one ever really reads the editorial anyway!

This issue of *Cinéphilia*, of course, also contains the second installment of Sam Adelman’s “Imitation of Sirk”.

— m.

INTERVIEW



## CLEAR BUT NOT SO PRESENT FILMMAKER

by Matthew Clayfield

[NOTE: The following is an abridged version of a somewhat longer and more “complete” piece, the full version of which can be found in the October archives of my website: [www.esotericrabbit.blogspot.com](http://www.esotericrabbit.blogspot.com)]

I receive a call at about one-thirty in the afternoon, telling me that Phillip Noyce’s four-thirty appointment has been cancelled. He’s running slightly late, and is currently flying in from Perth. Understandably, I’m extremely excited by this information, as – although it’s not said in so many words – it’s quite clear to me that, now, I’m actually going to have an opportunity to take the phone interview that I was hoping to do and to transform it into a face-to-face conversation. Man to man, filmmaker to filmmaker, third semester film student to A-list Hollywood director. In my mind, it’s going to be great.

At four-thirty, I’m sitting in the head of the film school’s office with a miniDV camera hidden underneath the table, a microphone and book – my professor Ingo Petzke’s *Phillip Noyce: Backroads to Hollywood* – sitting on the desk, while I slowly become more and more excited as Noyce’s imminent arrival draws closer. And suddenly, he’s there – a big, almost sloppy man (although that might just be attributed to the fact that he’s just been on a plane for six-and-a-half hours) – slightly confused about what’s supposed to be going on, and far more interested in just sitting down and resting for a moment than he is on having an interview with such a probing (and I don’t doubt annoying) film student like myself.

[. . .]

And thus, for the next thirty-or-so minutes, I actively struggle with Noyce’s lack of interest in the interview, occasionally pulling some genuinely insightful and interesting tips, anecdotes and stories from him, as though pulling teeth from a bedraggled and mangy, but also far bigger and more important dog than myself. At the end of the interview, I feel as though I’ve been through a round with a master of conversational evasiveness, although I can’t help but feel as though – ultimately – I’m the one who’s come out the victor (if only through sheer determination). Phillip signs my copy of Petzke’s book with “To Matt, who asks and asks.” I laugh and offer my condolences: “I’ll tell you what. One day you can interview me.”

[. . .]

**Matthew Clayfield (MC):** [. . .] Just talking about those mentions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Quiet American*, for me personally, I haven’t seen all of your films, but...are you looking for somewhere to plug that in?

[Phillip is currently playing with his mobile phone.]

I actually prefer *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Quiet American*; I think that they’re...

**Phillip Noyce (PN):** Have you seen *Newsfront* (1978)?

**MC:** Yes, I have, and I enjoyed it very much, but I...

[I am currently terrified of this man.]

I personally feel that *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Quiet American* are your strongest pictures.

**PN:** Uh-huh.

**MC:** And I was just going to ask, they seem almost kind of linked...

**PN:** Which?

**MC:** ...

**PN:** ...

**MC:** *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Quiet American*.

**PN:** Well, yeah, they’re both about the corrupting effects of colonization. And they both deal with colonizers who are full of the best intentions, and are absolutely convinced that they’re doing the right thing, and are oblivious to the pain and suffering that they cause. So, they’re exactly the same. The Alden Pyle character played by Brendan Fraser in *The Quiet American* is just a cousin of A. O. Neville [from *Rabbit-Proof Fence*].

**MC:** I was just going to say, for me the most effecting and frightening scene of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is the scene in which Kenneth Branagh is doing the slide show.

**PN:** Yes. Which he did. Regularly.

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[. . .]

**MC:** One of the things that I didn’t think was different about *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Tracker* was that they both felt like Australian takes on the Hollywood Western and...

**PN:** [noticing something across the room] What’s that?

**MC:** I don’t know, I’ve only just seen it myself. Hell, you’ve got good eyes. So, anyway...

**PN:** No, hang on, mate, what is it? What are they giving me?

**MC:** I think they’re giving you a present...

**PN:** What does it say?

**Girl:** “Visiting fellow.”

**PN:** “Visiting fellow?” That’s it? Oh, I thought they...why couldn’t they make me a professor or something?

**Girl:** Give you a doctorate of filmmaking...

**PN:** Why didn’t they make me something that I could actually peddle? And use! And then I could get some position in, like, you know, Florida University of the Arts or whatever.

**MC:** ...yeah.

**PN:** Okay, sorry, mate.

**MC:** That’s cool, that’s cool. I understand that you’re probably “interviewed-out”.

[I am internally distraught by this stage.]

**PN:** No, no...ask me the question, I’m...ready.

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**MC:** I was wondering if [the influence of the Western on *Rabbit-Proof Fence*] was a conscientious...

**PN:** No. No, it wasn’t. I mean, obviously the little girls are dwarfed by the landscape, and you’re constantly trying to express the distance between where they are now and where they want to be. So, that leads to a certain type of imagery that stresses dislocation and so on. And obviously there are many films that deal with similar themes, so they’re all going to draw on the same dwarfing aspects of landscape and humans, or alienation from the landscape, the threatening nature of the landscape, the sustaining nature of the landscape and so on. Because it’s a journey across country. There are many films with similar themes – different stories, similar themes – so naturally, visually, there’ll be similarities.

**MC:** And it was the same thing with *The Quiet American*; I was wondering if *The Third Man* (d. Carol Reed, 1949), not so much influenced, but was something you were aware of. [The *Third Man* and *The Quiet American* were both based on novels by Graham Greene].

**PN:** No. Again, it wasn’t an influence, *The Third Man*, really...

**MC:** It was just that some of those earlier scenes with Detective Vigo, some of the framing especially, seemed very reminiscent of *The Third Man*.

**PN:** Well, there was Dutch tilting, there was chiaroscuro lighting with, you know, heavy shadows and so on, but it wasn’t related to...is that rain?

[Oh, God...]

**MC:** I think it is.

**PN:** ...wasn’t related to *The Third Man*.

[Thank you!]

It was just an interpretation of the story. It wasn’t related to any film actually, that one.

**MC:** Mm-hm.

[Personally, it also reminds me a lot of Peter Weir’s *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), but I don’t tell Noyce this, for some reason.]

**PN:** We didn’t look at any other movies or anything, no. It was a response to the material and Vietnam. And the characters.

**MC:** It’s a beautiful film. Both of them are beautiful films, not just in terms of the whole, but also in terms of the visuals, and of course, we’re at a film school and I would be crucified if I was to not ask you about Christopher Doyle and what it was like working with him and how that came about.

**PN:** I met Chris in 1979 in Taiwan. I was there, I was going to direct a war film. I argued with John McCallum, the producer, and didn’t end up shooting the film, that starred Mel Gibson and Sam Neill and Chris Haywood...

**MC:** What was its name?

**PN:** *Attack Force Z* (d. Tim Burstall & Jing Ao Hsing, 1982). And Tim Burstall came in and took over the film before I started shooting, but while I was preparing the film I was given an interpreter – a young Australian who spoke perfect Mandarin and perfect dialect, local Taiwanese dialect – and this was a gentleman who had run away from Australia several years earlier and immersed himself in Chinese culture, and dreamt of becoming a cinematographer, which seemed very unlikely given that he spent so much time in bars! And there was no independent cinema in Taiwan at the time.

**MC:** Mm.

**PN:** But as the years passed, so did the postcards, which turned into e-mails, and we kept up a relationship and I went to see Chris once when he was shooting one of the Wong Kar Wai films, and he told me to come to a certain location, in Hong Kong. Now, usually when you go to a film set, if you pick up the scent about half-a-mile away you can just follow the equipment and the trucks and the people and everything...

**MC:** And you’ll find the film set.

**PN:** ...and you’ll find it eventually, you get to the epicentre of activity; that’s where they’ll be shooting. In this case, I thought that I’d gone to the wrong square because there was nobody, nothing, not a soul, no evidence that anyone was filming there or even that anyone was...there. It was in the night. And then, finally, a car comes around the corner, and there’s this Wong Kar Wai, two actors, Chris and one other guy. And that’s the whole film crew! And Chris is holding the camera in one hand and a light in the other, and the guy is sort of just supporting him and being the dog’s body. So, when we came to shoot *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, a film

that would require manoeuvrability, that would need an approach that didn’t dwarf the children and drown them in technology, that allowed them to be spontaneous, I thought, ‘Chris is the ideal person. He’ll work with, you know, almost no equipment, he won’t get bogged down out in the outback, trying to move lights and all this stuff,’ and that’s what he did.

[. . .]

So, Chris became a friend, and then came to stay at my house in Los Angeles. And so eventually I asked him to shoot not one, but two films. In a row! By the end of the second film we wanted to kill each other.

**MC:** [genuinely surprised and saddened; still in film buff mode] Oh, really?

**PN:** Yeah. It was just too long, you know, two films...

**MC:** Yeah. Do you think you’ll work with him again?

**PN:** Probably.

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[. . .]

**MC:** I was wondering about how you’ve dealt with the “political” aspect of things recently, intentionally with *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and intentionally, but maybe not that intentionally, with *The Quiet American*, I mean, that became more political that perhaps it would have been had September 11 not happened. Has that been a...

**PN:** Well, obviously, as Mel Gibson and Michael Moore have shown us, the best kind of publicity is when you’ve upset someone...

[I can’t help but wonder why, if this is the case, Miramax held back *The Quiet American* for a good year before Michael Caine kicked up a fuss to get it released...]

...because as soon as someone becomes upset by something, other people become curious. But you couldn’t make *Rabbit-Proof Fence* – or ultimately *The Quiet American* – without becoming embroiled in a political discussion.

**MC:** [misquoting *The Quiet American*, if only slightly] “Eventually one must take sides if one is to remain human...”

**PN:** Yeah, you’ve got to take a side on...not that you would need to necessarily on the *Stolen Generations*, but you do within the context of the debate that still rages on within Australia. You know, once people used to say, “Well, let’s avoid all politics, otherwise we’ll scare our audience off,” you know, that was a concept...a “truism,” supposedly, to do with film distribution. But I think it’s been proven completely and utterly wrong! [laughs]

**MC:** And this year especially!

**PN:** Yeah.

**MC:** And has that been a conscious thing? I mean, you look at something like...

**PN:** Well, I wanted to make the stories. Those stories. And

obviously they...one thing leads to another.

[At this point, I make an incredibly stupid faux pas, noting that I'd like to get down to the "relevant" stuff on my list – my film school questions – to which, bemused or bewildered, Noyce replies, "You mean none of that was relevant?!" Next thing I know, I'm the last thing on his mind again – in fact, right now, he's looking at the girl's ring-slash-watch thing as though it's the most amazing thing he's ever seen. (...)]

PN: Oh, it's a watch!

MC: [snootily] Yeah, it's good.

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MC: You went to AFTRS, didn't you?

PN: Yes.

MC: How was that for you?

PN: It was great. You know, it was a one-year course in directing, where we got paid a wage, and got given three different budgets. We had to employ professionals on our crews so we had to use the money as best we could, and beg, borrow and steal additional money. Cajole and trick everybody to make the money go further, just like in real life, so it was a very good training ground. Plus, everyone owned the films, so we could exploit them in any way that we imagined. It was a great course. We didn't have any film history, because there wasn't time, but we certainly had a crash course in guerrilla filmmaking.

MC: And, of course, you were leaving film school into an industry that...

PN: Well, there wasn't much of an industry, we weren't leaving "into an industry," but we were leaving into circumstances that were right for exploitation.

[...]  
The government had decided that they would "create" a film industry and we were lucky enough to be the first fully trained graduates that were "battle-ready". Like soldiers, you know, coming out of Duntroon or something, from where none had come before, straight to the top.

MC: And I'm wondering what you think of Australian film at the moment...

PN: [for the first time, Noyce settles, focuses and really chooses his words carefully; this is the man that my professor interviewed, not the man that's just been on a five-day press junket around the country] Well, there seems to be something wrong. There's a sickness. Which may be just a fever and will pass. But there's certainly a sickness. Maybe it's just, you know, a cycle and it's in its negative dip at the moment. Maybe the "brain drain" has been too cathartic for everyone. But there's a new crop of films coming along – shortly – that utilize some of that "brain drain". Returning, for example, Jocelyn Moorhouse is making *Eucalyptus* (2006) with Russel Crowe; *Little Fish* (2005), Rowan Woods' film will star Cate Blanchett; and Heath Ledger is going to be in *Candy* (d. Neil Armfield, 2005)...

[...]  
...so, you know, there's reason to be optimistic given that the

greatest asset that the Australian film industry has – in theory – are the performers that have come out of this country and have risen to enormous prominence worldwide. Now that some of them are coming back, maybe we might see, again, a return to the same close relationship between the films and the audience. It's been lacking over the last few years, you know, the films have seemed to have been made in a vacuum with no connect.

[...]

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MC: Any last words for all the film students who will be reading this interview?

PN: Um...

MC: Actually, what are you "guiding words" for aspiring filmmakers?

PN: That they should just pick up their handycam and make a movie. They don't need to learn anything, from anybody, except themselves and their lens. And there's no reason not to start...now. Immediately. After putting down this newspaper.

MC: Excellent. Thank you very much. Now I'm going to get you to sign my book...

So, yes, while he may have struggled with me as though his very livelihood depended on it, my tumultuous interview with Phillip Noyce was ultimately worth it if only for these final, golden pearls of wisdom (not to mention, I now realize, the countless pearls that were scattered throughout the interview as well). Phillip's final "call to action" is what I've been trying to communicate to both myself and to others in every waking moment of my studies here at Bond; I've been trying to instil in everyone I meet, as much as I can, through *Cinéphilia* and just in general, a desire to do something great and to do it *now*. The best (and perhaps only) way to really make things happen is to just get up and do them. I mean, it's certainly worked for Phillip Noyce. Just look at where it's gotten him.

#### FILM ANALYSIS

### IMITATION OF SIRK

#### Part Two

By Sam Adelman

In Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956) colours and lighting techniques also add to the narrative and the characters. In the scene in which Lucy tries to reach Kyle about his unhappiness, the dark areas of the frame seem unnatural and out of place with the rest of the image (Morris). This lighting technique, used by Sirk quite often, foreshadows the problems that will arise from Kyle's alcoholism. The scene has a very menacing quality to it.

In Fassbinder's remake of *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), drab colours are used, yet they fit the movie very well. For the most part, the colours do not give the viewer the further insight into the characters or narrative. However, there are subtle touches throughout the film where colours

are used for abstract purposes. At one point in the film Emmi states, "Dark clothes look so sad." She could easily be referring to her dreary surroundings. However, there is a point early in the film where Emmi enters the scene wearing a dark overcoat. Moments later she removes the coat, revealing a white dress with colourful shapes upon it, completely contrasting the grey coat. It's a scene that takes the viewer by surprise. It also establishes that the search for inner beauty is the central theme for the film. When the world around the two characters is basically devoid of colours; colour reflects the inner beauty of the character. This certainly applies to the character of Emmi, but it also applies to characters such as her children who lack colours, therefore the inner beauty.

In addition to the colour-coding of the characters in *Ali*, Fassbinder also adds subtle, almost unnoticeable flashes of red between scenes. The film almost carries itself like a series of vignettes starring Emmi and Ali as they face the rest of world. Each scene has a beginning, middle, and end before fading out to the next one. Every so often, in between the fade in and out, a flash of red appears before the fade in. This sudden, yet subtle, burst of red reflects the sparks of passion between Ali and Emmi. Like the characters in the film who can't be open about their love for each other due to society's constraints, their love must be kept away from the rest of the world; much like the flash of red occurs outside (or rather in between) the main narrative.

Along with overt colours, Sirk's films rely heavily upon symbolism to convey subtle meanings. Items such as mirrors, dolls, and flowers all contain deep insights to the story and characters. Dolls for example have a very clear symbolic meaning in the beginning of *Imitation of Life* (1959). After they first meet, Sarah Jane and Susie exchange dolls and Susie gives Sarah Jane a black doll. Sarah Jane, though she doesn't appear to be, is really black and immediately offended by this gesture. In this scene, the doll serves as a reflection to Sarah Jane in a way that, to her offence, objectifies her.

Flowers and trees symbolize the love between Rob and Carrie in *All that Heaven Allows*. At the start of the film, Ron tells Carrie about a "love tree" she has in her garden, which will only blossom when love is present. In the following scene, as it becomes evident that a romance between the two will blossom, the tree is seen in the background as Ron makes plans to see Carrie again. Trees are used once again when Ron gives Carrie a tour of the old mill; he points out the foundations are made up of oak which is "still good for another 100 years." In this sense trees symbolize the solid foundation for the romance between Carrie and Ron.

The story of *All that Heaven Allows* is essentially the downfall of Carrie and Ron's romance.

They're love is strongest during the start of the movie; the rest of the film is them trying to keep it alive. Here, flowers play a symbolic role. The story begins in autumn. The flowers, like Ron and Carrie's romance, have blossomed. However, the season changes to winter, killing the flowers. It is also the point where Ron and Carrie struggle to maintain their relationship, and ultimately fail. The ending of this film has been widely interpreted by critics. In spite of adversity, Carrie and Ron are reunited. It is still clear, however, that Carrie will never really fit into Ron's world, no matter how much they love each other.

The most dominant visual and symbolic motif throughout Sirk's filmography is mirrors and reflections. Not only do they make the film more aesthetically unique, but they can also take on various symbolic meanings.

In *Imitation of Life*, for example, Sarah Jane and Susie stand in front of a dressing room mirror together. In this scene, they are separate from the drama happening around them, they are just two regular teenage girls. By framing the two girls and their reflection in the same frame they are both cast upon a single surface (Fischer, p.258). This reveals that although they are dealing with different issues, they are still equals when they are with each other.

One of the most famous examples of the use of a reflection in Sirk's work, and in cinema history, is Carrie's reflection in a television screen in *All that Heaven Allows*. At the start of the movie, Carrie's daughter jokes about her mother's widow status as she compares her to an ancient Egyptian wife that follows her deceased husband to his tomb. The daughter and the son then both encourage their mother to get out more. Carrie meets Ron, but eventually breaks up with him in order to please her children and peers. When Christmas comes along, Carrie's children buy her a television, the one thing she dreaded (she views the screen as a symbol for her old age). While Carrie stares in disgust at the screen the camera pans in to reveal her reflection on the screen. In a sense, Carrie has become "entombed", much like the Egyptian wives (Morris).

Just as the dolls in *Imitation of Life* reflected Sarah Jane, the mannequins in Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (1972) do the same for Petra. In the film, Petra is basically a mannequin (with an attitude just as pleasant). Her maid/slave, Marlene, then dresses Petra in a stylish robe and wig, almost as if she is dressing a mannequin. Basically, it's her clothes that create her persona - without them she has no personality. The mise-en-scene of this movie has mannequins consistently positioned throughout the frame to remind the viewer that Petra is no different from anyone.

*The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* also makes interesting use of mirrors as a symbolic medium. The set of this film is very small, very claustrophobic. Often as the

camera pans across the room it's unclear to the audience whether they're looking at a reflection or a real person. This adds several elements to the film. First, seeing a reflection of a character reduces that character to a mere reflection (Fischer, p. 258). It is one of Fassbinder's ways of humiliating Petra through the aesthetics of the film, rather than through the narrative. The second function of the mirrors is to act as a symbol for Petra's vain personality. In one scene Petra is on the bed talking with a friend while applying makeup. During the whole conversation she never looks away from the mirror. The scene is framed so that Petra is in the foreground, her reflection in the middle, and her friend in the background. The scene shows how Petra's vanity and ego come between her and the rest of the world.

Fassbinder's film *Effie Briest* (1974) uses mirror images and reflection in nearly every interior scene, and even a few outdoor ones. Like other symbols they can hold various interpretations. Anna Kuhn sees them as a way for expressing the isolation of characters. William R. Magretta sees them as "devices in the film which both distance and engage the characters (Platters). In one external scene a carriage carrying the Innstetens home exits the frame. The camera lingers for awhile on the estate they just left, soon revealing that the camera is actually trained on a perfect reflection of the estate, not the real one. Since the image is a reverse, it shows the hypocrisy of the local upper class (Platters). In another scene, Innstetten reads a letter from Crampas apologizing for leaving town so suddenly, Effie is left to make a quick explanation for the letter. As she speaks, she is both visible in the flesh and also in the mirror hanging on the wall between her and her husband (Platters). Mirrors are used in this scene to suggest the dual nature of a person.

In another scene, a long shot includes Effie and Innstetten and their reflection in an oval mirror. As Effie approaches her husband her reflection disappears from the mirror, signifying her chances of leaving her double life are not very good (Platters).

TO BE CONTINUED...

**NOTE:** The new Bond University Cinema Club will be meeting every Wednesday night in Seminar Room 12 on Level 4. Films start at 6:30pm sharp and will be followed by an optional discussion. **FREE ADMISSION.**

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