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#8

Tale in the Darkness
Fight for your short!
Xavier Dolan

Cannes
NisiMazine

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editorial

by Bruno Carmelo

The press conference for Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* started with a surprising question from a journalist of The Daily Mail: "Could you justify doing this film?" After some stuttering from the director, the journalist insisted that he had to justify his work, since being selected in a renowned festival implied such a responsibility.

The tone of the question was pretty shocking (it was clear that the journalist had not liked the film at all), but the most interesting point of the attack was the weapon he used: the legitimacy of a work of art. He surely wouldn't ask the same question

of the directors whose films he appreciated. After all, according to a common theory, quality justifies itself.

The question put to von Trier could have been addressed to every filmmaker in the world: Why do people make films? Is an artist responsible for every interpretation based on his work? In order to answer that, the public should not be left out of the discussion. Unless we consider that a film contains quality in itself (which means, strictly, that it doesn't need an audience to be legitimate), we should think of the quality of the judgement brought to it. In our specific case,

the Daily Mail journalist should have attacked the artistic director of the festival rather than von Trier.

Actually, we could say that the director's opinion about his own film doesn't have any interest at all. Perhaps the director didn't achieve his ambitions, expressed a different idea from the one he wanted to or just doesn't know why he made the film. The latter seems to be von Trier's case. If we seek to legitimise a work of art, the director should be the last person to do it, as he is too close to what he's done. We'd better ask the public and the work of art itself.

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EDITORIAL STAFF

Director of Publication **Matthieu Darras**

Editors-in-Chief **Maartje Alders**

Jude Lister

Layout **Maartje Alders**

Tutor **Lee Marshall**

Contributors to this issue

Natalia Ames, Bruno Carmelo

Eftihia Chatzistefanidi, Moa Gestrand

Marta Musso, Luis Sens

Coordinators **Joanna Gallardo**

Maximilien van Aertryck, Gulçin Sahin

NISI MASA 10 rue de l'Echiquier,

75010, Paris, France.

+33 (0)6 32 61 70 26

europa@nisimasa.com

www.nisimasa.com



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BY LUIS SENS

picture of the day

Skazka pro temnotu / Tale in the Darkness

Nikolay Khomeriki (Russia), UCR



film of the day

In *Tale in the Darkness*, even the dolphins in the zoo are sad. Grey faces in grey uniforms wander through grey Russian streets, in search of love, or at least some kind of communication. Angelina is a police officer rescuing children from fucked-up families. At the police station, the walls breathe the despair of a dysfunctional society in which many need saving.

Khomeriki won his first Cannes award in 2005 with the short *VDOYOM*. His first feature, *977*, made it to *Un Certain Regard* in 2006. *977* was a mystical drama about a scientific experiment

trying to calculate the mathematical laws of human emotions. With *Tale in the Darkness*, Khomeriki stays in the backyard of human relationships, but digs even deeper. The darkness is really dark: it's beyond dark.

Alisa Khazanova, who also starred in *977*, elegantly portrays the unsmiling hero Angelina. She brings a toothless boy to play and tells him he's a little prince. "And you're an old fucking dry cunt", he replies, pretty much summing up the film's dialogue as well as revealing what kind of environment he grew up in. Khomeriki's social criticism is subtle, more of a framework than

a main theme. Instead, this is an original love story, only without that much love.

The dry cunt comment shocks Angelina into slowly changing her life, and herself. She takes tango lessons, loosens her topknot, and undoes the first button of her uniform. The camera always follows her with the same slow pace, sometimes from a distance, sometimes from behind. The scenes are long, the colours are bleak, and the sun never shines. But in all of the sadness, the images are a true joy, and thus the slow scenes where nothing happens are never dull.

Angelina waits, Angelina washes clothes, Angelina has sex, always with the same look on her face - serious, empty. As Lev Kuleshov did with the actor Ivan Mozzhukhin in his montage experiments in the 1920s, Khomeriki uses actress Alisa Khazanova's expressionless visage as an empty painting, filling it with substance and emotions. But instead of alternating images of a blank face with soup or a dead woman, like Kuleshov, Khomeriki uses the cold love and harsh dialogue between Angelina and her police partner Dimych to complete his work of art. And it works.

by Moa Geistrand

review

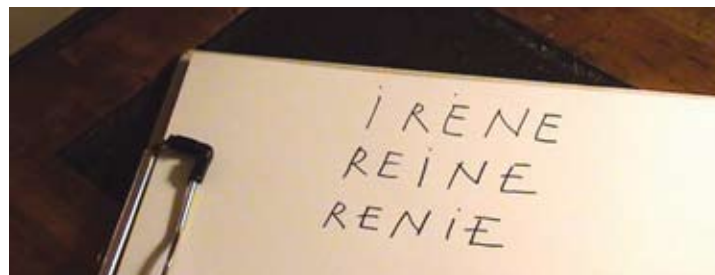
by Andrea Franco

Even fifteen hours after watching this film, I am still wondering about its message. A film that at times fascinated me and at others tested me to the limits of my patience. A difficult portrait; weak, human, tense and unbearable most of the time. A portrait of one woman but, beyond that, of the man who tries to resuscitate her by scouring all the places she visited with his camera. A testimonial document made by an author who has reached maturity, which

points to the closing of a cycle. One might even ask if his filmography coming to an end: Is Alain Cavalier already at peace? Has he succeeded in the fight against the ghosts of his past? Or perhaps it's the opposite: Is he now condemned, after this movie, to keep in his brain the everlasting images of a lonely and obsessed man who cannot live anymore?

Cavalier strips himself bare, opens his diary to the world, and

Irène Alain Cavalier (France), UCR



looks at his own reflection in the mirror. Focusing on every detail around him, he gets closer and closer to the one he observes, hallucinating through desperation and decadence. And he remembers, remembers, remembers this

enigmatic woman, trying to understand her complex personality. Feeling responsible for her and wishing, throughout this exercise in therapy, to let her also rest in peace.

review **Ajami** *Scandar Copti & Yaron Shanti (Israël / Germany)*



Omar's uncle wounded a gangster and now the whole family lives in fear. Malek is a Palestinian refugee who works illegally in Israel. Binj is going to settle down with his Jewish girlfriend and that causes tensions amongst his Palestinian friends. Dando is an Israeli policeman who just lost his brother. Hadir and Omar love each other, but Hadir's Christian family would never allow her to marry a Muslim. Different but deeply connected stories are intertwined in *Ajami*, the multiethnic neighbourhood of Jaffa, one of the oldest cities in the world. Hebrew and Arabic meet in the breakthrough of two directors whom history could very likely have turned into enemies: Scandar Copti is a Palestinian who lives in Israel; Yaron Shani is an Israeli.

Together they shot an intense, moving film that depicts a composite and dramatic reality

wherein violence, drugs and a never-ending war win over everything else - but in which people still hold on to their hopes. The choice of dividing the film into 5 non-chronological chapters favours an analytical rather than emotional approach to the story, conveying a more realistic portrait of *Ajami*, symbol of all the beauty and the problems of multiethnicity, but also of the devastating degradation caused by the political situation.

by **Marta Musso**



Faiblesses Nicolas Giraud (France)

At a time when films are dominated by technology, increasing speed and explicit content, young French director Nicolas Giraud is turning towards classic values: his characters are two lovers inside a house, calmly discussing their relationship. His camera is always steady, the shots are long and there's barely any music; which gives the idea that direction and editing here make an effort to hide behind the noble dramatic virtues of acting and screenwriting.

What follows is a game of manipulation. He gives her orders, she accepts them: she is blinded; she listens to the music he chooses and accepts the sexual act he imposes. In a very masculine point of view (something that becomes clearer once we know that the director is also the actor), the woman's body will be undressed and beautifully exposed, while the man's remains covered during the whole scene. She can't see, but he sees twice through the fetishism of placing her in front of a mirror. She is all acceptances and smiles; he is all domination and possession.

"Weaknesses", says the title; and one can only wonder what exactly it refers to: is she the weak one? Is it him? Is it love itself or maybe the sexual impulses they cannot resist? Anyway, the contrast between feeling and reason suggested by the story is that of the whole film; divided between a sensorial atmosphere of beauty and eroticism and some conventional filmmaking that chooses solid values over creativity and originality.

In the end, *Faiblesses* may delight purists, enrage feminists and leave a taste of *déjà vu* for those familiar with the stereotype according to which the symbol of French cinema is young couples in bed, smoking and engaging in existentialist dialogues.

by **Bruno Carmelo**

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Brillante Mendoza

Director of *Kinatay*, OC

interview

Almost 25 years after 'Lino Brocka' was part of the Official Competition in Cannes, another Philippine director was invited to participate in the same selection. This happened last year with Brillante Mendoza's 'Serbis', and this year we have two directors from that country competing for the Palme D'Or. One of them is Raya Martin with 'Independencia', and the other is Mendoza again with 'Kinatay', one of the most provocative titles in competition.

What was the beginning of the project *Kinatay*?

When I was making *Slingshot*, a feature about small-time crooks, I stumbled upon this police student and he told me about his first criminal experience. I thought there were interesting concepts there: for example the idea that it's not safe out there, it's a dangerous world, and what makes it even more dangerous is that it involves people who are supposed to be our allies, our protectors.

Kinatay is not an easy film to see, because of its violent content.

Yes, in fact, when I was conceptualizing the story I thought, it's too ambitious for me to require so much from the audience, because I want them to feel what the character is going through, the horror in his mind. That's what I want in the audience, and there are some who couldn't

take it, of course. This film is not an entertainment film, the less adventurous and courageous audiences will just get out. I mean, not everybody will go into the cinema and see and feel and smell everything that is going on; if you are sheltered you probably won't do it, you'll stay in your room and watch TV and be happy and forget what is going on out there. I want the audiences to stay with the character, to look and think. I want the audiences to be disturbed.

What do you expect about the reception of *Kinatay* in your country?

Philippine audiences are not ready for my kind of films. We have been under the United States so long, exposed to Hollywood; that's the only kind of cinema that we know, mainstream, Hollywood, melodrama... And we see it only as entertainment, nothing more.

You want to see famous actors, their clothes... The Philippines don't want to reality; they want to stay away from it. They want to see a fancy, beautiful life. But for me, I think it's a responsibility to make them aware that reality will always stay there. For example with *Kinatay*, I don't intend to show it in cinemas or in malls, I intend to show it in universities and schools, explain a little bit about my film. My plan is quite ambitious but I know I have to start somewhere. I want to make the students aware that there is such thing as independent, alternative cinema, which can awake our senses. For me, just being aware is a big achievement, I don't dream of changing the lives and minds of the Philippine audience. It's too grand, but I have to start somewhere.

How do you think your work has changed since *The Masseur*, your first film?

I think it changed a lot, not also my views but also my films. To be honest with you, when I started *The Masseur* I wanted to be a famous blockbuster director, I wanted to be the first Philippine to have a blockbuster (laughs). But it changes when you experience your film together with the audience. With *The Masseur*

I just wanted to make it right, I was following my heart and my intuition. In fact when I showed it, most of my friends didn't like it. Of course I felt discouraged and I couldn't sleep because not even the actress liked it, they said it was boring. But I followed my heart.

Do you think there has been progress in the use of cinematographic tools in your cinema?

I'm learning little by little: I know the kind of look that I want when I'm conceiving a story. It's very clear in my mind that I want to have a difference from the happy, normal look of the daylight in accordance to what the characters are going through, to the dark look at night. I spoke about it with my cinematographer and my art director and the others involved in the production: "this is the kind of look I want to achieve". This is one of the ingredients to have the kind of participation I am expecting from the audience.

by Natalia Ames

Fight for your short!

in focus

BY LUIS SENS



The diary of Harri J. Rantala

The Short Film Corner of the Cannes festival gathers over one thousand films from all over the world. The directors have ten days to show their latest work, talk to possible buyers and attract as much attention as possible to their shorts.

In order to better understand how this experience works, we decided to follow young Finnish director Harri J. Rantala, who is presenting his fourth film, 'Nurmoo', a thirty-minute story about wrestlers who are forced to choose between the sport and their private lives. Being in Cannes is not new for him: all his other works have already participated in the Short Film Corner; which has given him the opportunity to be selected in over thirty festivals.

We followed Harri during the four days of his stay, and he shared his strategies, hopes, and feedback from directors and the public.

Day 1: First impressions

(Number of people having watched his film: 45)

Harri arrives in Cannes full of expectations. After the success of his other films, this is his most expensive production to date, and "the only one in the Short Film Corner that focuses on sport", he says. Besides, by choosing the city of Nurmo as his backdrop, he intends to keep alive the memory of his hometown, which has been merged with another city and "disappeared". "People consider me a hero in my hometown", he affirms. Quite a big responsibility.

Day 2: Wrestlers on the red carpet

(Total number of people having watched his film: 115)

Harri books a first screening in the miniature rooms available at the Short Film Corner. Many possible buyers attend the screening,

and at the end he begins to have the first concrete negotiations with a producer in California and with the president of the Saint Petersburg Film Festival. The publicity campaign takes place, with the actors of the film walking around the Croisette and on the red carpet in traditional Finnish wrestling uniforms. Attention is guaranteed, and Harri ends his day with photos and party invitations.

Day 3: "There are the Kaurismaki brothers, and then there's me"

(Total number of people having watched his film: 200)

"My film is known by everyone now." Harri arrives with a large smile, confident that the parties and the marketing campaign are working just fine. A second and last screening takes place, and it's considerably less well-attended than the day before. However, this does not discourage him; since his purpose is mostly to get people talking about *Nur-*

moo rather than actually find immediate buyers. And, in this respect, business is going well: three television channels are talking about him, more photos are taken and more parties are organized. "Cannes is just the beginning", he reminds us with a smile. *Nurmoo* has already been invited to festivals, from Scandinavia to Italy.

Day 4: Final results

Harri's contacts multiply. Producers from Toronto, Houston and Lisbon get in touch with him. Even if no actual deals are made, he considers his work to be over and heads to Monaco for the last day of the trip with his producer and the cast of the film. Has the participation in Cannes this year met his expectations? "Definitely", he says. Harri reminds us how small the Short Film Corner was five years ago, and states that this is one of the best places to expose such a difficult product as a short film. According to him,

the photos and television programs will be enough material to go home and start working on *Nurmoo's* career. As far as Harry is concerned, going to the Short Film Corner is satisfying in itself, despite the possible results reached there.

Having followed Harri through these days, we could say his experience seems to match those of the other young directors who walked around the green carpet of the Short Film Corner everyday. Cannes works as a powerful symbolic element for the short film's career, in a way that being able to present your film there counts just as much as the results one may achieve. In its fast progress, the Short Film Corner functions mostly as a showcase to the world than as an actual market; which is already considerably important for a product with such limited commercial potential as a short film.

by Bruno Carmelo



portrait

Xavier Dolan
Director of *J'ai tué ma mère*, *QR*

If the Cannes Directors' Fortnight is considered to be a 'scouting agency' for the next big thing in filmmaking, the talented Mr Xavier Dolan is surely one great discovery.

Born in 1989 in Montreal, he started out as a child actor and eventually entered the film and television industry while dropping out of school. Moving out of the family home and living on his own during years of "nothingness", as he calls them, nurtured his creative flair and paved the ground for his first feature, which started as a short novella.

Although there is so far little documentation about Dolan's life, there's no better place to explore his temperament than in *I killed my mother*. Not only the provocative title, but also the semi-autobiographical tone, cannot really let the film pass unnoticed. The story focuses on Hubert (played by Xavier himself), a 16-year-old boy who lives with his mother, who he absolutely hates. The fragile adolescent stage he is going through enhances the lack of communication between them, as they both seem to be coming from different worlds. Their shocking encounters also emanate from Hubert's homosexuality and are being processed through his sensitive, artistic psyche. However, his attempt to revive his childhood memories of when their relationship was uncondi-

tionally affectionate leads him to the realisation of their deep bond.

An exceptionally creative film, *I killed my mother* comes out more as a manifesto, a tribute to the dark paths of adolescence. In a series of black and white inserts, Dolan confesses his turbulent emotions, an experience which seems to be necessary for him in order to reach a catharsis. However, there is much more love than expected at first glance. Scenes shot on Super 8 that recall the characters' past memories and dreamy desires are all declaring the inner battle of the child trying to separate from his mother, and eventually, grow up. This attempt to "bury childhood" as the director prefers to call it, makes *I killed my mother* an optional title, as it could

also be altered to *I killed my son*. Still, if anyone wonders how his mother feels about this project he surprisingly confesses that, although she has not yet seen the film, it was an experience that made them reunite.

Attending the press conference after the screening, Xavier had the uneasy grin of a kid who is expecting his first grades from school (but suspects he did well). A couple of questions were enough to make him relax and explain his work, motives and inspirations. "It was certainly a dream but for sure I was not expecting all this" was his response regarding his presence in Cannes.

Despite his youth his film feels mature, perhaps because he also grew up in the process of making it. And his eloquent and intellectual use of language is certainly an indication that he is in fact an author, if not an *auteur*. Once you have seen his film you can certainly recognize where all this poetic realism emanates from: he pays homage to Wong Kar Wai, with the use of music and slow-paced movements, and even Michael Haneke (as he admits) in his meticulous, calculating directing methods. But it

also seems like he enjoys teasing cinephile audiences and referencing directors he admires, such as Gus Van Sant, Truffaut and Godard. In fact, his next project will be influenced by *Pierrot le Fou*, and will explore the theme of transsexuality.

The detailed analysis of the film by Dolan himself says a lot about his self confidence and gives the impression that he knows exactly what he wants. The shots in which the characters are placed on the margin of the frame, for example, suggest their loneliness, and the setting is also full of symbols. But even without logical justification, *I killed my mother* speaks for itself. We shouldn't forget that this is a diary on celluloid which, as the director states, works as an exercise in self-exposure. I am not sure if this autobiographical debut will promise a bright future, but there was something about Xavier Dolan that felt real. Reading his letter in the press-kit, he quotes his great-aunt by saying: "those without a dream will die from the cold". I think he will probably keep himself warm for a little while.

by Eftihia
Chatzistefanidi

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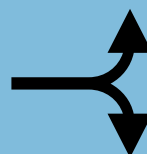
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