

BFI News Online – March 2013

A selection of stories from the BFI website in a handy newspaper

Best of British at the Berlin Film Festival

Samuel Wigley

Thursday, 7 February 2013

The world premiere of Ken Loach's *The Spirit of '45* tops a strong showing for Team GB at the 63rd Berlin International Film Festival.

Martial arts epic *The Grandmaster*, the latest feature from Wong Kar-Wai, kicks off the 63rd annual Berlin International Film Festival today. The largest public film festival in the world, the 10-day celebration of world cinema features around 400 films from far and wide, from major international productions to a wealth of independent releases.

India; *The Act of Killing*, a Danish-Norwegian-UK co-production boasting Werner Herzog and Errol Morris as executive producers; and *A World Not Ours*, in which Danish filmmaker Mahdi Fleifel charts the lives of three families in a Palestinian refugee camp in southern Lebanon.

Billed as the most daring section of the festival, where viewers can alight upon “yet-to-be-discovered cinematic landscapes”, the Forum includes David M. Rosenthal's *A Single Shot*, a cat-and-mouse thriller about a huntsman (played by Sam Rockwell) in over his head in the backwoods of North America. In the festival's Forum Expanded section, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's formally experimental *Leviathan* brings the mythic resonance of *Moby-Dick* up to date to the world of contemporary fishing.



First a Girl (1935)

A strong offering of British short films included across the festival takes in *Not Blacking Out*, *Just Turning the Lights Off* (directed by James Richards), *Hannah and the Moon* (directed by Kate Charter), the Iraqi-British co-production *Happy Birthday* (directed by Mohanad Hayal), *Flight of the Pompadour* (directed by Karan Kandhari), and Rachel Mayeri's *Primate Cinema: Apes as Family*.

Finally, rubbing shoulders with classics like *Casablanca* (1942) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959), a clutch of British archive gems will be screening in this year's retrospective strand, *The Weimar Touch*. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Small Back Room* (1949), the 1935 Jessie Matthews comedy *First a Girl*, Thorold Dickinson's baroque period drama *The Queen of Spades* (1949) and the film operetta *Car of Dreams* (1935) will be holding the British end up as the festival explores the influence of Weimar-era German cinema on other national cinemas.

Sam Wigley edits the news section of the BFI website.

More online

There's much more to see at bfi.org.uk, including these exclusive BFI video interviews:

Wreck-It Ralph Q&A with Sarah Silverman
My Brother the Devil Q&A at the Future Film Festival
Creating the soundtrack for *Les Misérables*
Beryl Vertue in Conversation

This sample of our online content is published by the BFI digital content team. Contact webteam@bfi.org.uk with feedback, or for more information.



The Spirit of '45

British film is well represented this year, with the world premiere of Ken Loach's *The Spirit of '45* prominent in the Berlinale Special section, the festival's showcase for new films by established film talent. Backed by the BFI Film Fund, Loach's film draws on archive footage from the BFI National Archive and regional archives to tell the story of the creation of the welfare state in the UK after the end of the Second World War.

The Berlinale Special section also offers gala screenings of Tom Hooper's Oscar-nominated musical *Les Misérables* and the European premiere of the latest collaboration between director Michael Winterbottom and star Steve Coogan. *The Look of Love* is the true story of Paul Raymond, the 'King of Soho', who from small beginnings in 1950s London built a huge sex-industry empire that made him one of Britain's richest men.

Panorama Dokumente offers a cross-section of the best new documentary films, encompassing the world premiere of Kim Longinotto's *Salma*, a powerful account of one girl's resistance to arranged marriage in Tamil

Foodie cinema is celebrated in the festival's seventh Culinary Cinema strand, where British entries are *The Moo Man*, Andy Heathcote and Heike Bachelier's documentary about a dairy farmer's working relationship with his 55 wayward cows, and Amit Gupta's *Jadoo*, a tale of feuding chef brothers who set up rival restaurants on the same street.



The Act of Killing (2012)

This Working Life: Steel – an introduction

Ros Cranston

Friday, 1 February 2013

Visual memories of a vanished way of life, *This Working Life: Steel* celebrates a rich seam of Britain's industrial heritage. Curator Ros Cranston introduces our major new archive project.

tled *Steel* (directed by Ronald Riley in 1945). Shot in several locations including Sheffield, Glasgow and Ebbw Vale, *Steel* is a dazzling Technicolor spotlight on some of the highly skilled craftsmen who devoted their working lives to the metal.

The film has been restored using pioneering digital techniques (to be explained in a forthcoming blog) and will be the centrepiece of the project's launch event A

of the New Tyne Bridge (1928), which documents the perilous construction of the Tyne Bridge.

Men of Consett (1959), meanwhile, is a wonderfully odd film directed by explorer, cameramen and food writer Tom Stobart, who, having shot *The Conquest of Everest* (1953), ventured into the steelmaking community in Consett at a time when steel ruled the town.

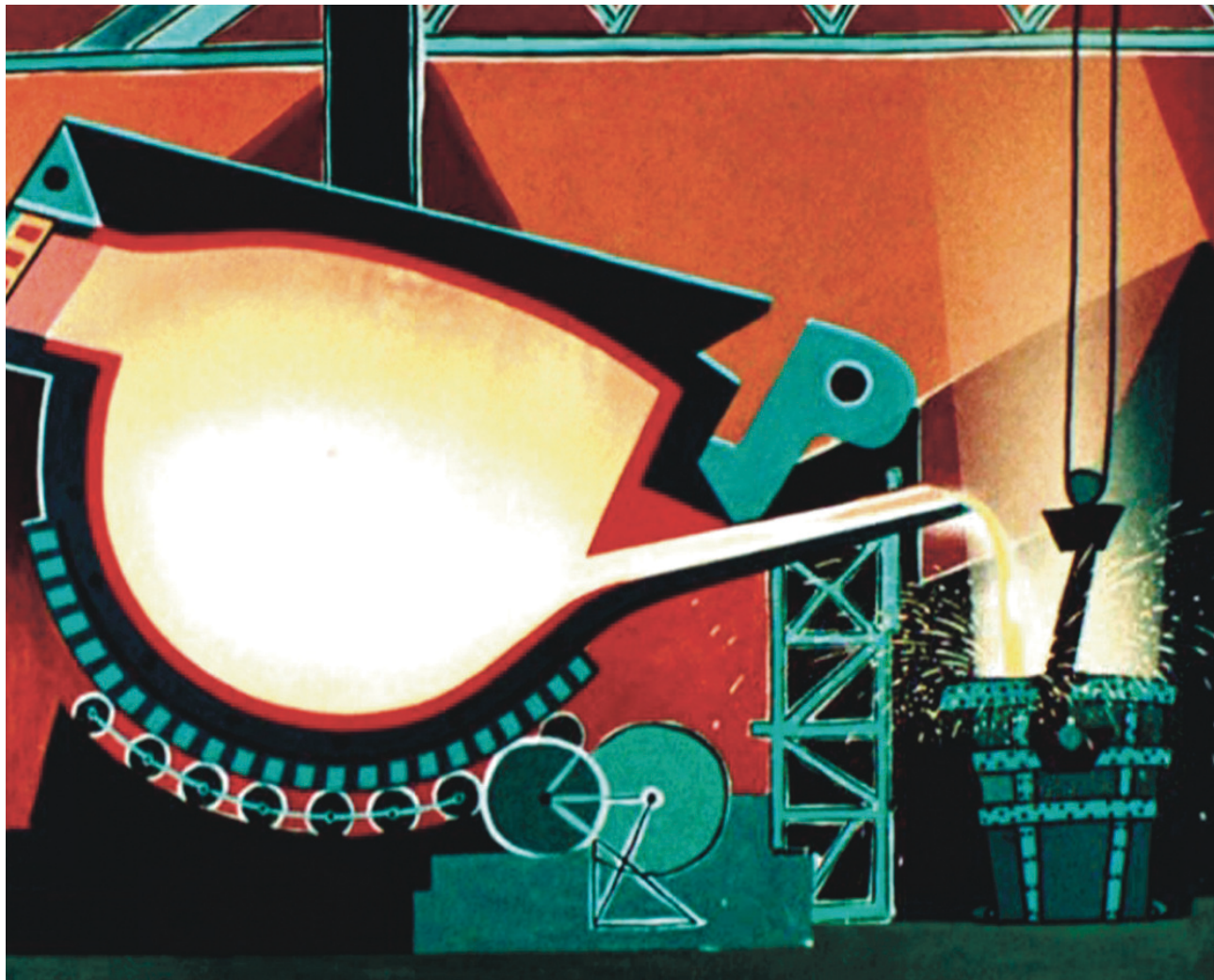
Striking a very different note, comic actor Charles Hawtrey extols the utilitarian wonder of the steel-built 'prefab' in Lewis Gilbert's (later of Bond film fame) *The Ten Year Plan* (1945). There's further inventive wit in the animation *River of Steel* (1951), directed by Peter Sachs with art direction by the surrealist painter Oscar Dominguez (soon to be the subject of another blog).

There's controversy too: the season provides a rare opportunity to see one of Ken Loach's periodic brushes with the powers that be. He gave voice to steelworkers who felt betrayed by their trade union leaders in the strike of 1980 in *A Question of Leadership* – a programme which was pulled before its national transmission.

As well as screenings around the UK as part of *This Working Life: Steel*, a DVD box-set will be released and a selection of the films will be available to see in BFI Mediatheques and on BFI Screenonline.

The films in *This Working Life: Steel* don't just celebrate this mighty industry – "the brace and girder and strut and stay of every industrial economy on earth" – and those who worked in it. They also offer vivid insights into the development of the moving image across a century. And the film industry itself is as dependant on steel as any other: it's a rare cinema or studio that isn't built with steel.

Ros Cranston is a non-fiction curator at the BFI National Archive.



River of Steel (1951)

"An adventure into the awe-inspiring guts of steelmaking..."
– *Men of Consett* (1959)

The visual drama of steelmaking has long provided spectacular subject matter for filmmakers. I've been working on the BFI's long-running project celebrating Britain's industrial heritage, *This Working Life*, for several years, and the final strand, *Steel*, has offered up as many exciting discoveries as its two predecessors, *King Coal* and *Tales from the Shipyard*. Like them, *Steel* showcases newly restored non-fiction and feature films, and television material on varied facets of the steel industry.

We've drawn on a range of actuality, fiction, documentary and political films captured by filmmakers across a century to bring alive the stories of the communities around the UK shaped by the steelworks. They offer a richly fascinating and often surprising view of a largely vanished way of life. For millions of people this isn't just Britain's industrial heritage, it's their family history.

One of the thrills of the project has been the opportunity to restore the stunning cinematography of Jack Cardiff and Cyril Knowles in the deceptively plainly-ti-

Century of Steelmaking on Screen on 5 February. The film is also showing in Sheffield, Cardiff, Glasgow and Newcastle.

The range of steely delights featured in the project is quite something. Naturally, Sheffield features prominently – in films as diverse as the eye-opening documentary *Women of Steel*, a rare insight into women's role in the steel industry in wartime Sheffield, and the top-flight Children's Film Foundation escapade *Wings of Mystery* (1963) starring a precocious young Judy Geeson and several homing pigeons.

Penny Woolcock, director of the acclaimed *From the Sea to the Land Beyond*, will be at BFI Southbank to introduce the first two films she made (both in Consett, County Durham): a short piece for the leftwing video magazine *Northern Newsreel* (1987) and *When the Dog Bites* (1988). Both films explore the wide-ranging consequences of the closure of the steelworks, while the second film shows with a sympathetic eye some of the imaginative, enterprising and implausible attempts on the part of the locals to make a living.

There are further daring activities in the northeast to marvel at in the intrepid, visually splendid *The Building*



Steel (1945)

*This introduction gives a flavour of some of the highlights included in the *Steel* retrospective and DVD release. It was the first of eight blogs contributed by archive and curatorial staff to promote the *Steel* project.*

BFI Film Academy students visit Pinewood Studios

Jen Sobol

Friday, 22 February 2013

Over 100 budding young filmmakers take a tour of Pinewood Studios and learn from master craftsmen as part of the BFI Film Academy programme.



"Don't be frightened to start at the bottom."

– executive producer Tony Waye advises BFI Film Academy participants

The BFI Film Academy regional programme is now in full swing, with 24 partners across England delivering film training courses to 16-19 year olds. Its aim is to give a diverse group of young people from all backgrounds the opportunity to be part of the UK's future film industry by providing opportunities for talented and committed young people to develop new skills and build a career, no matter where they live or what their background.

During half-term, Pinewood Studios made it possible for over 100 participants from the programme to visit their premises, giving them access to the world's leading studio facilities and a wealth of expertise from leading film industry experts. Pinewood Studios is a strategic partner of the BFI Film Academy and is providing both guidance on the programme and opportunities for the participants.

Speakers included multi-award winning professionals such as film production executive Tony Waye (known for his work on the Bond films *For Your Eyes Only*, *Octopussy*, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, *Casino Royale*); production designer Stephen Scott (*Indiana Jones and the Lost Crusade*, *Die Another Day*, *Hellboy*); director of photography Robin Vidgeon (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Hellraiser*, *Memphis Belle*); sound designer Glenn Freemantle (*Slumdog Millionaire*, *127 Hours*, *Shame*, *Marley*); and Nigel Stone, CEO and creative director of the film and TV production company Platinum Films.

During their visits, participants were given invaluable advice on how to develop their careers and the different types of jobs and paths they could pursue, with speakers sharing first-hand how they got to their positions.

Cinematographer Robin Vidgeon spoke about the importance of teamwork and understanding the roles of everyone who works on the shoot. "Having a sense of humour is a safety valve for working on a film set," he advised. Meanwhile, Stephen Scott strongly encouraged anyone who wanted to work in production design to have their portfolios ready to show to potential employers. Tony Waye, talking from experience, advised his audience to start by finding work in local radio or television to get your foot in the door: "Get experience in any way you can and work your way up."

In addition to these talks, participants spent some time exploring Pinewood and were taken around to see production facilities, the famed 007 stage, the unique underwater stage and tank (which is the largest in Europe), the purpose-built studios and brand new HD galleries for the production of all genres of TV and the production offices. They learned about apprenticeship opportunities with the studios and what support Pinewood offers to filmmakers in the early stages of their careers.

Jen Sobol is Project Manager of the Film Academy programme.

This piece highlights the new BFI Film Academy programme, giving an idea of some of the opportunities being offered to Film Academy participants.

Colourful programming: the Glasgow Film Festival

Samuel Wigley

Thursday, 14 February 2013

The curtain rises on the Glasgow Film Festival, with a bigger-than-ever offering of premieres, events and over 360 screenings across the city.



Populaire (2013)

Mad Men-era retro chic provides an appetite-whetting Gallic amuse-bouche to the Glasgow Film Festival, with the opening night UK premiere of *Populaire*, a first feature by acclaimed music video director Régis Roinsard. It's a suitably romantic Valentine's Day curtain-raiser to a much-expanded festival, with over 360 screenings – including six world premieres and 57 UK premieres – taking place in 27 venues across the city.

Among the festival's high-profile offerings are first UK outings for the big-business thriller *Arbitrage*, starring Richard Gere; Neil Jordan's *Byzantium*, backed by the BFI Film Fund and starring Gemma Arterton and Saoirse Ronan as mother and daughter vampires de-

scending on a British coastal resort town; and two new Nicole Kidman starrers – *Stoker*, the first English-language film by cult Korean director Park Chan-wook, and *The Paperboy*, a heady dose of Southern Gothic directed by Lee Daniels (*Precious*, 2009).

The Place beyond the Pines sees director Derek Cianfrance reuniting with his *Blue Valentine* (2010) star Ryan Gosling, while *The Look of Love* reteams Michael Winterbottom with his regular star Steve Coogan, playing seedy real-life 'King of Soho' Paul Raymond. *Mama* is a creepy Spanish-Canadian horror film starring Jessica Chastain and boasting Guillermo Del Toro as executive producer.

Part-filmed in Glasgow, *Cloud Atlas* will also receive its first UK screening. This ambitious adaptation of David Mitchell's 2004 novel is the result of an intriguing directorial collaboration between Andy and Lana Wachowski (*The Matrix*, 1999) and Tom Tykwer (*Run Lola Run*, 1998; *Heaven*, 2002).

But the festival also presents an opportunity to catch up with less-heralded cinematic offerings from all around the globe. With Brazil poised to host both the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, the country's national cinema gets a special spotlight this year. The Buena Onda strand provides a survey of its best new films, with Kleber Mendonça Filho's visionary and surreal neighbourhood drama *Neighbouring Sounds* a particular highlight.

New films by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (*Mekong Hotel*) and Jem Cohen (*Museum Hours*) prop up the Crossing the Line section, a tasting menu of some of world cinema's more outré offerings. *Kapow!* offers geekier pleasures, with its triple bill of Marvel movies and John Wagner – creator of comic books *Judge Dredd* and *30 Days of Night* – appearing in conversation.

Meanwhile, James Cagney, famed for his wisecracking gangsters during Hollywood's Golden Age, gets a section all to himself, with outings for iconic underworld titles like *The Public Enemy* (1931), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) and *White Heat* (1949). Another archive treat is a screening of Carl Theodor Dreyer's silent masterpiece *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), accompanied by a live musical score, in Glasgow Cathedral.

"Glasgow Film Festival has grown into a massive celebration of every aspect of the moving image," says co-director Allan Hunter. "We all spend part of our lives watching films, playing games or catching up with television but there is still nothing to match sharing the experience with fellow enthusiasts, meeting the filmmakers and finding fresh inspiration. We are extremely proud of an ambitious 2013 programme that promises unforgettable moments in venues all across the city."

The festival draws to a close on 24 February with another UK first: a modern-day adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, in velvety black and white, directed – in an inspired left-turn from the super-heroics of *Avengers Assemble* (2012) – by Josh Whedon.

Sam Wigley edits the news section of the BFI website.

Aiming to extend our focus beyond London, this piece profiled an important regional festival, giving a flavour of the varied programme.

The lesser-spotted British animated feature

Jez Stewart

Friday, 15 February 2013

The release of *A Liar's Autobiography*, the new animated adaptation of Python Graham Chapman's memoirs, is cause for celebration. As curator Jez Stewart explains, feature-length British animated films are as scarce as hen's teeth.

Last week saw the release of a rare and unusual beast – a British animated feature film. *A Liar's Autobiography* uses three directors, 14 animation companies, a sprinkling of remaining Pythons, and the words and voice of late Graham Chapman to bring his own comic 'autobiography' to life. The film's website gives an excellent and very funny introduction to the film for those who are not familiar with it – but do heed the age and sensitivity warnings.

Animation has always been a labour-intensive process, particularly traditional cel animation, which required the tracing and hand colouring of pencil animation drawings for every distinct frame of the film. It's the main reason why feature-length animations, which might require over 50,000 of these drawings, have historically been few and far between, but Britain has a particularly sparse history.

The first animated feature film was the 70-minute *El Apóstol* produced by Argentine cartoonist Quirino Cristiani in 1917, but unfortunately neither this nor his second feature, made a year later, survive. The earliest surviving example is Lotte Reiniger's 65-minute *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, released in 1926, which is still an absolute delight to watch today.

Britain can tentatively throw its own hat into the ring in 1927, when Anson Dyer produced *The Story of the Flag*, which offered an animated exploration of the flags of Britain and its Empire over several film reels. Personally, I would try to surreptitiously claw the hat back as the film only ran around 40 minutes, and was more commonly released in six parts. Producing 3,600 feet of animation for that period was a considerable and worthy achievement that Dyer should be recognised for, but I think it is hard to see it as a 'feature' part of a film programme. Again the film is sadly lost, although even writing as someone who is extremely passionate about British animation and its history, I have to admit it does sound fairly dull...

The next contender for first British animated feature arrived in 1945, by which time the Soviet Union, Germany, the United States and China had already seen one or more of such films released, with Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) being the most famous example. However Halas & Batchelor's Admiralty-sponsored training film *Handling Ships*, which had a combined length of 70 minutes and was produced in Technicolor, was again more suited for showing in seven separate parts and is perhaps better regarded as a series. The same could be said for the 1949 film *Water For Firefighting*, also by Halas & Batchelor, which was in seven parts and ran only 45 minutes.



The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists! (2012)

So now we must jump ahead to the very end of December 1954 (with Spain, Japan, Denmark, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Italy, France and Brazil having in the meantime been added to the list of achievers) when Halas & Batchelor's 70-minute animated version of George Orwell's allegorical *Animal Farm* was released. To me this ticks all the boxes as the first British animated feature film, and remains an interesting, relevant, and powerful film today.

Some might argue over its Britishness, given that it was made with American money (with a large part of that funding infamously coming from the CIA), but I would dismiss such nit-picking, as the talent was virtually all British and it was made in London and Stroud. All the same, this does raise the issue of the lack of domestic production funding in Britain, particularly for animation, and – rather than opening the floodgates – *Animal Farm* would wait over a decade to be joined by a second animated British feature.

The importance of Halas & Batchelor to British animation history is proven by the fact that they also produced the next contender, with Joy Batchelor's version of Ruddigore (1967), based on the Gilbert & Sullivan operetta. Although it is a little short in running time at 54 minutes, and was principally made for American television, it was theatrically released in the UK and is one of the very few animation features to be directed by a woman and should be celebrated as such.

Yellow Submarine, released in 1968, was the next feature animation on a comparable scale to *Animal Farm*, and marks the first entry by another production company, George Dunning's TV Cartoons.

My research is not complete, but I can find only half-a-dozen qualifiers for the 1970s – most notably *Dick Deadeye*, or *Duty Done* (1975) and *Watership Down* (1978), and the story is not much different for the following decades. Flicking through my copies of *Sight &*

Sound, I find that last year saw only one British animation feature, in the form of the Aardman/Sony Pictures film *The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!* (with honourable mention to the roles played by British talent in US films such as *ParaNorman* and *Frankenweenie*).

The previous year saw another Aardman/Sony film, *Arthur Christmas* and – at a real stretch – *Gnomeo & Juliet*. I should also mention Phil Mulloy's *Dead but Not Buried* from 2011, part two of a trilogy of feature-length films, but unfortunately I don't believe the film was seen in Britain outside a couple of festival screenings, despite winning prizes elsewhere.

The success of American animation, easily imported into another English-speaking market, has long hung over our domestic industry, which needs significant investment to compete. Such backing has very rarely appeared over the years, and the funding situation for animation in this country is still fairly bleak.

Making animated films for adult audiences is an even more difficult proposition, as 'cartoons' are generally seen in the UK as fodder for children, to be pumped out by exhibitors during half-terms and holidays. All this goes to show that the release of *A Liar's Autobiography* is a considerable achievement that should be seen and celebrated, and when you do see it you will discover that Britain has a whole host of talented animators who are crying out for an opportunity to produce work in a longer form.

Jez Stewart is curator at the BFI National Archive, with a special interest in animation.

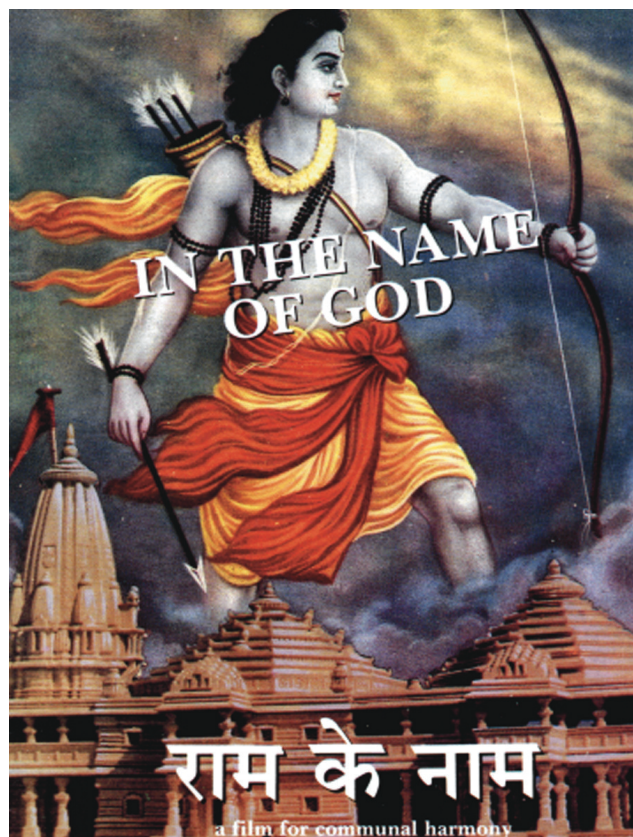
*This piece uses a new British film release, *A Liar's Autobiography* (also a gala screening at the London Film Festival), to talk about British cinema history, shedding light on our animation industry over the decades.*

Blazing modern India across the screen

Mark Cousins

Tuesday, 12 February 2013

‘Brick Lane, you really should be deserted.’
Filmmaker Mark Cousins explains why a weekend
of electrifying documentaries by Anand
Patwardhan is an unmissable opportunity to catch
up with a passionate chronicler of modern India.



In the Name of God (Raam Ke Naam, 1992)

I first heard about the films of Anand Patwardhan in the mid 1990s, when Kevin Macdonald and I were co-editing our book on non-fiction cinema, *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*. I wanted to include much more on Indian cinema in it, but that didn't work out.

I ordered Patwardhan's *Father, Son and Holy War* (1994) on VHS from, I think, a video store in New York – this was before DVD or email. It cost a lot and I had to wait quite a while, but when it came, I saw something remarkable. It wove together histories of Hindu fundamentalism and masculinity that not only saw connections but degrees of cause and effect. It had the best qualities of journalism, but was essayistic too, and angry, informed, expansive, epic and urgent. Then I managed to see *In the Name of God* (1992) which was electrifying – an odyssey about anti-secularism. Like news, you could hear the second hand ticking in it, but Patwardhan seemed to keep stepping back to see his fresco, his nation, on screen.

I had been teaching film for a while by then, and had become frustrated – scrub that, it was more than frustration, it was rage – that we in the western Anglo or Euro-American world seemed to think “our” documentaries – from the Maysles brothers to Errol Morris – were the best in the world. Such films are wonderful, but the lack of curiosity about Asian documentary astounded me. I was regularly gobsmacked by the fact that, because people hadn't heard of great Indian or

Asian docs, they assumed that there weren't any. What, so your tendrils reach so far, and our media is so reliable, that you assume that there's nothing great out there that's beyond them?

The truth is that the documentary filmmaking which is out there (ie in most of the world) is sometimes so great that it actually changes what it feels like to be “in here”. This is very much the case with Patwardhan's films. Fuelled by them and other things, I jumped in my 1970s campervan in 2001 and drove from Scotland, where I live, to India. My timing couldn't have been more Patwardhanian. The right wing BJP was flying the flag in the North of India, and rewriting its history books. There's no way I would have understood that trip without the lens of Patwardhan.

When I got home, various things happened, including the fact that Doc/Fest, the great film festival in Sheffield in the UK, offered me the chance, over three years, to guest curate. I did so, and chose Asian documentary as my theme. One of the things we did was a retrospective of, and tribute to, Patwardhan. In the year we did it, my own filmmaking had taking off again, so I wasn't able to be there. But in the catalogue I quoted Patwardhan...

“In the last few decades”, said Patwardhan, “I watched my country sacrifice all the principles that once made me proud of our independence. Non-violence, secularism, egalitarianism were replaced by venality, religious strife and militarism.” Such a complete critique of Indian life was bound to incur the wrath of the authorities

population regarded as ‘untouchables’), their principles, politics, persecution and activism. It was a samizdat musical. I went into the jury deliberation determined that it get the top prize. To my great relief, my fellow jurors had loved it too.

Then, last year, I heard that Patwardhan would be back in Sheffield and, so, I had to go, just to have dinner with him, just to meet the great man. When we met, I was excited. He was calm. He said that he'd like to go to an ordinary English pub to watch a football match or, rather, watch the people watching the match. We found one. It was packed. Standing room only, and cheers at goals. Instead of dinner, we each had a cheese bap, wrapped in cling film. This was when I knew that Patwardhan is not only my kind of filmmaker, he's my kind of guy. That night we talked a lot, in a night club, about Indian films politics, and people – directors Mani Kaul and Ritwik Ghatak, the naxalites, actor Sharmila Tagore.

I'm so jealous that I can't be at the BFI Southbank for his retrospective but I sincerely hope that the famed streets of London will be a little bit empty when his films are showing. Brick Lane, you really should be deserted. This is a rare chance to have a brainy, brilliant, bracing encounter with the bold realities of modern India, and to meet the remarkably clear-eyed (and generous-hearted) teller of the tale.

Please don't miss it.



Jai Bhim Comrade (2011)

and fundamentalists and, indeed, the key Patwardhan films have been banned. But he's fought the bans in the courts and, in the end, hasn't had to censor a frame of his work.

Such belief in the power of documentary to change society, to challenge prejudice, to illuminate the fetid shadows of ignorance, is inspiring indeed.

A year or two later I was on the jury of the Hong Kong International Film Festival. One of the competing films was Patwardhan's latest, *Jai Bhim Comrade* (2011). I watched, marvelled, tweeted, and raved about this film about dalit people in India (out-caste sections of the

Mark Cousins is a filmmaker and critic, best known for his TV epic The Story of Film.

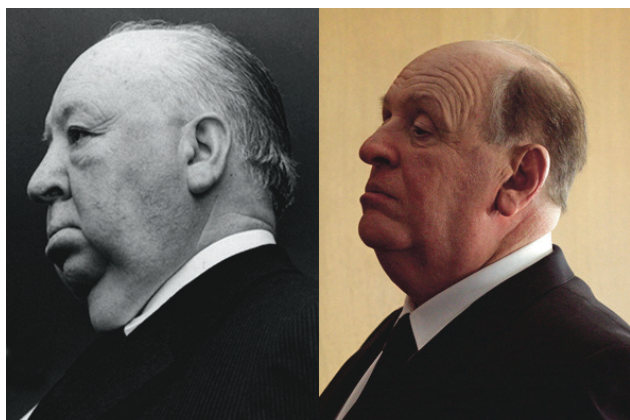
This piece uses a well-known and very passionate writer to give a personal and accessible introduction to an important but not widely known contemporary documentary filmmaker, to help promote a BFI Southbank retrospective.

Acting up: 10 film directors played on screen

Samuel Wigley

Saturday, 9 February 2013

With Anthony Hopkins and Toby Jones facing off for the title of best Alfred Hitchcock impression in new biopics, we take a look at the rare examples of actors playing real-life directors.



Alfred Hitchcock, as played by Anthony Hopkins in *Hitchcock* (2012)

Anthony Hopkins's feature-length impression of the Master of Suspense in Sacha Gervasi's new film *Hitchcock* follows hot on the heels of Toby Jones's outing as the portly director in the recent TV film *The Girl*. It's safe to say that film directors – those dominating creatives behind the camera – have recently become an on-screen subject unto themselves.

With the medium of film now well into its second century, its history and legends are now tempting terrain for film drama. Of course, the 'write-what-you-know' maxim has lead screenwriters and directors to make films about their own industry since the silent era, producing many classic films about filmmaking from *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) via Federico Fellini's *8 ½* (1963) to *Mulholland Dr.* (2001).

But the director characters in such films are nearly always fictional or, if modelled loosely on real figures, given fictional names. Think of Clint Eastwood's turn as a very John Huston-like 'John Wilson' in *White Hunter Black Heart* (1990), or Marcello Mastroianni's turn as harried auteur Guido Anselmi in *8 ½*, a fictive surrogate for Fellini himself.

In the old days, if a real-life filmmaker turned up as a character in a film, why not get the actual director to play himself – as Cecil B. DeMille did in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) or Fritz Lang did in *Le Mépris* (1963)?

Films in which actors portray real filmmakers are thin on the ground, but are slowly reaching critical mass. Hitchcock, who's due for another outing next year in a film of actor Grace Kelly's life, and Orson Welles, that great raconteur and showman, are two of the most natural subjects for films about film directors, which explains why they're leading the pack in onscreen portrayals to date.

But with a young Jean Renoir (played by Vincent Rottiers) popping up in a recent French biopic about his painter father, *Renoir* (2012), doppelgängers of Luis Buñuel appearing in two releases in the last few years,

and the recent emergence of a mini-genre of movies about troubled film shoots (from *Shadow of a Vampire* to Gervasi's *Hitchcock*), a rogue's gallery of film director impersonations has begun to take shape...

Charlie Chaplin



Charlie Chaplin, as played by Robert Downey Jr in *Chaplin* (1992)

Anyone with a fake moustache and a bowler hat has a fair chance of resembling Charlie Chaplin's hapless Tramp character, long a staple of fancy-dress parties. But, as this side by side comparison shows, Robert Downey Jr proved an excellent likeness for the great director-comedian in his civvies too.

Told in flashback, Richard Attenborough's 1992 biopic charted Chaplin's rise from a childhood of poverty, via an apprenticeship on the London stage, to his career in early Hollywood and extraordinary worldwide fame. Making an impressive job of imitating the silent comedian's balletic pratfalls, Downey Jr received an Oscar nomination for Best Actor for his portrayal.

Essential Chaplin: *The Gold Rush* (1925), *City Lights* (1931)

F.W. Murnau



F.W. Murnau, as played by John Malkovich in *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000)

Though his career was cut tragically short when he died in a car crash just prior to the premiere of his South Pacific romance *Tabu* (1931), F.W. Murnau was one of the great directors of the silent cinema. A key figure in the shadowy, expressionistic German cinema of the 1920s, he was lured to Hollywood in 1927 for the mega-production *Sunrise*, considered a cinematic milestone for its poetic use of lighting and roaming camera movement.

The 2000 film *Shadow of a Vampire* is a fictionalised account of the making of Murnau's eerie horror film *Nos-*

feratu (1922), a copyright-bypassing adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. John Malkovich plays Murnau as a flamboyant eccentric who'll stop at nothing for his craft, going so far as to employ a real-life vampire to play the eerie Count Orlok.

Essential Murnau: *Nosferatu* (1922), *Sunrise* (1927)

Luis Buñuel



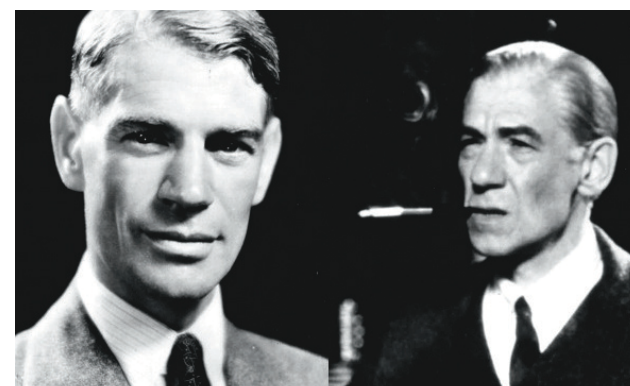
Luis Buñuel, as played by Matthew McNulty in *Little Ashes* (2008)

Canonised artists and writers are much more likely to get their own biopics than film directors, and in Paul Morrison's drama *Little Ashes*, set amid the avant-garde scene in Madrid in the 1920s, aspiring filmmaker Luis Buñuel (Matthew McNulty) plays third fiddle to the homoerotic relationship between his friends Salvador Dalí (Robert Pattinson) and Federico García Lorca (Javier Baltrán). Feeling isolated as the pair grows closer, Buñuel leaves for Paris, where he would eventually launch his film career with the surrealist scandals of *Un chien andalou* (1929) and *L'Âge d'or* (1930).

Portrayed in Morrison's film as a priggish homophobe, Buñuel fared only marginally better in Woody Allen's nostalgic comedy *Midnight in Paris* (2011), when the director (played by Adrien de Van, a better likeness) is shown to have got one of his best ideas – the plot for his 1962 Mexican film *The Exterminating Angel* – from a time-travelling Owen Wilson.

Essential Buñuel: *Un chien andalou* (1929), *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972)

James Whale



James Whale, as played by Ian McKellen in *Gods and Monsters* (1998)

Bringing the shadowy, exaggerated style of German silent horror films such as *The Golem* (1920) and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) to Hollywood, British-born James Whale directed a hugely influential run of chillers for Universal during the early 1930s. Franken-

stein (1931) and its 1935 sequel *Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Old Dark House* (1932) and his H.G. Wells adaptation *The Invisible Man* (1933) are some of the wittiest, most imaginative horror films the genre has given us.

Based on a fictionalised novel about the openly gay director's relationship with his male gardener, the 1998 film *Gods and Monsters* dramatises Whale's life in its final turn, when a series of strokes had left him fragile and tormented by the past. Bringing the silver-haired helmer a mischievous, camp sparkle, Ian McKellen was nominated for an Oscar for Best Actor for his performance. Further down the cast list, Martin Ferrero appeared as George Cukor, another great director of Hollywood's Golden Age.

Essential Whale: *Frankenstein* (1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)

Jean Vigo



Jean Vigo, as played by James Frain in *Vigo: A Passion for Life* (1998)

Director Julien Temple has always been drawn to the subject matter of impassioned, often doomed creatives, whether punk rock stars (*The Filth and the Fury*, 2000) or Romantic poets (*Pandaemonium*, 2000). With 1998's *Vigo: A Passion for Life*, he turned to a film director and one of the tragic short lives in cinema. Paris-born, Jean Vigo died from tuberculosis aged 29 leaving behind just three short films and a landmark feature, *L'Atalante* (1934), that still features on critics' lists of the best films ever made. Its fusion of open-air naturalism with surreal poetry was a key influence on later filmmakers, including those of the French New Wave.

Temple cast James Frain, since known for TV's *The Tudors*, as the troubled young filmmaker, giving him an authentic Vigo coiffure and having him dive into the Seine to experience an underwater apparition just as the young lover does in *L'Atalante*.

Essential Vigo: *Zéro de conduite* (1933), *L'Atalante* (1934)

Ed Wood



Edward D. Wood Jr, as played by Johnny Depp in *Ed Wood* (1994)

It's ironic that the director sometimes called the worst ever should provide the subject of one of the most satisfying filmmaker biopics. Edward D. Wood Jr was the irrepressible director of some of the tawdriest Z-grade science-fiction and horror films of the 1950s, a director who never let his tiny budgets get in the way of pursuing his vision. Films such as *Bride of the Monster* (1955) and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959) are littered with cardboard spaceships, rubber monster suits, and incongruous stock footage.

Lovingly recounting Wood's life story in the down-at-heel margins of Hollywood, director Tim Burton cast Johnny Depp as the charismatic, cross-dressing auteur, and Depp relishes every second, whether donning one of Wood's beloved angora sweaters or enrapt in a eureka moment of inspiration, eyes bright with enthusiasm above his pencil-thin moustache.

Essential Wood: *Glen or Glenda?* (1953), *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959)

Orson Welles



Orson Welles, as played by Christian McKay in *Me and Orson Welles* (2009)

"Visions are worth fighting for. Why spend your life making someone else's dreams?" Such is the advice that Orson Welles (Vincent D'Onofrio) gives starstruck B-movie director Ed Wood in Tim Burton's *Wood* biopic. Its perhaps for his gift as a teller of tales, or as the larger-than-life archetype of the film director as exuberant artist, that Welles must be the most frequently impersonated filmmaker on screen.

Angus MacFadyen played the Welles of his 1930s days on the New York stage in *Cradle Will Rock* (1999); Liev Schreiber played him during the production of *Citizen Kane* (1941) in the TV movie *RKO 281* (1999); Danny Huston played him in the aftermath of his doomed marriage to Rita Hayworth in *Fade to Black* (2006); and – pictured above – Christian McKay, certainly one of the best incarnations, played Welles at the time of his 1937 stage production of *Julius Caesar* in Richard Linklater's *Me and Orson Welles* (2009).

Essential Welles: *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)

Laurence Olivier

As the actor-director of highly acclaimed Shakespeare adaptations on both stage and screen, Kenneth Branagh has so often been compared to Laurence Olivier that it was perhaps inevitable that one day he'd end up playing him. Though Olivier is best known as a film director for his inventive Shakespearean trio of *Henry V* (1944), *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III* (1955), for Simon Curtis's 2011 film *My Week with Marilyn*, Branagh plays Olivier during the production on his later, critically maligned *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957).

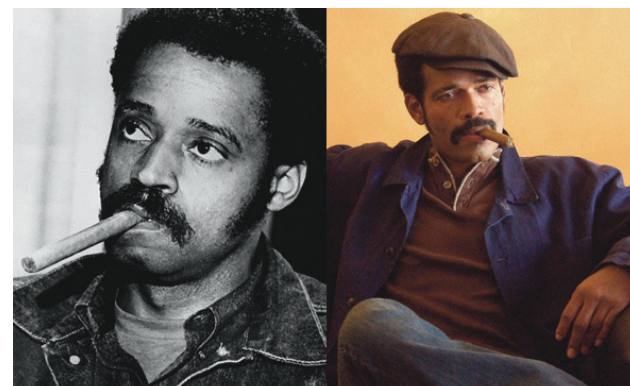


Laurence Olivier, as played by Kenneth Branagh in *My Week with Marilyn* (2011)

Depicting the tempestuous relations between Olivier and his co-star, Marilyn Monroe (Michelle Williams), the film gives Branagh ample room for an expert, feature-length Olivier impression. As Peter Bradshaw noted in *The Guardian*: "It is a complete joy to see Branagh's Olivier erupt in queenly frustration at Marilyn's lateness, space-cadet vagueness, and preposterous Method acting indulgence. He sometimes appears to be channelling the older and more sinister Olivier of *Marathon Man*."

Essential Olivier: *Henry V* (1944), *Richard III* (1955)

Melvin Van Peebles



Melvin Van Peebles, as played by Mario Van Peebles in *Baadasssss* (2003)

The popular success of Melvin Van Peebles' renegade independent 1971 feature *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, about a young African American man's flight from police persecution in South Central Los Angeles, is credited with waking Hollywood up to a potentially lucrative young black audience. Blaxploitation films such as *Shaft* (1971) and *Superfly* (1972) followed in its wake.

But making a film of such revolutionary intent on the fringes of a conservative film industry had its challenges, and the movie's troubled production history would later be dramatised by the director's son Mario Van Peebles in his own film, *Baadasssss* (2004). In the small canon of films featuring actors playing real-life directors, Mario (portraying Melvin) perhaps has an unfair advantage in the physical resemblance stakes: with handlebar moustache and ever-present fat cigar, he's a dead ringer for his groundbreaking father.

Essential Van Peebles: *Watermelon Man* (1970), *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971)

Sam Wigley edits the news section of the BFI website.

This piece used a contemporary film release as a pathway into film history, providing accessible introductions to 10 major film directors. It's so far been read by over 1,400 people.

Earth vision: interview with Anand Patwardhan

Georgia Korossi

Thursday, 21 February 2013

With a weekend of films at BFI Southbank providing a rare opportunity to catch up with the work of one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary documentary cinema, Georgia Korossi spoke with Anand Patwardhan about his impassioned portraits of India.



BFI Southbank's tribute to leading Indian documentary-maker Anand Patwardhan is exciting news: it's a rare opportunity to find the film medium engaging with the experiences of ordinary people, and is bound to prove a rich source of inspiration for new filmmakers.

Regrettably, I only discovered Patwardhan's work very recently but I was instantly drawn to his clear-minded approach and his impassioned argument for a just society. His landscapes of India, seen through his camera since the 1970s, are integrally connected to an activism for communal harmony. Yet controversial issues betray India's primary principles of non-violence, secularism and egalitarianism and people experience what looks like an unchanging reality.

While his films are not planned out in advance, Patwardhan became a cameraperson out of necessity, which encourages directness with the people he talks to and an appreciation of their viewpoint. He does both the camerawork and the editing, and the breathing space he leaves between shots of controversial material allows viewers time to gather their own thoughts.

Like Patricio Guzmán and Fernando Solanas, Anand Patwardhan engaged with the political logic of Julio García Espinosa's 1969 manifesto 'For an imperfect cinema'. Espinosa stated, "Imperfect cinema can enjoy itself despite everything that conspires to negate enjoyment." Patwardhan's work is under constant threat of

censorship by television networks and governmental authorities in his country. Nonetheless he has fought and found alternative distribution methods for his work.

His films make no assumptions, and have no formulaic thinking. Instead, they subscribe to the moral implications of tragic international human actions interwoven with songs that awaken the listener. Simply put, *State of the Nation* is one of the year's essential film seasons – Patwardhan's films should be seen by everyone, from fishermen to school children.

I often find that watching your films is like reading a book. *War and Peace* (2002), for instance, is divided into six chapters and an epilogue binding together questions of nationalism, Hiroshima, science and war as profit against the law of love and education. This type of film is often called a film essay. Is this approach intentional to allow a comprehensive understanding of the seriousness of worldwide matters?

I am not much of a cine theorist and was unaware that the form I ended up with is being described as an essay. I remember being irritated when my films were branded in some circles as 'agit-prop' so although I don't find labels too useful, 'essay' is definitely a better one. My problem with the 'agit-prop' tag is not that I disavow the engaged nature of filmic intervention, but that the word 'prop' is short for 'propaganda' and propaganda is generally what one does not agree with or trust. At best the label reeks of a subtle put-down from those who believe that art and politics are mutually exclusive and there is a pecking order between them. In this sense the term 'essay' is free from prejudice, unless one detects in it the subtle hierarchy between prose (the domain of the direct communicator) and poetry (the realm of the artist).

I will grant that my films are perhaps somewhat more verbal than visual in that I am wary not to rob people of their voice and steal only their image. I want my films to be cross-pollinators, carrying voices across natural and man-made divides. In deeply unjust and segregated societies they do the job of democracy. Silence or non-verbal moments in these films occur rarely, but when they do, they are significant precisely because they are rare.

There are chapters in *War and Peace* but these chapters, or this structure, did not emerge from anything pre-formulated at the research stage but from material gathered over the four years the film took. It was while trying to make sense of diverse sequences that I had boiled down on the edit table, because they felt important, that I eventually found a means of stringing them into a narrative that began to make sense.

In recent years, documentary filmmaking has received a wider appreciation. Perhaps due to a number of documentary film festivals, more people have the opportunity to practice this medium. But can it change the world?

People like us obviously believe our films can change at least some tiny part of the world or else we would have lost motivation a long time ago, because our work is neither the irrepressible product of self-expression nor meant for the collector's cupboard. I remember seeing Patricio Guzmán's *The Battle of Chile* (1975-79) in the 70s and it made a huge impact on me as it did on so many. But Pinochet ruled into old age while many of those he murdered remain unsung. The magic of the Allende years never returned and yet the memory and the inspiration of those years are forever captured on film.

Similarly, I cannot honestly claim that my films made a significant difference to the political realities they describe, but feel confident that those who were exposed to them were in some small way marked. I also believe that if the gatekeepers of the state and the marketplace (who increasingly control what gets seen and by whom) did not succeed so well, our films would indeed have made a far greater impact than they have done.

As for documentary festivals, in earlier years they played a vital role in popularising the medium and showcasing work which would otherwise have remained isolated, but today genuinely independent documentary cinema no longer has a natural home. The reason is the commercialisation of the documentary.

Most major festivals have turned into pitching zones where in five minutes flat, commissioning editors do thumbs up or thumbs down to competing performing monkeys. Once selected these mostly white folk are sent into the jungles of the world to come back with a quickie that will run for 52 minutes and tell people what they already know, because anything more would be too taxing and would risk the channel being switched.

We live in times of insecurity as more and more people lose their jobs, almost one in seven people in the world lives in poverty, and yet the promotion of nuclear weapons continues. Many people find this reality hard to grasp and this, I feel, is part of the argument in *War and Peace*. Can you explain how you started this project?

War and Peace is in part an answer to those who believe that national 'security' depends on acquiring ever-greater military might. In a country like India this is patently ludicrous. What does a starving farmer care whether we massacre millions of Pakistanis or Chinese with our atom bombs before or after they massacre millions of us? Nuclear nationalism is the game of powerful elites, although through widespread propaganda they do evoke jingoism in the wider populace. At the best of times, even without the nuclear element, nationalism serves the interests of a tiny class when it is divorced from principles of justice.

My horror at militarisation and its escalation to the nuclear is not restricted to countries like India and Pakistan on the grounds that we can ill afford it. The horror is even greater when a country from the first world like the USA spends zillions on weapons of mass destruction and supplies the rest of the world with its military arsenal because they are so scared that they cannot hold on to economic superiority forever without overwhelming military might.

I'm quoting Sheema Kermani, the Pakistani dancer in *War and Peace* who performs while Gandhi's favourite hymn plays in the background: 'When one is touched people can transform themselves.' Can you explain the

importance of this?

Not only was she braving fundamentalists by adopting a dance form that originated in pre-Partition India, but through this hymn she invokes: “God or Allah be your name, grant wisdom to us all”. As she says, it is precisely because dance (and music) can touch people’s hearts and transform them that the fundamentalists want to ban it.

The end credits of your film *Father, Son and Holy War* gratefully acknowledge the Black Audio Film Collective. How did you first hear about the Collective’s work and how has it influenced yours?

I first met the Black Audio Film Collective (now re-named Smoking Dogs Films) in the early 80s when I showed my films while passing through the UK and we have kept in touch since, more as personal friends than as official collaborators. Whenever I needed help they were always there.

John Akomfrah and Ilona Halberstadt were also the first in the UK to do an article and interview on my work for Ilona’s PIX magazine. This was international solidarity. Even now, many of my 16mm prints take up valuable space in the Smoking Dogs loft as the BFI National Archive turned me down when their mandate to preserve non-British made films shrunk in the face of cutbacks.

London in the 80s and 90s was always a source of sustenance for me, though I never spent more than a few days at a time there. A major inspiration was John La Rose and all the people associated with the Black Book-fair. It was here that I briefly met the amazing Linton Kwesi Johnson after having admired his work from afar. So I am quite thrilled that he agreed to talk with me on stage after the screening of *Jai Bhim Comrade* (2012) at the BFI this week. Casteism in India and racism in the west are two sides of the same coin and fighting this through music and poetry is what connects Linton to the people in my film.

What’s your message to future documentary filmmakers?

No message really. Do it only if it burns when you don’t.

Georgia Korossi works in the BFI’s digital team, and is also an independent curator and writer.

As a complement to Mark Cousins’ piece on the director, this interview with Anand Patwardhan aimed to promote a BFI retrospective, while also giving a space for a director to discuss his work in his own words.

Filming the divine: The Gospel According to Matthew

Geoff Andrew

Wednesday, 27 February 2013

Geoff Andrew wonders why religion and spirituality are so difficult to treat on screen... and explains how Pier Paolo Pasolini’s unforgettable film of the life of Christ cracks it.



“In my opinion, there are two things that can absolutely not be carried to the screen: the realistic presentation of the sexual act and praying to God.” Thus spake Orson Welles. I’m not entirely sure why he felt this to be the case, but Welles certainly doesn’t seem to have been a prude (though he was, of course, admirably aware of the ethical responsibilities of an artist – check out his superb 1974 film *F for Fake* if you’ve any doubts about that).

I imagine his prohibition on these two fronts must have had something to do with subjectivity and its relation to such private activities. After all, we bring so much personal baggage with us to the cinema in terms of religious faith and/or sexuality that we’re always going to be comparing our own experiences, ideas, anxieties, hopes and desires with what we see on screen. And very often, I suspect, we’re likely to feel that the gap between the films’ depictions of sex and prayer and our own individual experiences of them is pretty wide.

Which leads us to why it’s so difficult to make a properly plausible religious film. Just as prayer is hard to get right in a movie, so too are most things to do with faith and notions of divinity. Think of Hollywood films like *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) and *The Song of Bernardette* (1943), and the problems immediately become apparent. Even with the magic of cinema, miracles and visionary epiphanies often come across as incredible, simply because we know how editing, special effects and film artifice in general are so often devoted to deceiving the eye.

And then there’s the perennial question of how to represent holiness: too often it comes down to the clichés of dramatic backlighting and filters, a soaring, saccharine choral score and actors behaving in a way which seems so angelically distracted that they barely feel human at all.

Perhaps that’s why the films which depict divinity, spirituality or religious faith most persuasively are very often those which adhere most closely to a kind of materialistic realism rooted in the physical aspects of existence. One thinks of Carl Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) and *Ordet* (1955); of Robert Bresson’s *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) and *Mouchette* (1967); of Frank Borzage’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), of Roberto Rossellini’s *Viaggio in Italia* (1954), of Manoel de Oliveira’s *Rite of Spring* (1963), even, perhaps, of Eric Rohmer’s *The Green Ray* (1986).

And then there is *The Gospel According to Matthew* (1964), which for many is the finest life of Christ yet committed to film.

What makes this early work by Pier Paolo Pasolini so effective is that he grounds it in an immediately recognisable historical world. Admittedly, since he was a poet as well as a filmmaker, he allowed himself enough licence to do some mixing and matching in terms of time and place – mainly in terms of the costumes and the music track, but also in compositions inspired by Renaissance paintings. His point was that our knowledge of Christ’s life comes down to us through 2000 years of art, and it is pointless to try and pretend otherwise.

Still, Pasolini’s is essentially a realist’s approach to the story. We don’t even need to believe that his protagonist is the son of God, since he’s comprehensible as an activist seeking to right wrongs, change the world and rid it of oppression. At the same time, however, since we witness those he encounters responding to his words and deeds in a thoroughly believable way, it may be that we too at least share the conviction that here was someone special, important, different.

Wherein lies the film’s power. There is no special pleading, no visual or musical bombast. Even the miracles are depicted with the minimum of fuss, in a way that mirrors the matter-of-fact tone applied to the rest of the narrative. In the end, this is simply a plausible story of a charismatic man with unshakeably strong beliefs attempting to win others over to his cause. Such things happen. And Pasolini understood that that was quite enough.

Geoff Andrew is Head of Film Programme at BFI Southbank.



T time: the best T-shirts in the movies

Samuel Wigley

Tuesday, 19 February 2013

With the long-awaited release of cult classic children's adventure Sammy's Super T-shirt on DVD, it's time to open the wardrobe on a history of great T-shirts at the movies.

Homemade go-karts, a tricycle flying machine and a T-shirt bestowing superhuman powers are the weird and wonderful gizmos featured in *The Race Is On*, the second volume in the BFI's DVD collections of films by the Children's Film Foundation.



Sammy's Super T-shirt (1978)

Made for kids' Saturday morning matinees at the cinema, starting in the 1950s and continuing to the early 1980s, these inventive and hijinks-filled tales of adventure and pint-sized derring-do had a long afterlife on the small screen – children of the 80s will remember them as fixtures of Friday teatime TV.

Featured in the new set – alongside classic entries *Soapbox Derby* (1957), starring a young Michael Crawford, and *The Sky-Bike* (1967) – is one of the most sought after and fondly remembered of them all: *Sammy's Super T-shirt*.

First shown in 1978, it's the story of Sammy Smith (Reggie Winch), a diminutive 12-year-old fitness fanatic with dreams of bulging biceps and sports-day glory. When his lucky T-shirt accidentally becomes the subject of a laboratory experiment by a bungling scientist, Sammy's tiger top develops invincible powers, instilling his young wearer with stupendous physical strength.



Rebel Without a Cause (1955)

With this auspicious garment making its DVD debut, the time seemed right for a little fashion parade of some of film history's most notable T-shirts. A frivolous thought, perhaps, but in fact the history of the T-shirt is sewn together with the history of cinema in several unforgettable places, with the movies playing no small part in the popularisation of this now all-pervasive attire.

An undergarment until the second world war, when GIs started to be seen wearing them over their combat trousers, the ubiquity of the T-shirt as outerwear rocketed when Marlon Brando was seen wearing a tight T-shirt over a sweaty torso as the bellicose Stanley Kowalski in the 1951 adaptation of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The look quickly became associated with teen rebellion and masculine cool, with James Dean teaming white T-shirt and red leather jacket as Jim Stark in the ultimate 50s youth film, *Rebel without a Cause* (1955).



A bout de souffle (1960)

But a women's T-shirt revolution was right around the corner. Not least among the novelties of Jean-Luc Godard's 1960 French New Wave groundbreaker *A bout de souffle* was the iconic sight of Jean Seberg strolling down the Champs-Élysées with close-cropped hair and wearing a New York Herald Tribune top. Such T-shirts quickly began to fly off the hangers as fashionistas attempted to replicate the casual chic of this American in Paris.



Do the Right Thing (1989)



Napoleon Dynamite (2004)

In the decades since, on screen as on the streets, we've seen T-shirts proliferate as they've become the casual wear of choice in endless permutations across both mainstream fashion and subcultural movements from punk to hip hop. Any survey of cinematic Ts should take in Jack Nicholson as trouble-starting in-patient Randall P. McMurphy in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975); the 'Vote for Pedro' top donned by Jon Heder's eponymous geeky loafer in *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004); metalhead Garth's Aerosmith T-shirt in *Wayne's World* (1992); the demure blue heart logo adorned by Faye Wong's snack-bar lonelyheart in *Wong Kar-Wai's Chungking Express* (1994); and the retro style of Ewan McGregor's grubby yellow T-shirt as heroin addict Mark Renton in *Trainspotting* (1996).

In *Pulp Fiction* (1994), Quentin Tarantino uses the T-shirt as a symbol of emasculation. When hitmen Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) and Vincent (John Travolta) ruin their suits with sprayed blood from an accidental



Trainspotting (1996)

shooting, fixer The Wolf (Harvey Keitel) relishes having them change into baggy, skate-kid cottons, stripping them of their gangster cool in one sartorial sweep.

Sammy's T-shirt may be more knockout than most, but iconic onscreen Ts come in all colours and sizes, small, medium and large.

Sam Wigley edits the news section of the BFI website.

This is a fun and accessible piece aiming both to promote a new BFI DVD and provide some lighthearted film history. It proved very popular on Twitter, with people making their own suggestions for T-shirts to include. It's so far been read by over 1,500 people.

Fellini's 8½ turns 50

Samuel Wigley

Thursday, 14 February 2013

We wish a happy 50th birthday to Fellini's classic film about a director experiencing creative block, which premiered in Italy half a century ago.



Creative block has rarely been overcome as triumphantly, and with such vim and vigour, as Federico Fellini managed with his magnum opus 8½ (1963). The talk of the town (indeed most of the film world) after *La dolce vita* (1960), the great Italian director found himself wondering how he'd manage to top this era-defining film fresco about the social elite in Rome at the turn of the 1960s.

His solution? To turn this creative impasse, and the hectic circus of his life as a celebrity director, into his subject. Named so because Fellini had so far completed seven solo features, two sections of anthology films (counting as halves each) and had a co-directing credit with Alberto Lattuada on 1950's *Variety Lights* (another half), 8½ was literally the sum of Fellini's career to date, an exuberantly autobiographical film about the trials, temptations and tribulations of being a filmmaker.

Starring Marcello Mastroianni as Guido Anselmi, a lauded filmmaker struggling to find the inspiration to bring his new science-fiction epic to life, Fellini's classic simulates the chaotic life of a director – the creative decisions he must make, the sycophants he encounters, the beautiful women, journalists and producers who people his existence – while frequently digressing into reveries of his past, dream sequences and bawdy fantasies.

Fifty years ago, 8½ premiered in Rome to a mixed audience reception (Fellini's latest lacked the zeitgeist-y scandalousness of *La dolce vita*) but ecstatic reactions from many critics. Fellini had spent the winter editing the film, previewing two versions in a Rome studio that January: one with a downbeat ending, the other with all

the characters from Guido's life past and present joining together for an exhilarating circus parade. It was this latter, more optimistic finale which proved the most popular and made it into the finished film.

From Italy, Fellini's film was shown out of competition at the Cannes Film Festival in April, then in July was screened for an audience of 8,000 people in the Kremlin for the 3rd Moscow International Film Festival, where it won the Grand Prize. Releases in the US, the UK, and across Europe followed throughout 1963, the film quickly establishing itself as an intellectual and cultural event. It won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film at the 1964 Oscars, also scooping an Oscar for Best Costume Design and nominations for Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Art Direction – rare feats for a foreign language film.

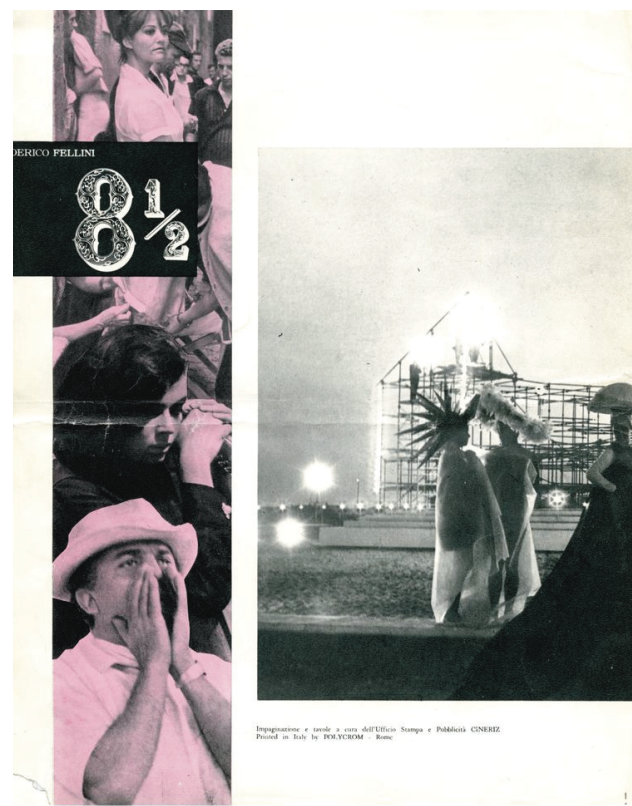
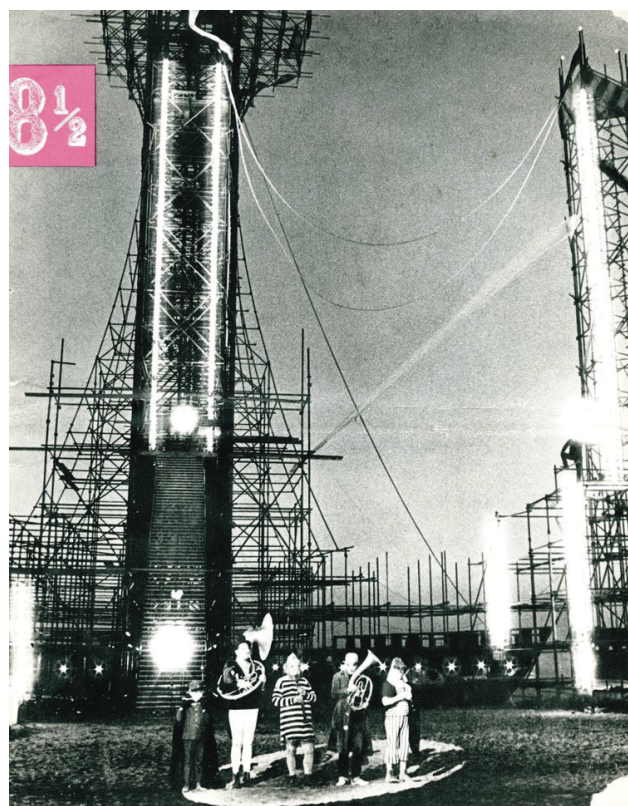
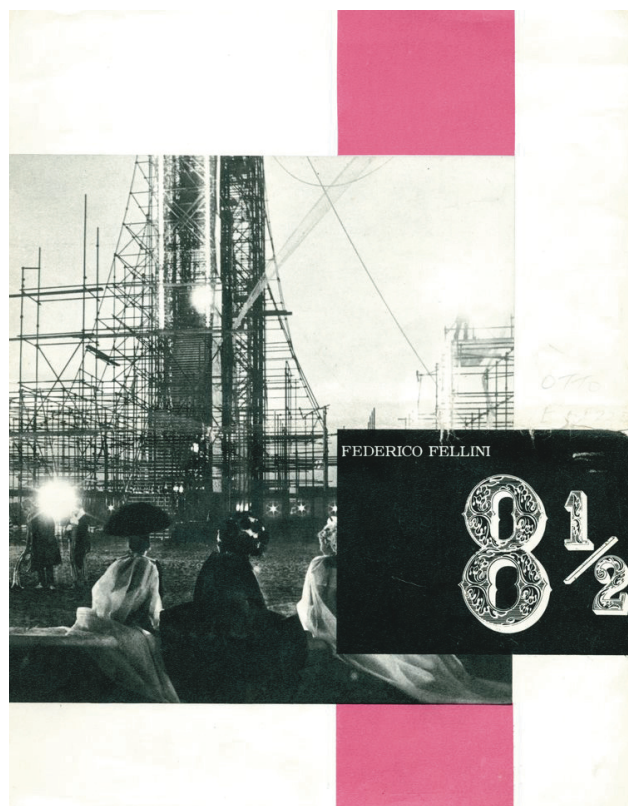
And, 50 years later, such high regard shows little sign of running out of steam. In the most recent of Sight &

Sound magazine's once-a-decade polls to determine the greatest films ever made, as chosen by critics and filmmakers, 8½ was voted in at number 10 by critics and number four by directors. Filmmakers, unsurprisingly, seem to have taken to this dazzlingly inventive portrait of their profession.

Only an elaborate Fellini-esque parade would truly suffice to celebrate this great film's half-century, but these pressbook pages from the time stands as our own modest way of raising a glass.

Sam Wigley edits the news section of the BFI website.

This piece marked an important anniversary for one of world cinema's most acclaimed films, while also sharing some of our special collections material on the film. On Facebook, this piece received over 200 likes. The BFI's initial tweet was retweeted 100 times.

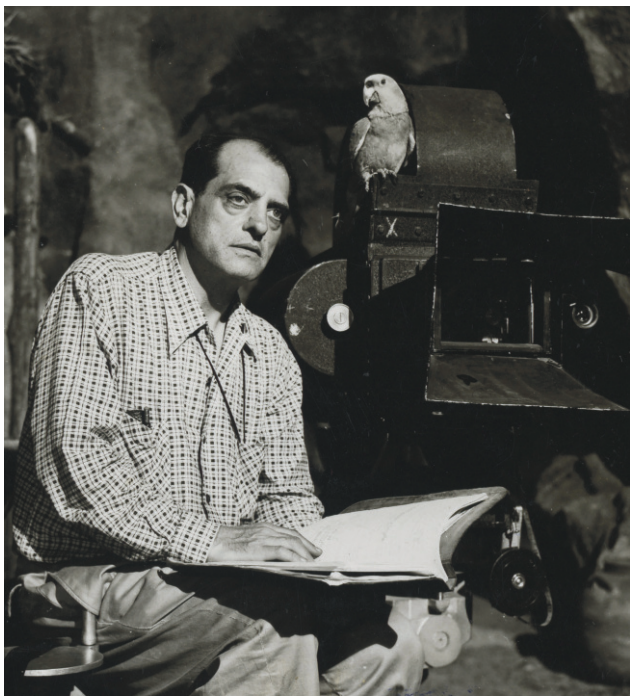


The discreet charm of the perfect martini

Nathalie Morris

Friday, 22 February 2013

Luis Buñuel once claimed never to have had the 'bad luck' to miss his daily cocktail: 'Where certain things are concerned, I plan ahead.' On the anniversary of the great director's birth, Nathalie Morris gets out the gin to recreate his personal martini recipe.



Luis Buñuel

"No cocktail – nor any mixed drink – has more mystique, folklore, legend and anecdote surrounding it than the Dry Martini." So says my 1966 paperback edition of Booth's Handbook of Cocktails and Mixed Drinks. And it's true – never has there been a drink that's acquired such an aura of sophistication and glamour, while giving rise to such a host of strongly declared personal preferences and strict instructions for how it should be created and consumed.

The cinema has contributed hugely to this, from Mae West's quip about slipping out of wet clothes and into a dry martini in *Every Day's a Holiday* (1937) to the insistence that a martini should be shaken rather than stirred (heresy to many cocktail aficionados) in films such as *The Thin Man* (1934) and *Dr. No* (1962). Whether James Bond's vodka-based drink counts as a martini at all is subject to debate.

Over the years a number of movie stars and directors have shared their own recipes for the definitive martini. The gin-loving Alfred Hitchcock preferred his very dry with just "one short glance at a bottle of vermouth", but the most famous paean to the martini is perhaps courtesy of the surrealist Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel.

Although Buñuel used the rituals of cocktail making and drinking to send up the pretentious middle classes in his 1972 film *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, he was himself a serious martini man. In his autobiography, *My Last Sigh* (1983), he waxed lyrical about the drink, confessing that it had played a "primordial" role in his life.

Like Hitch, Buñuel favoured the dry martini. Musing on the ratio of gin to vermouth he remarked that:

"Connoisseurs who like their martinis very dry suggest simply allowing a ray of sunlight to shine through a bottle of Noilly Prat before it hits the bottle of gin. At a certain period in America it was said that the making of a dry martini should resemble the Immaculate Conception, for, as Saint Thomas Aquinas once noted, the generative power of the Holy Ghost pierced the Virgin's hymen 'like a ray of sunlight through a window – leaving it unbroken'."

Buñuel goes on to offer readers directions for making his own version of the martini:

"Another crucial recommendation is that the ice be so cold and hard that it won't melt, since nothing's worse than a watery martini. For those who are still with me, let me give you my personal recipe, the fruit of long experimentation and guaranteed to produce perfect results. The day before your guests arrive, put all the ingredients – glasses, gin, and shaker – in the refrigerator. Use a thermometer to make sure the ice is about twenty degrees below zero (centigrade). Don't take anything out until your friends arrive; then pour a few drops of Noilly Prat and half a demitasse spoon of Angostura bitters over the ice. Stir it, then pour it out, keeping only the ice, which retains a faint taste of both. Then pour straight gin over the ice, stir it again, and serve."



In anticipation of the director's birthday (he was born on 22 February 1900), Sunday afternoon was devoted to following his carefully tried and tested instructions in an effort to produce the 'perfect' martini. Having only Martini Dry Vermouth in my cupboard, I dutifully went out on Saturday and bought some Noilly Prat, before following Buñuel's instructions to put bottles, glasses and cocktail shaker into the fridge in preparation for the following day.

In terms of the type of gin required, Buñuel specifies only that it must be English. We experimented with a couple, both suitably chilled. First Tanqueray and then Sacred, a newer and less well-known gin which comes from a home distillery based in north London. The use

of Sacred Gin seemed quite appropriate given a) Buñuel's reputation as a satirist of organised religion b) his above reference to the Immaculate Conception and c) that it was a Sunday.

We tested multiple versions of the drink, mostly because Buñuel's unorthodox inclusion of Angostura bitters detracted from the pure martini taste and made an alarmingly orange-coloured drink. Eventually we made a variation that was more subtle in flavour and colour, with just the vaguest hint of Angostura. This was my favourite of the bunch.

I must confess that I didn't use a thermometer to check the temperature of the ice but everything was very cold so we successfully avoided the horror of the too dilute martini.



The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972)

For additional guidance on consuming cocktails Buñuel-style, it was necessary to turn to *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. The film's famous martini scene confirms that "a classic cone-shaped glass is best." It also notoriously asserts that "a dry martini should be sipped like champagne" – and not gulped down in one go, in the manner of Maurice the chauffeur whose thirsty guzzling of the carefully assembled drink arouses the contempt of the middle-class guests ("no system can give the masses the proper social graces").

Given that Buñuel was himself an iconoclast, I hope he'd find it a suitably fitting tribute that by martini number four we decided to diverge from his strict instructions and rather naughtily add an olive garnish.

If you choose to celebrate Buñuel's birthday with a perfect martini or two, I'd strongly recommend going one step further and following your drinks with a substantial meal. With luck you'll fare better than the characters of *The Discreet Charm* and actually get to sit down and eat, and better than those of *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) and manage to go home afterwards... perhaps feeling just the teeniest bit worse for wear.

Nathalie Morris is Senior Curator, in charge of the BFI's Special Collections.

This piece is a fun way of celebrating the anniversary of a great director's work, providing an accessible introduction to the themes of his films. It received nearly 200 likes on Facebook. It's so far been read by over 1,000 people.