



Free

Welcome to the ninth issue of One+One Filmmakers Journal

One+One is run by a group of filmmakers and theorists who love Cinema and see it as a way to express and explore all aspects of life. We seek to encourage and contribute to a critical discussion of Cinema which goes beyond easy categorisation or detached theory, which asks of each contribution how it brings new light to the debate and breaks pre-established ideas rather than how it fits into the accepted moulds. Each essay, interview, report or debate holds the potential to expand our understanding of cinema and enrich our experience of it. Moreover, we are interested in reflecting on what cinema reveals of the world in which we live, and possibly to draw from our engagement with it new ideas and ways of living.

One+One is a space in which we pursue this exploration and invite others to join us, we share reflections and opinions about all aspects of filmmaking and film exhibition that result from our own work and hope that they will be of use to others. We have recently launched a new website where you have free access to all our past issues, and our blog. You can find it at oneplusonejournal.co.uk.

As another part of our larger exploration of cinema, in the past year we have also been developing various projects as collaborations between two or more of us here at **One+One**. *Savage Witches*, which is a feature film collaboration between myself and Daniel Fawcett, has recently premiered at the Cambridge Film Festival in September and in this issue you can find out more about the ideas and process behind the film in our interview with Bradley Tuck. We have also been exploring the territory between trash cinema and soap opera in our short film *Cesspit Alley*, a collaboration between James Marcus Tucker, Bradley Tuck, Daniel Fawcett, myself and Mikolaj Holowko, which will surely colour one of our following issues which is dedicated to Trash and Exploitation Cinema.

These projects not only feed into our writing at **One+One**, but they are driven by the same passion and have the same purpose, to use cinema as a tool for exploring ideas and experience. We do not believe in one set way of making films and are in constant discussion, questioning and experimentation. These explorations of cinema are grouped under the banner of The Underground Film Studio, you can find more about it at theundergroundfilmstudio.co.uk.

I hope you enjoy this issue. Please contact us if you would like to contribute to **One+One** or want to discuss anything relating to this issue or filmmaking.

Clara Pais

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One+One has been produced collaboratively by a group of Brighton-based filmmakers, with internationally based contributors and writers and is a not-for-profit project. Visit our website at www.oneplusonejournal.co.uk for back issues and our regularly updated blog.

'Letters To The Dead'

Notes and Reflections

Nick Hudson



It began as a simple narrative and was rapidly refracted through various media, behind which lay the idealistic intent that no one medium should dominate – the album, the book, the performance and the film – all should mutually augment each other in exploring the given story. The narrative springboard for the entire project was to consider the consequences of a mother abandoning her child for no other reason than her suffering a profound absence of maternal compassion – she was never meant to be a mother.

I free-associatively drew together other components – the father would be es-

tranged – never having met his child; he would be an author, at whose desk, moored on the rock-pools at the edge of the ocean, letters would be penned to his phantom progeny; these letters would be folded into origami sampans and cast into the sea. Here they would be intercepted by ocean-dwelling, undead, kelp-draped sprites – the metamorphosed incarnations of children abandoned decades earlier, who upon intercepting the letters assume that they are the intended recipients. It goes on to incorporate a Victorian spirit medium, a trial, and the banishment of the mother unto the very ocean that

gave home to the sprites for long decades after their own abandonment.

The record is complete, the libretto booklet is awaiting formatting, and the film will premiere in October in Brighton. The record boasts around thirty contributors, the libretto booklet features dedicated artworks by around six artists. The film is cast with many of those who contributed to the record and the libretto booklet. All

of the participants are diversely active in their own art practices. Many of us have collaborated in various capacities prior to coming together for 'Letters To The Dead' and not once have any of us exchanged money for contributions to each

“ These principles of self-determined action apply more than ever to the way I have approached making 'Letters To The Dead' ”

others art. There have been no invoices passed between agents, no talk of union rates and no health and safety assessment certification. I've always operated independently – I have always produced my own records, frequently self-released them, and increasingly I coordinate and programme my own performances. I've also been - for better or worse in some instances - my own PR agent and manager. These principles of self-determined action apply more than ever to the way I have approached making 'Letters To The Dead'.

In any era where a creative industry



grows ever-more hesitant to take risks, and where funding cuts have been implemented with barbarous insensitivity, new methods of working begin to emerge – via a necessity born of defiance. The bedroom auteurs take to the streets with a flare and a Canon 60D, throw their friends into bizarre scenarios, unleash a swathe of untrammelled fury syphoned through their own film grammar, organise their own screenings, print their own invitations, become vo-

raciously fluent in social media use, and barely even notice the empire walls crumbling about their heads.

The impulse to create is irrepressible and certainly more robust than any number of abstract economies whose phantasmal currencies and values fluctuate at the whim of a lepidopterist's prize. The success of any economy relies on the degree to which its subject is fetishised by those participating in the illusion/delusion. It's been a long-asserted conceit that a deity is sustained by belief alone. Once the belief expires, the deity ceases



to exist. Those that care not for material wealth; those who are sustained by what they create are well-armoured in the face of economic crisis. As I'm coming to learn, one can live and eat relatively cheaply if pushed. Certainly it seems to be the case that a certain kind of artist may well thrive in a period of recession.

The films of Derek Jarman - born under the draconian blight of Thatcher's government - were manifested on absurdly minimal budgets, and would indubitably have been less impactful were they not peopled by and crewed with his friends and allies - willing to work for lesser fees and bringing an energy to the screen that comes from intimacy, trust, loyalty and the intuitive dialogues only a deep friendship can foster. Jarman's ensemble operated more like

“ Each creative gesture carries a specific energy and weight and is to be celebrated for its singularity ”

an experimental theatre company whose deliriously charged actions happened to be caught on camera. Likewise the early works of John Waters, whose productions

were so rich with the left-field charisma of his troupe of scatological burlesques that they almost carried an aroma of (perverse) social-realism.

The process of making *'Letters To the Dead'*, in collaboration with London-based director Chris Purdie, is one borne of similar impulses. Having divested ourselves/ been divested of the bureaucratic strait-jackets of mainstream film-making - having no budget is liberating in that sense - we convene and deploy a collective focus in manifesting the required images as best we can. Resourcefulness, adaptability and dedication are of course pre-requisites in attaining any goal creative or otherwise, but I would suggest this is even more acutely the case in a zero budget production - defiance is again here invoked. We are filming with one camera, all within the confines of Brighton, using predominantly natural light - part aesthetic preference and part necessity. The opportunism and nature-imposed deadlines of using natural light and location shooting has us adrenalised and sharply-attuned to the demands of each scene, and thus far the results have been thrilling.

We were shooting a scene where the aforesaid trio of undead sprites emerge from the ocean, half-naked and draped in seaweed. Our cast - Karin (illustrator and poet, who also sings in the choir on the *'Letters...'* record), Luke (painter, the foreword for whose recent solo show I wrote) and Stephanie (vocalist and actress) - were knee-deep in chilly water, writhing against the sunset, the tide at its lowest. Obviously conscious of their suffering at the cold, we continually checked in on their discomfort levels, only to be repeatedly told that they wanted to remain in the ocean a little longer.



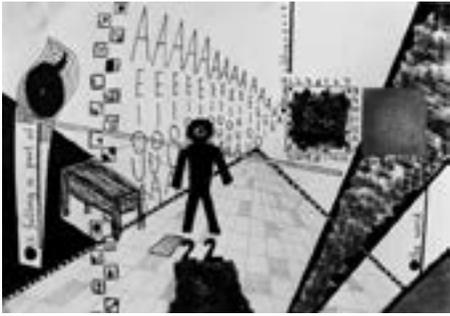
Rather than take a three minute dip before dashing out and embroidering a space blanket about themselves, our cast volunteered to remain in the sea for half an hour, proposing shots, angles, poses and gestures - wholly a collaboration, and for me the embodiment of the principles on which this article is founded.

Upon completion of this multi-tenta-

pled colossus of a project, I will throw a huge party for all involved. Each contributor will be given a copy of the record and the film. I've already donated music to various projects authored by contributors to *'Letters To The Dead'* and will no doubt be asked to contribute to other works in the future. I find that each collaboration leads to further, broader collaborations. A new economy kicks in, a mirror to the one which poisons, dilutes and strangles artistic expression; an economy of favour-trading and skill-sharing where the individual strengths of each participant constitute the value of the exchange. Whereas money looks and feels the same in anybody's hand, each creative gesture carries a specific energy and weight and is to be celebrated for its singularity.

Making *'Letters To The Dead'* - in all of its manifestations - is one of the most exciting and emboldening processes I've ever undertaken, and I'll admit freely that I take enormous pleasure in enacting it in resistance to mainstream systems of creative production. There have, of course, been moments where I'm prone to thinking things could be so much easier were I to write something populist and submit it to the machinations of mainstream film production (and one day I may even do that, for the education), and in these moments of reflexive malaise, simmering with loneliness and alienation, I consider the image of, for example, Robert Wilson, avant-garde theatre maverick, who somehow succeeded in independently staging *'Einstein on The Beach'* at the New York Met through raising \$1,000,000 through tireless fund-raising actions and tungsten persistence of vision.

It's highly improbable that this means



of creative practice will replace the committee-authored, arch-capitalist Hollywood machine, and most cinema-goers wouldn't want it to. But to know that we can achieve great things despite the prevalence of a weary, exclusive and risk-fearing industry is an enormously empowering sensation. Naturally, the industry boasts a certain omnipotence when it comes to marketing and distribution, but it's part of our role as DIY artists to consider alternate means of distribution that don't require cataracts of hard cash. Flash mobs, zine culture, guerilla performance actions, and availing oneself of cheap venues that can be converted into ad hoc cinema/performance spaces – all of these carry precedent as attention-grabbing manoeuvres. Likewise, many independent film festivals offer free submissions and are frequently a great means by which to get these homespun miracles aired.

The 'Letters...' team and I are now

considering all of the above as work on the film nears completion. We have a première lined up at Duke of York's cinema in Brighton, and we have rented a cavernous church in which we shall perform the entire record as the film is projected onto a huge screen, with staged sequences and a blaze of strobes and dry ice. We've coined the term 'Doom Cinema' as a genre tag on which to nail our output. With members of Seattle/New York underground bands Asva, Kayo Dot and Baliset all contributing to the project, and with an icy, portentous and slow-paced set of rhythms and textures underpinning the whole work, this feels both exciting and accurate. Keep watch for further developments...

'Letters To The Dead' will be premièred at The Duke Of York's Picturehouse, Brighton on October 28th, with a performance and screening to follow on 5th November at St. Mary's Church, Brighton.

For further details please visit:

<http://www.facebook.com/nickhudsonindustries>
<http://nickhudsonindustries.bandcamp.com/>

All images courtesy Nick Hudson

Savage Witches, Wild and Free

An Interview with Daniel Fawcett and Clara Pais

Bradley Tuck



Savage Witches is a recent film written, directed and edited by Daniel Fawcett and Clara Pais that premièred on the 21st September at the Cambridge Film Festival. It is a kaleidoscopic foray into the imagination, which follows the magical adventures of two teenage girls in their search for freedom from the disciplinarian and all too "grown up" world around them. They speak in unison looking straight to the cam-

era saying

"Let's not spend our lives trapped like all these slaves, They cannot see how fake they are, going around in circles to reinforce the lies. They dance like in a bad ballet and over-act like in a primitive play, Jailers and inmates all of them, lets break free, like wild creatures, Like *Savage Witches* wild and free!"



They are transported on a journey of magic keys, secret gardens and witchcraft conducted through a plethora of visual imagery and experimental effects.

Clara Pais and Daniel Fawcett are both members of the One+One editorial team, so I already had a sense of what I was going to see. I had seen clips, impressive clips I might add, and heard much talk about it from both of them. I had seen hand-painted photographs in their office, part of what seemed like a painstaking process of making a small segment of the film. I would come in regularly to find them editing some fantastically colourful and creative sequences on the laptop. I was expecting to be impressed.

There is nothing quite as unnerving as sitting in the cinema, watching a friend's film and waiting to be impressed. Suddenly, while sitting in the cinema, I couldn't help but feel that the film was somehow going to disappoint. I imagined all their hard work falling to pieces. "Oh my God!

I know it..." I thought "they are going to mess up somehow. It will be all fantastic imagery, but with no real substance" I continued to fret and as the film started I was obsessively looking out for the inappropriate effect, the lag in pace. But as the film progressed I felt increasingly seduced by the abundance of the visual delights. Each sequence was like a tasty morsel cocooned between more tasty morsels. I constantly wished I could rewind the film and watch a whole segment all over again. Collage! Animation! Montage and more. Each scene was so well crafted and so innovative. The whole thing was crammed with texture and colour. I got that feeling you get when you go to the art gallery and you just want to glide your hand over that rippled canvas; touch and plaster your fingers over everything. I soon realised that this film was not lacking content, the form was part of the content. The young girls' search for freedom overflowed and had coloured the whole visual process.

Q There was obviously a lot of work that went into this. Could you tell us a bit about the different effects, styles and methods you used?

That's a great response, a few people have also commented on having physical reactions to the film, not just wanting to touch it but that the film affected them physically somehow, this is fascinating. We wanted *Savage Witches* to be a film that almost bursts out of the screen and crosses over into life, we never felt that is was a passive thing to watch a film, physical reactions are good, the best films make us want to leap out of our seat and take action.

Making the film we wanted a process that was tactile and hands on, we didn't want to be at a distance, just telling other people what we wanted and letting them do it, we wanted to be involved with every part of the process from making props and sets to operating the cameras ourselves. We also found ways to affect the texture of the footage as we wanted to explore the material side of the image as well. This started by simply questioning what kind of camera we wanted to use and what could we do to the footage to make it work for us, we ended up filming with a

bunch of different cameras – VHS, DV, HD, Super 8 and stills cameras. A lot of the footage went through a few layers of processing, for example, the VHS footage was transformed by projecting it and cranking up the colour settings in the projector, then re-filming it off the wall with an HD camera, the result is that incredibly rich quality of colour and blurry edges like an impressionist painting.

We also made animations for the film which sometimes would originate from stills photos, other times from drawings or photocopies and even footage from which we would export each frame of a sequence, print it on paper, hand colour it then scan it back in. The burning sequence was made like this. We got right in there, inspected every frame. Working with single frames really alters your understanding of how films are made, we got right under the skin of the process of making a film.

Q Sound and music are intimately tied up in this project, they really add to the feel of this film. There are so many strange and unusual sounds there. Could you tell us a bit about this collaboration process?

The sound design was cre-

ated by Simon Keep and the music by Fiona Bevan. For the soundtrack the music came first, as soon as we had a locked edit we sent the film to Fiona. We discussed with her the structure and the ideas behind each scene and then we left her to herself and she started creating the music, we wanted her to be as free as possible and put music where she felt the film needed music. Fiona was very interested in finding ways of recording and processing the music that mirrored what we had done with the image. She then sent us this and we discussed with her what worked for us and what we weren't so sure about and she went away and built upon that. It went on like this, a back and forth process, until it was finished. Some things were finished very early on like the music for the end sequence, there wasn't a rough version of that, it was first take, we loved it so much that we kept it as it was. I think Fiona wanted to polish it up a bit, she even recorded an alternative version which was much slicker, and even though it was stunning it lacked the raw strangeness of the original which better suited the scene.

The sound design was



the very last creative part of making the film, everything else had been done and committed to. *Savage Witches* was shot completely silent, we recorded the voice-overs in a studio while we were editing but the rest of the sound was created by Simon. We went through the film building the sound scene by scene, layer by layer, using a lot of recordings from his sound archive which he has been building for years, but we also recorded a lot, all the footsteps you hear in the film where recorded in the studio, Daniel did Gretchen's and Clara did Margarita's, we even did the footstep

sounds for the chickens!

Q The film never adopts the pretence of realism. There is something fascinatingly artificial and theatrical about it. During the film we hear the actors describing their characters, at another point we hear them describing their frustration with the process and in another scene we see a storyboard rather than live action. In these moments the process intrudes into the "illusion" of the film and yet it still remains theatrical from start to finish. Why was it important that the pro-

cess appear in the final product?

For us cinema is not about trying to make the audience believe that what they are seeing is real, that these girls are really witches etc, it is about what we can discover and understand through the play of making films. We are all actors, we play the directors, the girls are playing at being stars, you are playing the critic – it's all a game, but that doesn't devalue it, games are how we learn, discover and explore life. There didn't seem to be much difference between constructing scenes and documenting the process,



the material was all there at the end and we presented it in the way that seemed to be most truthful. You could say *Savage Witches* is a documentary with fantasy elements rather than a theatrical film with documentary elements.

Q How do you think the actors coped with the process? Do you think this is the sort of film they expected?

Something that happened early on in the workshops with the actors was that we realised that the script was starting to become a hindrance, we found that the more the girls knew about

the film and what they were doing the less interesting their performances became, so in order to capture the feeling we wanted we took away the script and we kept them in the dark from day to day about what they were doing. This was incredibly frustrating for them and drove them mad. But what this did was it made them hungry to know, they couldn't hide this feeling of frustration and lack of control, the feeling of searching for meaning and purpose, this is exactly what we wanted these characters to be about. So reality and illusion blended to create the truth of the situation. There were

moments when they were very angry at us throughout because even though they had been told that the film would not be fixed to the script but would evolve and change as we went along I don't think they believed how far we would take it. For this type of film scripts can be a real hindrance, once people have seen them they cling on to them with dear life no matter how much you explain that it was just the starting point. I am sure the same thing would happen with producers or funders if we had to deal with them. We have no preciousness over the script, for us it is just a starting point, the first ex-

pression and the first steps of the exploration, it is a map of the territory we wish to explore but it can express very little of what it is to be out in the wilderness!

“ A receptive mind is a potential for transformation, a change, an expansion of understanding, for real magic to take place! ”

Q There are a lot of implicit references to mythology, the history of witchcraft and, I think, children's adventure stories. How did these things shape the film?

This is something which really evolved during the making of the film because the film developed in a way that was both following intuition and going through careful intellectual reflection. A lot of the symbols that we use in the film came unconsciously and their purpose and place either evolved or became clear to us only later. Things seem to always be dictated in part by the material in our unconscious, while making the film we tried to be as receptive as possible, to let those things flow and come out a bit more freely.

We are very interested

in myths because their language is symbolic and what we find appealing is that symbols are used not as dead-ended or closed meanings but as doorways to ideas and expe-

riences, something that can be both the instigator and the guide in our journey. The initial script had much more conventional elements of witchcraft and magic, in the beginning these were brought in as a device that we could use to break open the filmmaking conventions we were exploring, magic as an instigator of transformation both within the narrative and in the process.

There were also a lot of more personal symbols, things that we associated with our own experiences and memories. But we felt it was important to go deep into what purpose these symbols were serving, where they were taking us, and remain receptive to the changes that presented themselves to us which eventually revealed the bigger themes and the

more universal currents in the things we were already exploring. Myths and magical stories are usually seen as superstitions, simplified ways to see the world or escapisms more appropriate for children, but they go much deeper than that if we are willing to open ourselves to them, they use symbols and structures that are as old as humankind and therefore are intricately connected with human psychology, that is why artists and creative people in any area strive to foster and protect a child-like mind, both receptive and imaginative. A receptive mind is a potential for transformation, a change, an expansion of understanding, for real magic to take place!

Q In many ways the story appeared to play a secondary role to the visual experimentation. How important was the story to the overall film?

Savage Witches started with a script which had a fairly conventional narrative, it had a lot of the scenes which you will see in the finished film but there was a lot more explanation and going from A to B. As soon as we got a clear understanding of what was at the core of this explora-



tion, what its purpose was, then it became clear that some of the elements of the script had served their purpose and were no longer needed. Even when we had the script we intended to let this film follow the narrative of ideas rather than that of story, we wanted to celebrate the things we love about cinema, the play, the illusion and the artifice, the language of symbols and even though we love story-based films for this project it wasn't about telling stories as much as

it was about constructing narrative, looking at those pieces that make up a story and taking them a part.

Q The film was also very poetic. In the literal sense, you had written a lot of poetry for this. There wasn't really dialogue in the conventional Hollywood sense. But also in the visual sense. It was like a montage of visual poetry. What drew you to this poetic approach?

Cinema has been around now for about 120 years

and in that time it has been focused primarily on storytelling. Of course there have been those filmmakers who explore its other qualities and potentials but they are certainly in the minority and are always classed as outside or somehow alternative to 'real cinema'. One of the reasons cinema has maintained a fairly narrow focus is because it has until recently been very expensive to make films, this therefore has meant that those who control what is created are those who control the money. Early on it became clear that audiences responded well to story-based cinema and the money men of course responded to this by funding more story-based films until the industry was well and truly established and people's idea of what cinema is was well and truly tied up with storytelling. Times now are changing and the tools for making films are available for very little money and are easier to use than ever before. This should be the start of a rethinking of what cinema is about, various new languages of cinema could emerge, but before they do we have some serious work to do. The industrial approach to cinema is very much ingrained in our minds, even filmmakers making films



outside of the system without money and without anyone telling them what to do still obey the rules of the system and the form of the industrial film. It is time to dig into this, explore and deconstruct these conventions and see what else cinema could be. We don't have to discard things simply because they have come to us via industrial filmmaking but it is a time to question what they could be within a new form of cinema. And when we talk of form we are not only speaking of the film itself but of the process and world that surrounds it, the structure of cast and crew, the relationship to technology, distribution and the exhibition of the film. We arrived at the poetic approach out of questioning and experimenting with a form that felt right for our exploration

at every level, if a story film was the best means then we would have done that.

Q One of the things I really liked was that the film was subtitled "A Motion Picture Exploration". The idea of "Motion Pictures" brings to mind the golden age of Hollywood, with allusions to its archaic charm, its aim to entertain and its commercially driven agenda. But the word "Exploration" brings to mind the opposite: the experimental avant-garde. Do you feel like you are living somewhere between both these worlds? I don't know where we fit in and I don't think it matters much, whenever we talk to critics they want to know which boxes we fit into, we love all kinds of cinema and art and draw

upon anything that excites us. We love 50's and 60's Hollywood, Douglas Sirk, Westerns, Technicolour movies like *Duel in the Sun*, *Johnny Guitar* and the films of Powell and Presburger but we draw just as much on underground filmmakers such as The Kuchar Brother and Jeff Keen and people like Fassbinder and Jarman. Possibly the biggest influence on *Savage Witches* has come from the Czech New Wave film *Daisies* by Vera Chytilova, when we first saw *Daisies* it was a revelation, we found a form that was what we had been searching for!

Q What do you think you are trying to say (in the strong or weak sense) with this film? What is your "message" to the world?

We do not have a fixed message, *Savage Witches* is an exploration of cinema, of personal ideas relating to creative freedom and our relationship to the world around us. We tried not to consider too much how we thought the audience would respond and focused on creating our perfect movie, the movie that we wanted to watch and the experience we wanted to live through. Through it we have explored many ideas and at this point we have

a certain reading of the film from our own point of view, but certainly this will evolve as it has done during the making of the film, the film allows our understanding of it to evolve and our ideas to change and this is exactly what we wanted. The hope is that if we make a movie that we are really happy with and truly believe in then there will probably be other people out there who will like it too. Audience reactions are something to be very careful about, really it doesn't matter if someone likes or dislikes the film, it matters more if we haven't made a film we believe in. We are not seeking outside confirmation that we have done OK, we love *Savage Witches*, after 18 months of living with the making of this film it is such a

“ *Savage Witches* is an exploration of cinema, of personal ideas relating to creative freedom and our relationship to the world around us ”

joy to watch it on the big screen, it has surprises for us and even now it reveals things to us that we had not known previously. We have been on a wonderful journey and the film is our way of presenting the results of this journey to

an audience, and we hope that for the audience there is something in the sounds and images that is of use in their own journey.

Q Daniel, in the first issue of One+One you wrote a manifesto where you declared "My independence is better than your independence". I have heard a lot of talk recently about The King's Speech as an independent film and that seems far away from my image of independent cinema. Clara, you have also written on the work of George Kuchar and Stan Brakhage, both of which seem to be advocating a different kind of filmmaking. One+One and The Underground Film Studio have grown simultaneously with the aim of en-

couraging a different kind of independence. What do you believe this independence is and where do you see it taking you?

Maybe what we are talking about here is freedom. We believe freedom is to be at peace with oneself and to

be at ease with the world. We have found that through making art, specifically movies, we can experience a peace within ourselves, it is not about making products on the search for money or fame, it is about our personal exploration of the world. The independence element comes into play as a result of this, we cannot be on a truthful exploration if we have to pitch our film to bureaucrat funders who want us to explain who the audience is or summarise our movie in bite-size marketable statements, this stuff is crushing, it damages the mind, it distracts you from what is really important and stops you making the right decisions. If you spend enough time dealing with these people you'll start thinking like them, you'll find your inspiration suddenly becomes simplified and marketable, you can tick all the boxes and bamn you are in their club, sucking up after money and craving for fame, asking permission, that's the worst, we live in a world where you have to ask permission for everything, it's disgusting. It is important to remain independent simply to protect your own mind and energy, there is always a myriad of ways to do things and it's much more interesting to explore all of these

than having to ask permission to do things. We make films on our terms, life is too beautiful and rich to waste time with all that nonsense.

Q Funding at the moment is very difficult. With all the cuts it is hard to know what is going to happen to the film culture in this country. What was your budget? How did you get funding? And how do you plan to continue to find funding in these uncertain times?

Cuts or no cuts the funding situation in the UK is terrible, the BFI just like the Film Council will have you jump through hoops and sell your soul for very little in return. You cannot be funded by these people and have creative control over your project, you have to choose. Making a film takes a lot of energy and quite a bit of time, *Savage Witches* took 18 months. Life is too short to spend 18 months on something and then feel unhappy about it at the end, for the kind of cinema we are interested in making there is no way we could do it with those kind of funders and come out happy at the end. We crowdfunded our film, people would make small donations towards the project if they liked the

sound of it and had some cash to spare. These donations are not financial investments, they are simply giving it as a gift to support the project, we don't want to take any money from anyone who doesn't believe in us or the film. In return for the donations we give small gifts, tokens of appreciation such as posters, screening invites etc. This is the future of funding, the films' creators must be free. *Savage Witches* cost between four and five grand to make, start to finish, half the money came from sponsors and the other half we scraped together and put in ourselves. No one was paid and the film was made as a non-profit film, any money that turns up as a result of the film will be put into the next project. We try to have a minimal relationship to money, it's not that interesting, it comes and goes quite easily but rather than claw after it we prefer to focus on creating the film, we use what we have available and make that work. The filmmakers who desperately chase money and spend years waiting to make a film because they need more are wasting their lives, it's not worth it, making art is all about transformation, cin-

ema is magic, anything is possible, with or without a pocket of jingling coins, let the coins and cameras roll!

Q How can people see this film?

We have lots of screenings coming up, the film will be available on DVD sometime in the next year, the best thing to do is keep an eye on the facebook page, we post all the info about screenings on there.

Q What do you plan to do next?

Our next film is called *The Gun That Killed Cassidy! Or: How I lost my mind and came to my senses*. It will be a strange and beautiful journey out of the cinema to the end of the world, we haven't made it yet so anything could happen, it's very exciting.

www.savagewitches.co.uk

All images are stills from *Savage Witches*, starring Christina Wood and Victoria Smith

Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Obama

But Were Afraid to Ask Mr. Freedom

Marc James Léger

Accumulation on a world scale; the world capitalist system; the development of underdevelopment; imperialism and dependency, or the structure of dependence; poverty and imperialism: the repertory is well-known in economics, political science, history, and sociology... Nevertheless the cultural implications of such phrases and concepts are discernible – despite their oft-debated and far from settled nature – and, alas, they are undeniably depressing to even the most untortured eye.

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

“One year into his term, Obama in fact oversaw the killing of more civilians than Bush did in his first year in office”

“Well, I think that the promotion of freedom and democracy needs to be a central part of our foreign policy. It is who we are. It is one of our best exports, if it is not exported simply down the barrel of a gun.” These are the words spoken by Barack Obama to a

Washington Post reporter in January, 2009, a few weeks following his election as the first Black President of the United States.¹ In the same statement he praised George W. Bush's sincerity about democracy and human rights. One year into his term, Obama in fact oversaw the killing of more civilians than Bush did in his first year in office, thereby proving the Democrats' "security credentials" by increasing defense spending (which represents about one quarter of the US GDP and now three quarters of total global defense spending) and violating Pakistani sovereignty as part of the Afghan surge.² At

the close of the first term of the Obama administration, it is just as evident as it was with Reagan, Clinton, and Bush Sr. that the decline of the labour movement in the 1960s has signaled the end of political liberalism in US government policy, with work-

ing class consciousness being reorganized to support a pro-business agenda, which in many respects is directly connected to military incursions abroad.³ Since 2001, this has meant support for the "war on terror," leading, throughout the Bush years, to strained



relations with the international community. Given the deference shown to Wall Street in the wake of the 2008 financial meltdown and the complete indifference shown toward the Occupy movement, the plans for the indefinite occupation of Afghanistan, the pursuit of conflict in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and Libya, the covert collaboration with Al Qaeda in the fanning of anti-Shiite sectarian conflict in Syria and Lebanon, the persistent threats against Iran and China, the drawing of kill lists that target even US citizens, the killing of thousands of civilians through drone warfare, the desecration of the body of Osama Bin Laden at sea, the authorization of in-

definite military detention, the torture of whistleblower Bradley Manning and the efforts to extradite and prosecute WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Obama's 2012 re-election promises can be taken as the biggest put on ever delivered since William Klein's *Mr. Freedom*: "You want peace. I want peace." In the following I examine the reception of the DVD release in 2008 of Klein's 1969 film *Mr. Freedom* as a means to gauge the deception that has been the Obama administration and why a second term won't make much of a difference for those who cling to the liberal illusions of democratic materialism.

It came as a bit of a surprise to me that one of the most optimistic early endorsements of Obama came from the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, whose two short essays, "Use Your

Illusions" and "Why Cynics are Wrong" circulated widely in the blogosphere in November of 2008. In these pieces, Žižek reiterated Noam Chomsky's view that we should support Obama but without illusions, adding his own rationale that Obama's election represents a moment of enthusiasm that is part of the "the universal freedom of humanity." Obama remarked on this himself in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in which he invoked the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. as foundational to his achievement. The true battle, Žižek added, as though aware of the gap that sustains the illusion of Obama as "something completely different," begins



after the election victory and in the context of 9/11 and the trillion-dollar bailout. "The danger," he wrote, "is thus that the predominant narrative of the meltdown won't be the one that awakens us from a dream, but the one that will enable us to continue to dream. And it is here that we should start to worry: not only about the economic consequences of the meltdown, but about the obvious temptation to reinvigorate the 'war on terror' and US interventionism in order to keep the economy running."⁴ In many ways, despite Obama's initial appeal as the "most loved man on the planet," the worse has happened and we have indeed continued

with the predominant narrative. As Žižek predicted elsewhere, Obama became the "great conservative president," perpetuating Bush's authoritarian rule and doing the kinds of things that a right-wing representative would perhaps have had more difficulty achieving. Obama's Health Care bill shamefully delivered the population to the health insurance industry and big Pharma, and the US played an embarrassing role in Copenhagen and subsequent environment summits. The kind of "decaffeinated" politics that Žižek argues makes this possible among populations in the industrialized Western countries and elsewhere is the "post-politics" of today's liberal capitalism – a politics, it should be said, which has recently had disastrous outcomes in Egypt, Libya and Syria. In the absence of a universalizing political project, and with the hegemony of the view (even amongst progressive leftists) that democratic capitalism with a human face is the least worst option, what we have as a consequence is the predominance of market competition that is buttressed by an obscure technocratic managerialism and combined with populism.⁵

In December of 2009 Obama announced that the US would be sending 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan at a cost of roughly \$100 billion annually. This decision garnered many comparisons with Lyndon Johnson's decision to maintain the conflict in Vietnam, which came to a head in 1968 with the Tet offensive. However different the two situations, the similarities allow us to make another historical comparison, which is the cultural response to Obama. Whereas in the 1960s, cultural protest was conducted against the background of the Chinese cultural revolution, Communist Party directives and massive student protests following, among other things, American civil rights, today's progressive cultural activism



is organized against the somewhat shallow background of anti-globalization protest and the NGO-dominated World Social Forums. If Tom Wolfe could once report with dismay on the efforts of New York socialites to support the civil liberties of the revolutionary Black Panthers, the situation came full circle when people like Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, former members of the Weather Underground, threw a Chicago party for the celebrity candidate. It's no great surprise, then, that in 2008 the *New Yorker* dared to depict Obama as a Muslim terrorist and Michelle Obama as a Black Panther since there is nothing in the cartoon that would allow us to consider why it is that even to this day there is no shortage of new recruits for the Taliban.

The possibility of seeing Obama as unpatriotic is not only a stock Republican talking point, but also a "symptomatic torsion" that allows us to consider the possibility of thinking unpatriotically in terms of critical cultural articulation. One of the most trenchant critiques of US foreign policy as a Ubuessque farce is William Klein's 1969 film, *Mr. Free-*

dom, a comical spoof of American superheroes in which the character *Freedom* is sent to investigate the assassination of one of his acolytes by French communists. A pawn in the employ of Freedom Inc., Freedom sets off like a wind-up automaton to rescue the French from Sino-Soviet influence. The film was actually made in the midst of the student-led strikes in Paris and Klein did not hesitate to include documentary footage of these events to contrast (albeit confusedly) with the nihilistic rioting of Freedom's Coca-Cola cronies.

Like most cultural production that reveals to us something of our ideological makeup, there is an altogether uncanny contemporaneity to Klein's *Mr. Freedom*. Much of the same could be said for his photography and his other films. Commenting on the interest in Klein's 1950s photographic work in 1981, Max Kozloff remarked: "This poet of the epoch of McCarthy and the bomb is given a long delayed revival during even the more mercenary age of Reagan. And the lesson that the artist has to teach us is as explicit

as ever."⁶ In the introduction to her book on Klein, Claire Clouzot made a similar statement that the rediscovery of his films is a vital need for our times.⁷ Interestingly, these assertions, made more than ten and almost thirty years ago, correspond with comments that were made more recently. Richard Woodward of the *New York Times* wrote in 2003 that "recent events have conspired to give fresh relevance to some of Klein's films..., especially *Mr. Freedom*, his cartoonish satire of American foreign policy during Vietnam and the Cold War." Michael Atkinson wrote in *IFC.com* in 2008 that

'Like a missing-link hominid stepping out of the jungle, famous photographer William Klein emerges on 21st century DVD as the great bullgoose art film-era satirist we never knew we had. (...) The movies in the new Criterion Eclipse set are a revelation (arguably, they're the most astute left-wing mockeries of their day), but more than that, they appear to be timeless, and

"It's scary...that a farcical film this old can still be so right on the money"

their blitzkrieg critiques are just as pertinent now as they were then. Perhaps more so, since the brainless sociopathologies that Klein attacks have only grown more powerful and pervasive in the intervening decades, and precious few Western filmmakers today have the nerve to satirize the culture that feeds them. (...) Mr. Freedom is the discovery of the moment, if only because of its relentless scabrous rip through the Bush administration mindset (as well as its [Karl] Rovian reasoning, press conference rhetoric and homicidal policies) even more accurately than it

characterizes the American public personality during the 'Nam years.'

Chicago Reader film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum revised his 1989 critique of *Mr. Freedom* in 2008 with the following: "Could it be that almost 40 years after its original, unheralded release, Klein's movie has finally found its audience – meaning that we've finally caught up with it? (...) Maybe it took a George W. Bush – a full, real-life embodiment of Klein's ridiculous antihero – to drive home the satiric point." James Rich of DVD Talk wrote in May 2008:

'The anti-French rhetoric spouted by the Freedoms is again, eerily familiar. Forty years later, and the right-wing pundits are still saying the same thing, questioning France's fortitude and taking all the credit for carrying Europe in both World Wars. It's scary that progress has been so poor in all this time that a farcical film this old can still be so right on the money. (...) Given the current political climate and the popularity of superhero movies, Klein's candy-coated dissent should finally go down as the director always intended.'

On this, a few words should be allowed for Klein himself. In recent interviews, Klein makes the links between his 60s and 70s films and the contemporary conjuncture. In a 2003 interview he makes a typically sardonic comment: "Nixon's election was great for the film. When Carter came in, I thought it would be obsolete. But now we have Bush. Bush is exactly Mr. Freedom." In a 2008 interview he stated more generally:

'I was a complete anarchist. I couldn't

stand any kind of political party, on the left or otherwise. So I was really open to anything – the Muslims, the Black Panthers, and so on. I mean, I took them as illustrations of what was going on in America. I wasn't a Black Muslim, I wasn't a Black Panther. A lot of people say to me, 'Why don't you live in America?', and I say, 'If I lived in America I'd be dead by now.' If I saw Cheney and Bush on TV, and Nixon and Westmoreland and all those people, I'd have a heart attack every morning. I can't stand that sort of shit!

The interviewer responds: "It's right out of Mr. Freedom." Klein says: "It's exactly what's happening. (...) I see Freedom saying, 'Everything I destroyed I'll build up better than before, God Bless You.' (...) Well that's the way I think. Bush – can you say anything good about him? What can you say?"⁸

Lastly, Jay Bagler of the *Daily Planet*, a straggler in all these reviews, adds a contemporary note:

'It's disturbing how prescient the Vietnam-era Mr. Freedom seems in the wake of the Bush Administration's 21st century hubris – and it's still relevant even in the Obama era. In Mr. Freedom's opening scene, the hero breaks into an African American family's dining room, delivers a thundering lecture on the American Way, and opens fire apropos of nothing but the color of the family's skin. This weekend, I stopped at a Wisconsin gas station that was selling oversized stickers: ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT HUNTING PERMIT – NO LIMIT. Freedom, it seems, is still armed and dangerous.'

After all this, one inevitably wishes to know more about the filmmaker himself. Klein is not only notable for his early photographic work, which invites comparisons with Rob-

ert Frank, but for his original effort at making the first Pop art film (*Broadway by Light*, 1958), and for his brilliant documentaries and feature films that have been the object of both government censorship and rediscovery through film societies and cultural institutions. What makes mining the Klein archive especially rewarding is not only the artwork but also something of the author's political vigilance, with statements like: "If an election was ripped off like Bush did in Florida, in one hour a million people would march in Paris."⁹ Klein's early biography is also a pleasure to discover if one wants to find some tendentious signs of a creative talent: a fan of Daumier and Charlie Chaplin who interviewed Groucho Marx, Gypsy Rose Lee and Sinclair Lewis for the school newspaper; a reader of smutty bestsellers in drugstores; a guy who argued with friends about Gauguin; an insider who criticized his relatives in the Hollywood film industry for thinking only about money; a dreamer who moved to Paris to become an artist. From the start, politics was one of the things that Klein abhorred, and when he later produced photographic book projects or documentary films, the sociological always gave way to personal, visual or poetic emphasis. "Politics came late in my life," he has said, "with the US intervention in Vietnam. After almost forty years, the demon of politics got me. I moved away from classical cinema to put my camera in the service of those who didn't have any say."¹⁰ This is noticed especially in the difference between his satirical new wave films *Who Are You Polly Maggoo* (1966) and *Mr. Freedom* (1969), and such projects as *Muhammad Ali*, *The Greatest* (1964/74), *Loin du ViêtNam* (1967), *Grands soirs et petits matins* (1968), and *Eldridge Cleaver*, *Black Panther* (1970). Before making films, Klein worked as a photographer for *Vogue*



magazine but he hated the business. He used its resources to produce funky, confrontational, beatnik photographs of New York society that were eventually published in Europe thanks to the help of Chris Marker, who threatened his employer, the publisher *Seuil*, that he would quit if they did not support Klein's images. The New York book was presented according to the brash newspaper headline aesthetics of the *New York Daily News*: LIFE IS GOOD & GOOD FOR YOU IN NEW YORK WILLIAM KLEIN TRANCE WITENESS REVELS. Marker introduced Klein to Alain Resnais and other left bank artists who were fascinated with American culture. They encouraged Klein to make films. In 1956 he travelled to Italy to work on Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* and in his company he met Pier Paolo Pasolini and Alberto Moravia, who wrote texts for Klein's book of images of Rome. He later worked as art director on Louis Malle's Raymond Queneau film, *Zazie dans le Métro*. After shooting footage

of Muhammad Ali and filming Malcolm X at his house, Klein made a television documentary of the French electoral system and the discontent that people expressed with regard to politicians. The French Minister of Information and other government representatives would not allow the film to be aired and this experience of censorship is indirectly documented in *Polly Maggoo*. Almost contemporaneous with *Mr. Freedom* is Klein's "May '68" film, *Grands soirs et petits matins*, which was made while the film industry went on strike. In both its making and in its subject matter, the film is concerned with the question of how to organize revolutionary cinema. Students from the Sorbonne who did not trust television crews asked Klein and his wife Jeanne Florin to form the Cinéma Sorbonne. Not released until 1978, *Grands soirs et petits matins* is a brilliant document of the joys and stresses of the student activists as they engage the whole of French society in occupations and radicalization. It's also

a brilliant work of realism, a sober counterpoint to the worldless aestheticism of Philippe Garrel's *Les amants réguliers*.

Filmed before and during the events of May '68 in Paris, but not allowed a French

“ These last moments of the film render deftly the false choices that stand in as the wages of freedom ”

release until after all the dust settled, *Mr. Freedom* is the product of Klein's nonaligned critique of conformity at home and abuses abroad. The main character, a US Sheriff played by John Abbey (whose career was stunted by this artistic sacrifice), is a combination of Superman and James Bond. He is sent to Paris by Freedom Inc. to liberate the French from the influence of Moscow (Moujik Man) and Beijing (Red China Man, an enormous balloon puppet). A double agent, played by Delphine Seyrig, acts as both cheerleader for the narcissistic brute and femme fatale, allowing the forces of Anti-Freedom to invade his headquarters before the end of the film. The two main ideological weapons of the film are cheap special effects and colourful costumes – not all that far off from the protest strategies of today's alterglobalization activists. The top floors in the Freedom Building, in which Freedom gets his marching orders, represent various multinational corporations: Unilever, United Fruit, Standard Oil, General Motors, Aramco, Shell. The top floor is Freedom Inc., the address of universal capitalist ideology in its contingent, American form. After getting his feet wet with Marie Madeleine, at the American “supermarket” Embassy, and with Super French Man and his Ministers, Freedom confronts Moujik Man and Red China Man at the Saint-Martin Métro Station. Moujik Man

gets into a fight with Red China Man about whether or not one should negotiate with imperialism. “You know he's crazy,” he says, “He's capable of anything.” “If you think you can reason with him, you're the crazy one,” says Red China Man. “Sssh! He understands,” Moujik Man replies. “He understands nothing,” says Red China Man, “He will never understand. As long as Freedom is there we will never have peace. It's him or it's

us.” Christ Man chimes in but to no effect. Freedom fumbles his way out of the situation by accidentally backing into an exit sign, which knocks him unconscious. Believing he was the victim of an assassination attempt, Freedom decides to destroy France. One of his aids, Dick Discount (aka Dick Sensass) warns him that Anti-Freedomism is on the rise, with hundreds of thousands of protesters chanting “Freedom Go Home!” and warning that the working class will kick his ass. Before his penultimate defeat, Freedom makes a televised speech: “Thank you, you've been terrific! I'm pleased to announce that we've destroyed half the country. I hope you now understand that aggression doesn't pay. You want peace, I want peace. Some don't want peace. As long as they resist us, our security is threatened and our honor is tarnished. Negotiate. Help me, I'll help you. Amen!”¹¹

Among the ironies of the film, Klein collapses the thinkable and the unthinkable in the form of Freedom's biggest weapon, which appears at first like an atom bomb-type device. In one of the closing scenes, Freedom's “The Big One – Absolute Weapon” is placed above the dying Dick Discount as the latter explains the impotence of the Freedom forces in the face of what is, allegorically rendered, the declining rates of profit themselves. Freedom is

then blown up as the camera zooms out to reveal the remains of the gas factory at Saint-Denis. These last moments of the film render deftly the false choices that stand in as the wages of freedom. Insofar as *Mr. Freedom* could be said to be the “most anti-American movie ever made” (Rosenbaum), it signals to us today that the forces of Anti-Freedom should not be left in the hands of Obama and the like.

In his recent book, *The Enigma of Capital*, David Harvey accounts for how it is that the wealthy in the US have accumulated unprecedented amounts of surplus capital, taking the entire country back to nineteenth-century levels of economic inequality.¹² Because of the financialization of the economy, more people are unemployed and are having a difficult time making ends meet. Even middle-class households with double incomes are unable to sustain their way of life. Harvey says that in 2009 one third of the capital equipment in the US stood idle, contributing nothing to the creation of wealth. The financial aristocracy is presently very much worried about falling rates of profit but what it has done to solve the problem is find ways to steal from the majority rather than work to create responsible forms of sustainable growth. Through its manipulation of the state, this dominant class is systematically destroying most of the public institutions that liberals and socialists have built throughout the twentieth century. While the over-inflated rhetoric of presidents like Obama is easy enough to see through, and easy enough to compare to a character like *Mr. Freedom*, the contemporary relevance of the film should also make us reflect on the forces of Anti-Freedom. What have been and what will be effective forces of resistance to global capitalism also weighs in

the balance.

1 Barack Obama cited in “Elections Aren't Democracy,” *The Washington Post* (January 19, 2009), available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/up-dyn/content/article/2009/01/18/AR2009011801490.html>.

2 See the interview with journalist Allan Nairn on *Democracy Now*, January 6, 2010.

3 See Robert Brenner, “Structure vs Conjuncture: The 2006 Elections and the Rightward Shift,” *New Left Review* #43 (January-February 2007) 33-59, Tariq Ali, “Afghanistan: Mirage of the Good War,” *New Left Review* #50 (March-April 2008) 5-22 and Mike Davis, “Obama at Manassas,” *New Left Review* #56 (March-April 2009) 5-40.

4 Slavoj Žižek, “Use Your Illusions,” *London Review of Books* (November 14, 2008).

5 Slavoj Žižek, “The Future of Europe,” Lecture delivered at the Bled Forum on Europe Association, March 7, 2009.

6 Max Kozloff, “William Klein and the Radioactive Fifties,” *Artforum* (May 1981) 41.

7 Claire Clouzot, *William Klein Films* (Paris: Marval, 1998) 5.

8 Jared Rapfogel, “Mister Freedom: An Interview with William Klein,” *Cineaste* (September 22, 2008).

9 William Klein, “Afterword,” in *Paris + Klein* (Paris: Marval, 2003) Afterword 2.

10 Klein cited in Clouzot, *William Klein Films*, 11.

11 For a transcript of the film, see *Mister Freedom* (Paris: Eric Losfeld, 1970).

12 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The Realest of Monsters:

Ineffectual Oedipus and Capitalism in We Need To Talk About Kevin

James Marcus Tucker



The Brutal Drive

Experiencing Scottish director Lynne Ramsay's adaptation of Lionel Shriver's novel, *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (2011), it is easy to miss the fact that you are indeed watching a horror movie. The obvious parallels exist on the surface - *The Bad Seed* (1953), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Don't Look Now* (1973), *Children of the Corn* (1983) and of course, *The Omen* (1976). The fear that our most beloved darlings are perhaps not (or perhaps will not be) as full of sugar and spice as we wish, pervades the parental unconscious and has

been psychological fodder for generations of filmmakers. But Kevin is something different. Whereas Damien in *The Omen* franchise has the mark of the mythical beast, Kevin's "evil" can be said to come from nowhere at all. It is unmarked; its envelope has no return address. And unlike the uninvited demonic guest that inhabits Linda Blair's Regan in *The Exorcist*, Kevin's malevolent, sadistic and eventually murderous tendency is not obviously metaphysical. And any attempt to liken it to a slasher film, despite its numerous young teenage victims and the blood red motif that runs throughout, dissolves due

to the denouement offering us no discernable motive for the crimes. The lack of empathy displayed by our anti-protagonist makes him more of a Romeroesque living dead - displaying outward signs of vital life, yet inwardly lacking something - to our Symbolic and sentimental notion of it nevertheless - recognisably human. For writer and theorist Mark Fisher, it is this element of Kevin which makes him implausible. He opines, "In refusing to offer easy explanations, both the film and the novel collude with Kevin's ambition—but neither succeed in making him into a convincing enigma."¹ He likens his character to that of a pantomime villain, I assume to highlight the seemingly shallow one-dimensionality of it. For me however, it is this very aspect which makes it most compelling. It is precisely because of the pure negativity that Kevin evokes that we are reminded of a film that is most like *We Need To Talk About Kevin* in its menace; Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963).

Slavoj Žižek's enormously entertaining documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) sees him declaring the birds in Hitchcock's film (which start attacking the inhabitants of the small town for no apparent reason) as the "raw incestuous energy" of the mother figure who wishes to cling onto her son and disrupt a burgeoning love affair. The birds' inexplicable behaviour in the film parallels the mother's motive - that of wrecking her son's plans to be with a beautiful young woman and which threaten to tear her world apart. Žižek more importantly (for our purposes) mentions how the birds are a "foreign dimension" that disturb symbolic space: by behaving oddly and inexplicably, they shatter our already very frail identifiable/liveable sense of reality. He does not go



much deeper here, but it is this very aspect - this shattering of symbolic space and familial order - which I believe connects Kevin to the birds, and fundamentally makes him the most compelling and truly horrific monster. The desire to "humanise" our villains serves solely to assimilate the evil into our recognisable world: analysed, understood, treated and ultimately curable.

The motif of the family in its oedipal structure pervades *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, and like in *The Birds*, it is the family itself which is most at threat from the inexplicable, unsymbolisable danger. Queer theorist Lee Edelman has written about this particular threat in regards to Hitchcock's film and its societal equivalent. For him, meaning in our capitalist society has been, and continues to be underpinned by the notion of heterosexuality, the heterosexual family and futurity. He proves his point by discussing, without exception, the consistent reference to the "future generation" by presidential candidates in debates and



mother and protagonist of the film played by the brilliant Tilda Swinton. It is her story we follow - the narrative of her life flashing backwards to before her marriage and motherhood, then jumping forwards to her post-traumatic life of social purgatory, offering a collage of time that defies classical narrative. We feel at once as if Eva's existence is experienced staccato: as poetry rather than banal prose. She is a travel-

conventions. Ignoring the here-and-now, fulfilment is forever, continually deferred. Future is meaning, children are the future, and it is through them that we avoid social psychosis. The birds, for Edelman, are "the arbitrary, future-negating force of a brutal and mindless drive"² and his polemic reflects mostly upon the socially construed figure of the homosexual and its meaning-negating drive within a heteronormative, future/child oriented social space. Whether we describe such meaning-negation as a brutal eruption of the Lacanian "Real" or a death-driven "jouissance", this brutality of which Edelman speaks must be considered to be whatever refuses to "allow parents to cherish their children."³

If Edelman's project is to read into the phobically reified figure of the homosexual the drive that threatens meaning in such a child-centred space (a figure he cleverly terms "sinthomosexual"), Shriver and Ramsay wish to go one further and offer us the even more monstrous notion of the child itself as bearer of despicable non-meaning.

We Need To Talk About Oedipus

At first, we are introduced to Eva, the

ler, seen at the very beginning of the film revelling amongst a multitude of bodies, presumably at a festival, covered in the red of tomato pulp. It is a foreboding image, so reminiscent of blood that more than hints at the punishment she is to later endure. Eva is accustomed to smiles and new experiences here, and freedom and spontaneity abound. So it is a sharp difference when we become aware through the mise-en-scene of her much more settled, tidy and neat life of suburban familial convention.

After Kevin's act, around which the narrative rotates, the most fascinating thing is how much Eva herself is blamed - treated as the true cause of the school shootings. She is socially shunned, attacked in the street and her home is constantly paint-bombed. At work, she becomes the brunt of a cruel insult by a co-worker whose sexual advances she understandably rejects. It cannot be by accident she is named Eva, a name so similar to the biblical first woman who would become the scapegoat for not only the pain of childbirth, but the fall of humanity in general. Is it this heavy burden Eva has to bear alone? And if so, is the book and film an anti-misogynist tract? Lionel Shriver

and Lynne Ramsay are both reticent to lay direct blame for Kevin's brutality, yet they are continually planting the seeds of doubt. Kevin's birth is portrayed through blurry, disjointed images and sounds of Eva's screams. Next we see a portentous image of Eva sat alone in the hospital bed, as her husband Franklin holds the screaming Kevin in his arms. From this very early moment of Kevin's life, we can see that this relationship is a fraught, distant one. But why could this be so? We are left to wonder if Eva has rejected Kevin because of her regrets (which leaves her open to the accusations of selfishness and neglect) or because somehow, genetically, she knows that something is dreadfully wrong with her boy. He cries continually as a baby, causing so much distress to Eva that even the sound of a jackhammer brings light relief. Yet later, Eva is desperate to get some kind of fond or responsive reaction from Kevin in his playpen. Thwarted in her efforts yet again, she tells Kevin how she used to be happy before he came along but now wishes she lived in France. And of course this is America, so there could be nothing worse than France! Could Shriver and Ramsay

“ the...monstrous notion of the child itself as bearer of despicable non-meaning ”

be asking us to contemplate that Eva's failure to follow textbook parenting be the cause of Kevin's personality? But then as Kevin himself later asks, "What personality?" Perhaps these questions which are so easily and frequently asked by the audience highlight the extent to which we ourselves are implicated in the misogyny presented to us on screen.

Franklin himself (who it should be noted, nobody seems to blame for Kevin's behaviour) is an awkward figure - affable but unable, or perhaps unwilling to see what Kevin is doing to his mother. Bluntly, he is incapable of laying down any true Law-of-the-Father. On one hand, we are clearly outside oedipal ground here - ostensibly there is no affection between Eva and Kevin. They are, at best, "used" to each other. At worst their relationship is torturous and based on blackmail. Yet, it is interesting to note that in a sense, perhaps the truest relationship, and most honest, is that which exists between Kevin and Eva; for it is only these two who could claim to fully know the other. Eva wishes to explain her predicament to Franklin, but he is unwilling to believe it. Kevin's friendly and adoring attitude to his father is performed solely for the added trauma it will inflict upon Eva. There is no love here, but they know each other's secrets.

Kevin's position in family and social life defies convention, yet not because he can't get it right, but because somehow he already knows the rules to which he is supposed to be only gradually accustomed. On his sixteenth birthday,

Eva takes him for a meal and tries engaging him in discussion. She asks him how school is, but here efforts are re-

turned with insults - Kevin, it turns out, already recognises how this conversation is supposed to go, leading to the inevitable "birds and the bees" advice. But he knows it all already, and isn't going to listen to it. He even defies the tried and tested convention of slaughtering ones schoolmates with easily accessed firearms. Instead he uses the very bow



and arrow "toys" his father raised him to shoot at a target.

Perhaps Kevin's worst personally inflicted torment of all is to kill both his sister and father, leaving his mother alive. The question remains as to the motive for this decision (as with everything else). In one respect it is purely sadistic - a punishment to end all punishments. On the other, Kevin's negativity - his only true existence - can only continue if Eva is around to suffer it. We could read this decision as a desire on Kevin's behalf to keep hold of the somewhat hateful bond they have together. No matter how hard Kevin tries, this oedipal trap is not easy to escape.

The film itself opens with Eva's point-of-view of her backdoor at night with a white curtain, billowing in the wind. Behind which (we are later to discover as Eva walks through it) lay the dead bodies of Franklin and Celia - their daughter, on the back lawn. It is incredibly reminiscent of the shot Pasolini uses in his film *Oedipus Rex* (1967), where a curtain stands between a baby (presumably representing Pasolini himself) and the sight of his parents embracing and kissing. As he walks through the curtain (white, like the one in Kevin) he is confronted with the dreaded image which sparks off fireworks above the courtyard, and little Pasolini cries out and looks away. If Pasolini aimed to link the classic myth with his own family via Freud's complex in a sympathetic manner, claiming his own inclusion into the oedipal dynamic, Ramsay offers mere allusions. They offer little to assuage the audience's desire for a graspable explanation for Kevin who, it seems resists assimilation into oedipal injunctions. As a young boy, Kevin catches Eva and Franklin having

sex, then as a teenager Kevin is caught masturbating by Eva; but none of these typical oedipal games cause the detached Kevin any emotional fireworks, except perhaps a perverted pleasure for causing his mother embarrassment.

Refusing to Talk about Capitalism

When considering Oedipus, I argue that we cannot ignore its relation to capitalism - yet *We Need To Talk About Kevin* has very little to propose in this arena, and perhaps purposefully. For French writer Guy Hocquenghem, capitalism and Oedipus are a symbiotic relation, both manufacturing the other; "Freudianism plays a key role under Capitalism: it is both the discoverer of the mechanisms of desire, and the organiser, through the acceptance of the oedipal complex, of its control."⁴ Hocquenghem's project is a Deleuzian

“ Kevin's negativity - his only true existence - can only continue if Eva is around to suffer it ”

rejection of the oedipalisation of human desire. He sees Freud's notion as an ideological cage that serves a capitalist universe, imposed upon desire that is otherwise polymorphous in potential. Fundamentally, daddy/mommy/me has imposed such control by assigning a position for the child in language and family, leaving the Unconscious as the only space available for what resists this conformity. It would seem, for Hocquenghem, that to release oneself from the dreaded oedipal complex, one must release oneself from the capitalism that it shapes.

So it is here that one looks for an-

swers in *We Need To Talk About Kevin* - a film set in the country most plagued by such classroom tragedy, renowned for its unashamed philosophy of capitalistic individualism. Yet Ramsay's vision of America offers us little to work with. Unlike previous high school shooting films that aimed to discover the personal and social reasons for such events, the film abandons its social exploration as soon as it begins. In Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) we are asked to question how the social environment can account for such devastating behaviour. Moore's film dismisses the direct influence of music and violent video games yet asks us to contemplate the profit driven violence of America's foreign policy and devastating poverty at home that blights communities and offers little hope to young people.

There is one moment during *We Need To Talk About Kevin* that seems to nod in the direction of social explanation, yet somehow feels less than convincing. Once imprisoned, Kevin speaks directly into the camera lens to offer a "reason" for his actions and Eva watches on her TV set. Interestingly, he picks a somewhat lacklustre and unbelievable explanation, implicating the media and viewing public for their interest. He says, "don't you think they would have changed the channel by now if all I got was an A in Geometry?" But an explanation that resorts to an unsatisfied ego seems hardly revealing. It is as if the film tries to shoehorn some form of criticism for a monster-obsessed media landscape, yet during the film we never even see Kevin watch television media - he prefers to play outdoors and shoot his arrows whilst the rest of the family munch popcorn in front

of the box. Finally, the question regarding access to firearms is a moot point due to Kevin's low-tech approach to slaughter.

Eva's family exist in a somewhat alternate world from our own. Kevin is never actually seen at school, Franklin is never

“ Kevin threatened the notion by which we live: sentimental futurism ”

seen at work, there is no recognisable branding, no guns and a mere solitary scene where Franklin and Kevin play a video game. Most interestingly, a shot of Eva in front of rows of tomato soup cans at the supermarket is a monotonous wash of red, with a simple constructed brand on every can - "Ramsay's Tomato Soup". Whilst Ramsay explains this approach as a way to avoid product placement, it becomes reminiscent of a supermarket shelf you would have expected to find in East Germany or the Soviet Union, not a shelf recognisable to competitive, choice-filled America. Despite Kevin's hollow words, Ramsay doesn't wish to suggest that modern America could really be to blame, for her characters don't seem to even live there.

The Fear of No Meaning

It could be argued, politically, *We Need To Talk About Kevin* is asking us to consider the possibility that brutality and murder are unavoidable lapses in the Symbolic order – a kind of eruption of the Real that no manner of analysis could prevent. If we are to resist the easy temptation that leads to misogynist mother-baiting, the film leaves us with a sense of inevitability, thus it is a rather conservative approach to the problem that plagues the United States

at a disproportional rate, even when set against even closely aligned capitalist western societies. Designed to frighten, however, this conservatism is perhaps what makes *We Need to Talk About Kevin* a horror film par excellence.

Kevin's final act is considered so traumatic, less because of its Drive to destroy, but because of what it wished to destroy in its act. By targeting children and his own family, Kevin threatened the notion by which we live: sentimental futurism. As Edelman proclaims, futurism "generates generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence"⁵, and it is this repetitive narrative sequence - birth, reproduction, death, birth, reproduction, death, birth... - that Kevin so brutally, unemotionally, un sentimentally attacked. His very presence - a materialist demonic presence from which no priest could exorcise - turned the prospect of domestic bliss on its head. Speaking like a true Nietzschean, in the most telling moment of the film, when Eva asks him the "point" of owning a disc loaded with a virus which destroyed her laptop, Kevin replies "there is no point...that's the point!" Away from the easily digested demons, monsters and the living dead of our popular culture, this, it seems, is the scariest concept of all.

All images are stills from *We Need To Talk About Kevin*

1 Mark Fisher, *Implausible Psycho*, Film Quarterly, <http://www.filmquarterly.org/2012/05/implausible-psycho-we-need-to-talk-about-kevin/>

2 Edelman, L., *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Duke University Press, 2004, p.127

3 *ibid.*, p.114

4 Hocquenghem, G., *Homosexual Desire*, Duke University Press, 1993, p.32

5 Edelman, *op.cit* p.60

Adventures in... Elitism

Bradley Tuck



Still from *God Bless America*

"All Mass culture under monopoly is identical and the contours of its skeleton, the conceptual armature fabricated by monopoly, are beginning to stand out. Those in charge no longer take much trouble to conceal the structure, the power of which increases the more bluntly its existence is admitted. Films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce. They call themselves industries and the published figures for their directors incomes quell any doubts about the social necessity of their finished products."

Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.95

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously attacked the Christian and modernist culture of his time for producing a kind of nihilism. For all its grand ideas and ideals, beneath the surface there was nothing. Today we find the same nihilism in David Cameron, who wants to *rejuvenate* British Cinema. David Cameron wants British Film-makers to "aim higher"¹. His aim is to have more successful British films. Successful, here meaning financially successful and, British, meaning as much like American Cinema as possible. David Cameron wants cinema to become more commercial and competitive. Cameron is not going to invest in your meagre low budget art house experimental film, he wants the money rolling in. Bring on the

Still from *The Hunger Games*

age of British commercial cinema drivel. Get out your 3D specs and prepare yourself for yet another film written by Sir Richard Curtis, starring Keira Knightley, Hugh Grant, Colin Firth and Helena Bonham-Carter. What is more you can expect people to lap this up. An unhealthy anti-elitism plagues this country. With *Mamma Mia* being the UK's highest grossing film of all time² you would have presumed this to be common knowledge, but it isn't. We seem to have equated the view of being open-minded, accepting and anti-imperialistic with watching, and only watching, mainstream dross. We seem to live in a world of reverse snobbery. Once upon a time the snobs used to look down on people who didn't like art films, sophisticated literature and high brow "nonsense". Nowadays, it is the opposite: if you so much as look at a Godard film you will be branded a useless, pretentious, hipster and never again will your words be taken seriously. We are continually reminded to face facts, we all want money, things aren't going to change and anyone interested in art films is obviously pretentious and needs to chill out and watch *The Kings Speech*.

A perfect example of what is wrong with this populist culture is brilliantly captured in the

wonderful new film by Bobcat Goldthwait, *God Bless America* (2011). The film tells the story of two people who, fed up with this popularist mainstream televisual media bombardment decide to deliver justice by killing off "Celebrities" and "stars" who prop up and serve this mindless culture. The point that this film makes clear is that although this culture is "populist" it is in no sense in the interest of the people. It sells us limited ideas of fame, fear and encourages sadistic cold-hearted mockery. Criticising it may make you appear as an elitist, but beneath the surface this culture IS ELITIST. A discussion between Frank, the protagonist of the film, and his co-worker makes this clear. Referring to a boy with learning disabilities mocked throughout America for his performance on the fictional equivalent of *American Idol*, Frank's co-worker asks if he watched "that freak on American Superstars last night?" Frank replies that whilst he saw it he doesn't watch American Superstars. His co-worker responds with the typical accusation of elitism: "What, are you too good for the show?"

Franks response is exemplary:

Frank: Yes, I am too good for a karaoke contest that makes stars out of people

with no talent.

Co-worker: You can't say that dude, some of those kids have real talent.

Frank: No they don't. They have good pitch. They are relatively clean, they are non-threatening to little girls and old ladies. They have the ability to stand in line with other desperate and confused people. But I assure you they're talent free.

Co-worker: Yeah, well I bet 32 million people would disagree with you bro, cause that's how many phoned in to vote last year on the finale.

Frank: I wish I was a super genius inventor and could come up with a way to make a telephone into an explosive device that was triggered by the American Superstar's voting number. The battery could explode and leave a mark on the face so I could know who to avoid talking to before they even talked. "No, you're not going to be saying anything to me that is going to add any value to my life."

Co-worker: Yeah but it is funny, you got to admit that, Stephen Clark, that is funny shit Frank?

Frank: It is not very nice to laugh at someone who is not all there. It is the same freak show distraction that comes along every time a mighty empire starts collaps-

“ We are taught to aspire to be the next Jordan rather than aspire to change the world. In this respect, popular culture fundamentally serves the elite. ”

ing. American superstars is the new Colosseum. I won't participate in watching a show where the weak are torn apart every week for our entertainment. I'm done, really, everything is so cool now. I want it all to

stop. I mean no-one talks about anything any more. They just regurgitate everything they see on the TV, or hear on the radio or watch on the web. When was the last time you had a real conversation with someone without them texting or looking at a screen or a monitor over your head, about something that wasn't celebrities, gossip, sports or pop politics. I mean something important, something personal.

Behind the mask of populism a far darker reality lies, a deeper cruelty and elitism that produces unity via exclusion (or mocking inclusion). Just as Nazism and other forms of Nationalism creates unity at the expense of those they eliminate, so too does the powers of reality TV serve to create unity at the expense of humanity and universality. The perverse underside of this is the far more open shock tactics of the political right. Frank admits that he doesn't like them either.

Co-worker: How can you say that bro, 'cause maybe they're not "politically correct" but it's funny, Frank.

Frank: Seeing as I am not afraid of foreigners or people with vaginas, I guess I am not their target audience.

Co-worker: You don't get it, if you got it you wouldn't be so offended.

Frank: Oh I get it and I am offended. Not because I have a problem with bitter, predictable millionaire disc jockeys complaining about celebrities or how tough their life is, while I live in an apartment with thin walls next to a couple of Neanderthals, who instead of a

baby decided to give birth to some kind of nocturnal civil defence air raid siren that goes off every fucking night like it is Pearl Harbour. I am not offended that they act like it is my responsibility to protect their

rights to pick on the weak like pack animals or that we're supposed to support their freedom of speech when they don't give a fuck about yours or mine.

Co-Worker: So you're against freedom of speech now. Its in the bill of rights man.

Frank: I would defend their freedom of speech if I thought it was in jeopardy. I would defend their freedom of speech to tell uninspired, bigoted, blow job, gay bashing, racist and rape jokes all under the guise of being edgy. But that's not the edge, that's what sells. They couldn't possibly pander any harder or be any more commercially mainstream, because this is the "oh no you didn't say that" generation, where shocking comment has more wit than the truth. No one has any shame any more and we are supposed to celebrate it. I saw a woman throw a used tampon at another woman last night on network TV, a network that bills itself as today's woman's channel. Kids beat each other blind and post it on *youtube*. I mean you remember when eating rats and maggots on survivor was shocking. It all seems so quaint now. I am sure the girls from *Two Girls, One Cup* are going to have their own dating show on VH1 any day now. I mean why have a civilisation any more if you are no longer interested in being civilised?

Increasingly what passes as popularism turns against the ideal of civilisation. Just because something is popular does not mean that it is in the interest of the people, a point *The Hunger Games* drives home succinctly. If Frank saw the parallels between modern reality TV and the Colosseum, *The Hunger Games* runs with it. In this film, Capitol, the rich part of this fantasy world keeps its dominion over the poorer districts through a yearly sacrifice of two youths from each district. The purpose of such public sacrifices

is to quell revolutionary uprisings. The sacrifice, however, functions as a reality TV show in which each youth must fight each other to the death, and everyone can watch with fascination and excitement to find out which solitary individual will survive and thus win the game. The reason for this seemingly eccentric set up is given a rather familiar explanation. President Coriolanus Snow explains:

"Why do we have a winner? I mean if we wanted to just intimidate the districts why not round up 24 of them and execute them all? Its a lot faster... Hope. [...] It is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous. This stuff is fine as long as it is contained."

One can imagine David Cameron saying much the same thing to Simon Cowell after the London riots. I imagine him saying "Why does *X Factor* have winners? Why do we show the poor adverts of things they couldn't possibly afford? Why do we parade the lives of Celebrities (those who made it) in front of their faces? Surely it would be easier for us to put their noses to the grindstone and make them work? ... Hope. It is the only thing stronger than Fear. A little hope is effective, but a lot of hope inspires protests, occupations and riots. Hope is fine as long as it is contained to reality TV and Pop talent shows."

From *Big Brother* and *X Factor* to *The Hunger Games* the narrative of contained hope garnishes our pathetic hopeless lives. We are taught to aspire to be the next Jordan rather than aspire to change the world. In this respect, popular culture fundamentally serves the elite.

The distaste for elitism and snobbery in our film tastes is not a sign of increasing egalitarianism, but rather the contrary. In a world

in which the economy can only serve an elite few, a kind of populist halo must be provided in order to keep people stocking shelves and not aspiring. This, of course, is what Hollywood has done for years and what Simon Cowell's string of TV talent shows achieve with astounding success. Populist cinema and TV culture must increasingly hide its drive to turn people into mere beasts. We, the beasts, must work our lives away in order to consume a small segment of culture that will in turn sell us a dream of a life beyond our degraded misery. This, however, will always remain a dream. We must be kept working at any cost and our measly wage must be used as a medication to relieve us of the painful stresses induced via the culture in which we live.

That mankind might need a release from the pressures of life is understandable. We are told that people need escapism, they need the pathetic films that entertainment cinema churns out. This is, of course, completely understandable. In a society as dysfunctional as ours it is understandable that such films may play some kind of therapeutic function. But this must not be treated as a sign of quality. It is completely understandable that a Being crippled under the weight of an alienating and exploitative culture should find themselves driven to lesser forms of art that are less intellectually and emotionally demanding. This we can completely understand. But it is no reason to celebrate the art, rather it is a reason to pity the person.

When someone does raise their head from the trough they are called snobs and sometimes rightly so. Those bourgeois fools and fashion conscious "trend setters" who wear the straitjacket that dictates when to laugh, cry and applaud are pitiable as the beasts, forced to roam the factory floors. Their pre-

tence of class superiority locks them into a set of dogmas that already prescribes for them which art they must like and which they must peer down their nose at. If we pity the poor's lack of access to 'great art', we must equally pity the rich and the "hip", free to engage with any art they wish, but bound by the lock and chain of social conventions and their so-called "good taste".

But these showmen aside, we seem to have forgotten that mankind needs to aspire. Great things happened because Mankind aspired in philosophy, science, art, politics, therapy and life. But the problem occurs when aspiration and elitism are treated as synonymous.

In the film, *Richie Rich*, Macaulay Culkin plays a super rich child, alienated from the world around him because of his wealth. For all that money can buy it can't overcome the segregation that class brings. The poor are alienated by their lack of access to resources. The rich are alienated from their common man, who with their money they preside over. The film displays the universal misery that capital brings. But Richie Rich and his family are the "good responsible capitalists", they care for the workers that they subjugate. They give a little back and when the company is in trouble Richie demands that the money be docked, not from the worker's wages, but the wages of the owners and upper echelons. Nor is Richie a Classist. He befriends, with no obvious sign of arrogance or superiority, the children of the local estate. In many ways he is not an elitist at all. Yet Richie Rich is Super rich. No doubt he would belong to the 1% that owns the majority of the world's resources. His populist sympathies do nothing to challenge his economic status. He remains rich and the poor remain poor. He can afford to be populist, he is



Still from Richy Rich

part of the elite. He wins.

Walter Benn Michaels' finds a similar narrative in the TV series *Wife Swap*.

The wives who get swapped are rich Jodi (who has not only inherited money but married a man who make a lot of it) and poor (or at best working-class Lynn). Where Jodi spends most of her time working out and shopping ("me time"), with an hour or so a day for her kids (the four nannies do the heavy lifting), Lynn drives a schoolbus, chops wood, cleans her run-down house and spends every remaining moment with her kids. What do you learn when they trade lives for a couple of weeks? Rich Jodi learns that she ought to spend more time with her children. (When she goes home, she'll have dinner with them a lot more often.) Poor Lynn learns that she's better off where she is than on the Upper East Side; "Money," she says, "can't buy what I have." And poor Lynn's husband, with no one around to do the housework, learns what a treasure his wife is. The only one who doesn't learn anything is Jodi's rich

husband, Stephen, the villain of the piece, condemned not only by Lynn but by every critic who reviewed the show because he starts and ends the two weeks a "snob." In contrast to his rich spoiled wife, who has realized, she says, that "I have a little bit of prejudice in me against people who come from different worlds and live different lives" (she can't quite bring herself to say "poor people"), Stephen openly "looks down," as Lynn puts it, on poor people at the beginning of the show, and, although he unconvincingly claims "It had nothing to do with finance," he is still looking down on them at the end. He doesn't like Lynn's taste in food, in clothes or in decorating the house, so if the first point of the show is that moms should spend more time with their children, a point that every participant and every critic got [...], the second point—received with unanimous approval—is that the rich shouldn't look down on the poor, that the poor deserve to be treated, as Lynn says, with "respect." At no time, apparently, did it occur to the makers of the show, the people in it or the people re-

viewing it, that what the show really demonstrates is how much better it is to be rich than to be poor. Or perhaps one should say not that the show ignores this point but that it is devoted to denying it, and that it succeeds so completely (and this is its brilliance) that we find ourselves believing that run-down shacks in the woods are just as nice as Park Avenue apartments, especially if your husband remembers to thank you for chopping the wood when you get home from driving the bus. The idea the show likes is [...]: that the problem with being poor is not having less money than rich people but having rich people "look down" on you. And the rich husband is bad because he does indeed look down on the poor people, whereas the rich wife (the one who has never done a day's work in her life and begins the show by celebrating her "me time," shopping, working out, etc.) turns out to be good because she comes to appreciate the poor and even realize that she can learn from them. The fault here is not being rich but in thinking that you have better taste—more generally, in thinking that [...] you are a better person.³

As long as we are prepared to fight classism and not genuine inequality nothing needs to change. We are taught to accept the poor, and not look down on them, in the hope that the poor will learn to love the scraps they are given.

Neoliberal capitalism, ushered in by Thatcher and Reagan, and continued in a more moderate form via Clinton and Blair, celebrates the money makers as the true achievers and requires that the state be sold off to

this elite. In order to keep the rest of the people under the thumb an ideology is needed. For many right-wing neo-liberals this meant scape-goating the unemployed, the single mums and the immigrants. No better exemplified by the daytime TV shows of Jeremy Kyle and Jerry Springer. The poor must be turned into work horses and any failure to do so carries crippling stigmatisation. On the other hand, there is a tendency to popularise this supposedly necessarily elitist situation. In his path to privatisation of the university, Blair set up auditing schemes to check up on the universities in order that they work in the service of the people. Likewise Cameron

“ the forces of global capitalism indiscriminately usurp whatever culture is available. ”

ushers in further privatisation in the name of the big society. A tokenistic and largely counter-productive populism is brought in the service of the elite. "Do-gooders" like Richie Rich and Bill Gates remain rich. Patrick Bateman (of the film *American Psycho*) becomes the great American philanthropist and we are all submitted to the stupefaction of a *Glee* multiculturalist song and dance number. Populism is used to work in the service of elitism.

Mark Fisher has recently commented on this media trend pointing to how currently the media has a tendency to focus on stimulating superficial feeling, rather than contemplation and debate. What is often missing according to Fisher is genuine experimentation on TV. The irony being that in a post-Fordist society fundamentally based on risk, genuine artistic and creative risks become impossible. He points out that "It was the public service-oriented BBC and Channel Four that perplexed and delighted me with *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, Pinter plays and Tarkovsky seasons."⁴ In contrast, current TV, while shaking off the



Still from Dogville

shackles of the old paternalistic mantra *Educate, Inform, Entertain* simply panders to the lowest common denominator. As Fisher notes “In seeming irony, the media class’s refusal to be paternalistic has not produced a bottom up culture of breathtaking diversity, but one of increasingly infantilized.”¹⁵

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 Maybe one of the best critiques of this conservative populism is provided in Lars Von Trier’s *Dogville*. *Dogville* tells the story of a small village’s struggle to accept an outsider, named Grace. What is made astoundingly clear in this film is that evil need not come from monsters, corporations, authoritarian state programmes or dictatorships, but instead can be found in the everyday small (American) community. Evil in this film corresponds to what Hannah Arendt called “the banality of evil.”¹⁶ Evil comes from the common man who fails to think, challenge authority and overcome stagnant social routines. What is interesting about this small town is that there is a real sense of community, even radical forms of democracy and co-operation. We may even say that this village corresponds to what David Cameron calls “The Big Society.” There may be poverty, people may have their quirks and eccentricities, but there is a level of closeness rarely seen in late

capitalist culture. This Cameronian utopia, however, reveals its dark underside when we encounter the outsider: Grace. Grace needs sanctuary from the police and the Mafia and this puts the village to the test. The test for the characters is one concerning the possibility of giving, not only for the villagers, but also for Grace herself (what can she give back?). What starts off as a pure gift soon transforms into exchange; and exchange in to exploitation; and exploitation into slavery. In many respects it demonstrates the near impossibility of the gift in capitalist societies fundamentally based on exchange, but this film is also a parable about the outsiders and the excluded (Homeless, asylum seekers, the working and underclass) within the capitalist framework. In capitalism, big societies don’t protect such people. As we have also learnt from *The Wicker Man and Straw Dogs* small town big societies do not guarantee justice and equality. In fact, big societies of this kind are often breeding grounds for bigotry, small mindedness and xenophobia.

If this film is first of all a critique of right-wing populism, it is equally a critique of the liberal intelligentsia. Thomas Edison Jr., the philosopher and moralist, is largely impotent, delivering piecemeal gestures that do nothing to truly alleviate Grace’s suffering.

In the case of Thomas Edison Jr. moralism is a mere posturing, one that serves to give the impression of his own superiority to the township.

If Thomas Edison Jr. is the Liberal covert elitist with a genuine inability for self reflection, Grace all too readily accepts the goodness in all people. Her extreme Levinasian responsibility towards the Other does nothing but reinforce her role as a victim. It is in light of this that we should read Grace’s encounter with her father.

Father: It is you that is arrogant.

Grace: I am not the one passing judgement Daddy, you are.

Father: No, you do not pass judgement because you sympathise with them. A deprived childhood and a homicide, is not necessarily a homicide, right? The only thing you can blame is circumstances. Rapists and murderers may be victims according to you. But I, I call them Dogs. And if they’re lapping up their own vomit the only way to stop them is with a lash.

Grace: But dogs only obey their own nature, why shouldn’t we forgive them.

Father: Dogs can be taught many useful things, but not if we forgive them any time they obey their own nature.

Grace: So I’m arrogant, I’m arrogant because I forgive them.

Father: My God can’t you see how condescending you are when you say that? You have this preconceived notion that nobody, listen, that nobody can possibly attain the same high ethical standards as you so you exonerate them. I cannot think of anything more arrogant than that. It is precisely in our enacting of our responsibility towards the Other that we often enoble ourselves. Far from enacting a kind of altruistic elevation of the Other over our-

selves, such exoneration and forgiveness hides an implied inferiority of the Other. For example, the life of Jesus often appears as a life of giving, of putting the Other above himself. But such action always implies his superiority (this is why turning the other cheek is such provocative and subversive action.) The fact that Jesus is supposed to have died for our sins does not mean he simply placed himself below us, rather that we are always in his gratitude and debt. What may appear as a selfless act increasingly hides the aggrandising of the actor. In this sense, both Grace and Thomas Edison Jr. have an arrogant tendency to self-aggrandise; Edison, by adopting the role of moral tutor, Grace by adopting the role of the forgiving martyr. Whilst we can certainly sympathise with Grace far more than the cowardly, self delusional Edison, Grace still has a lesson to learn. The lesson for Grace is that there is nothing wrong with looking down on people and passing judgement, especially if they deserve it. In fact, we can only treat people as equals when we are willing to pass judgement. Continual exoneration is patronising and paternalistic, it fails to treat the Other as a subject capable of discussion, debate, deliberation and thinking. Continual exoneration objectifies the Other.

Treating the Other as Other requires judging them. The word “judging” often has negative connotations, but we must remember that prejudice, literally means to “pre-judge”. There are only two options open to us, either we carefully and reflectively judge or we remain in a pre-judgemental state – we remain within *prejudice*. Only by accepting that we are judgemental beings and then using that to help us make careful and accurate judgements can we truly take responsibility for the Other.

It is in light of this that we must vehe-

mently oppose the populist idea of “normal” or the moral majority. Quite often normal is not enough. As Arendt reports on Eichmann, an architect of the Final Solution,

Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as “normal” - “More normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him,” one of them was said to have exclaimed, while another found his whole psychological outlook, his attitude towards his wife and children, mother and father, brothers, sisters, and friends, was not only normal but desirable” ...⁷

Sometimes there can be no excuse for being normal, normal can be criminal. As Arendt makes clear in the case of Eichmann, being normal in no ways implies that you should not hang!

The perverse logic of tolerant liberal populism is apparent in Kevin Smith's *Dogma*. The film parodies the Catholic religion via the use of Christian mythology and symbolism. The story centres around two fallen angels attempting to get back into heaven via a loophole offered, unwittingly, by a Catholic priest, Ignatius Glick, keen to increase the popularity of the Catholic religion. As the film's title suggests, dogmatism is its chief target and Ignatius Glick is the main representative of this idea. In claiming knowledge of the divine, the Catholic church, claim dominion over what they do not know and as a result threaten the existence of the whole universe (via allowing the fallen angels re-entrance back into heaven). However, what strikes me as strange is that the critique of Catholicism doesn't come down to the common attacks (the abuse of children, opposition to contraception, complicity in spreading AIDS in Africa, their wealth,

faith verses reason, irrational faith verses reasonable faith). The problem of Catholicism, according to the film, is that they hold beliefs. Beliefs can't be changed, we are told, it is better to hold an idea, ideas can be changed. Here we see an inverted parallel with Galileo. When Galileo wrote *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, he was ordered, by the Catholic church, to present his view of the universe (that the earth travelled around the sun) not as a belief, but as an idea. By presenting his beliefs as ideas he was forced not to take a stand. By forcing people to merely present ideas, the church could prevent proliferations of belief. In the film, *Dogma*, this demand is reversed. The Catholics must be taught not to hold a belief, but merely contemplate an idea. Why this reversal? How did it come to be that the methods of enforcing beliefs used by the Catholic church would be used against them. What is implicit in the film is the dogmatism of this so-call “tolerant liberalism” which judges the Catholic church. Whatever reservations we might have of the Catholic church it is hard also not to be suspicious of Kevin Smith and the post-modern liberalism that underpins this film. Are they not providing exactly what Catholicism has provide for centuries: Dogmatism. When the civil rights movement happened they did not simply hold ideas, they believed something was wrong and acted on it. The same goes for many great scientists through the ages, they examined the world and altered their beliefs accordingly. To merely have an idea, means not to take a stand. It means accept everything (or more precisely accept things as they are.) It means “don't aspire.” To the post-modern liberal all grand narratives and belief systems are viewed as suspect. Equating belief with dogmatism is in line



Still from *Dogma*

with a populism which renders us subservient to the status quo.

It is hard to listen to Mark Kermode's film reviews without getting to those horrible awkward moment when he declares that he likes *High School Musical* or cried at *Mamma Mia*. Mark Kermode is a genuine fan of pop cinema, even that miserable filth that would make many aesthetically sane people's skin crawl with revulsion. But he has a few standards and a distaste for *Heat Magazine* is one of them. So when he debated the magazine with Miranda Sawyer on *The Culture Show* in 2009⁸ he did at least come out on the side of light, lambasting that filthy mag. Sawyer, with apparent ignorance of Kermode's film tastes, accuses him of snobbery. While Kermode says “that we should be investing in culture, art and politics.” Sawyer tells us that *Heat* is a genuine phenomenon that celebrates ordinary people. In this sense *Heat* embodies the ethos of populism that we have dealt with so far. According to Kermode *Heat magazine* implicitly says “First, care about these people who have done nothing, second care about the shape of their bodies.” But Sawyer understands it as

saying something totally different: “Don't worry about it everyone has cellulite, even the most beautiful women in the world.” The argument against Sawyer would seem to be that whilst indeed *Heat* does show that even “the most beautiful woman in the world” has cellulite, it increasingly draws attention to it as if it is the only issue that ever really matters. The problem with such populism is that it doesn't offer women anything to aspire to, except, maybe losing or gaining a few pounds. Even if there is benefits of hearing about so called “ordinary people,” it draws attention to them in a vacuum in which something to genuinely aspire to is absent. It is the media equivalent of a strong sedative that ensures your passive compliance. What is worse, however, is that critics of these cultural phenomenon are often branded snobs before any of the serious moral concerns have been raised. It shuts up the debate. It shames the critic before they've opened their mouth. It is as if people feel genuinely threatened by the idea that some cultural products might be superior to others. I'm starting to think that calling someone an elitist and a snob might just be a sign that you are jealous of their superior tastes.

• Film Studies courses in an age of austerity are now under threat. They must justify their usefulness along with the arts, humanities and social sciences. In our society this means making money or showing their likeliness to make money. This imperative underlies both the future of both film studies and film funding in the UK. Science, understood as the empirical natural sciences, justifies its usefulness. Persistent successes in physics, biology, chemistry, neuro- and cognitive sciences are a permanent fixture of our everyday world. In contrast, the arts and humanities appear to fall short in comparison. Determining what art is good or bad and its

“ For Wilde, populism was just another mode of domination, which suppressed man’s essential individuality, reducing man to a machine ”

meaning and subjective qualities appears imprecise and elusive when compared to the other sciences. Further, the history of colonialism, imperialism and discrimination may be enough to make you believe that questions of taste, of good and bad art, of the beautiful are mere dead remnants of a bourgeoisie-imperialist-nationalist-authoritarian-colonialist-Nazism.

But the opposite appears to be true. Increasingly the forces of global capitalism indiscriminately usurp whatever culture is available. “Provided it makes money, it is good” would appear to be the mantra that sets the stage for global capitalist “multiculturalism”. In a post-Fordist economy traditions are destroyed in the name of the market, but this market is also justified by an increased suspicion of experimentation and standards that exist beyond the realm

of money. If we don’t want to see Glee become the model of multiculturalism, McDonald’s the distributor of world foods and the Odeon the distributors of “world” cinema we must fight. I believe this requires defending the idea of superior art!

• That some art is better than others is an unspoken presupposition of almost every art institution, art education, critic and even artwork. The fact that an artist ponders their work, evaluates it and wonders whether it is worth showing to the world implies a hidden criteria for judging art. Most art galleries and Cinemas won’t just show anything. If there is really no way of judging art, why shouldn’t art galleries just save themselves the money and time and simply leave empty walls for people to look at? Film studies or art courses don’t teach you about every piece of art indiscriminately. The fact that certain things get taught implies that those teaching think that some things are worth studying and

others not. Judging a piece of art isn’t an easy task, but at the same time the experience of art appears to transcend the particular creative act. The fact that a piece of art can transcend a particular culture and a particular time is a miracle that reveals art’s timeless dimension. Art isn’t merely some object upon which we project our own psychology. Rather it is something that reveals, in a poetic manner, the fabric of the world past, present and to come. It is an integral part of human development and flourishing and to justifying it merely as something that “makes money” undermines our understanding of its truth. It is one thing to survive, it is another thing to live well and art appears to be a fundamental part of the latter. The philosopher Edmund Husserl recognised mankind’s need for “perpetual faith [...] in an aesthetic and moral sense of its cultural

life”⁹. As an ardent rationalist, he knew that this faith should be based on knowledge and reason. What was needed was a new science, “the missing science”¹⁰, as he called it, that would reveal the “a priori” truths that are rooted in the essence of man.¹¹ For the Human sciences to truly grasp the fundamental features of the human, spiritual world, they are in need of a science that rather than grounding truth in physics, chemistry and biology, grasps the phenomena on their own terms. “Art”, Hurbert Marcuse tells us, “has its own language and illuminates reality only through this other language.”¹² Without investigating its language on its own terms (as opposed to psychophysical, or economic terms) the ultimate and genuine meaning of art is lost. The arts are left without justification and are left to find and defend their utility via profit and propaganda. Artists however have often demanded that we go beyond this.

• So much for democracy! That the public cannot be trusted appears as the *a priori* of almost every TV countdown of the best movies as voted by the general public. Oscar Wilde once proclaimed that the “fact is, that the public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing.”¹³ Herein lies its propensity for evil. For Wilde, populism was just another mode of domination, which suppressed man’s essential individuality, reducing man to a machine. “Now Art” Oscar tells us “should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic.”¹⁴ Art is, for Wilde, essentially interconnected with aspiration, for it helps mankind to realise “the perfection of what was in him”. In light of this, his battle cry is *Art for Arts Sake!* Yet his Aesthetism should in no way be confused with the reductionistic formalism of Clive Bell and the Bloomsbury Group. Art for its own sake did not reside in the mere fetishisation of form,

but in the figure of the artist free to develop their individuality. “Art is Individualism,” Wilde tells us “and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine.”¹⁵ Art for Wilde must be valued for its own sake, because therein resides its most radical and political potential. Hurbert Marcuse would concur.

*“[...]art is “art for art’s sake” inasmuch as the aesthetic form reveals tabooed and repressed dimensions of reality: aspects of liberation”*¹⁶

For Marcuse, as with Wilde, the radical potential of art does not merely reside in its content, nor does it reside in its purely formal character, but rather “by the content having become form”¹⁷. With this in mind Marcuse opposes the realism and populism of orthodox Marxist aesthetics to the elitism and decadence of Baudelaire. Rather than attack Baudelaire in favour of a Marxist populist aesthetics, Marcuse follows Benjamin’s lead and called upon us to attend to the transgressive element of Baudelaire. In doing so Marcuse warns us that “Art cannot abolish the social division of labor which makes its esoteric character, but neither can art “popularize” itself without weakening its emancipatory impact.”¹⁸ Contrary to what appears it is “elitism”, not populism, wherein the greatest radicalism resides.

• The philosopher and film theorist Stanley Cavell argued that ideas of mankind’s perfectibility was a key ideal, not only underlying philosophy, but also literature and film¹⁹. If Oscar Wilde already upholds one variation of this idea, the novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch holds another. According to her, goodness and beauty



Still from Black Mirror - 15 Million Merits

are “largely part of the same structure.”²⁰ Art, for Murdoch, is an essential part of our moral development, its role, she tells us is to show us “pity and justice”²¹ and “to show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation.”²² Art is essentially educational and fundamentally tied to human development. “Art indeed,” Murdoch writes “so far from being a playful diversion of the human race, is the place of its most fundamental insight, and the centre to which the more uncertain steps of metaphysics must constantly return”²³ Art’s role is to pierce “the veil and gives sense to the notion of a reality which lies beyond appearance; it exhibits virtue in its true guise in the context of death and chance.”²⁴ But art as a path to moral enlightenment (Murdoch) or artistic self-perfection (Wilde) is given no place within the current aesthetic nihilism which justifies art only in terms of making money and pleasing the people. In art a far more radical potential resides.

In an episode entitled *15 Million Merits* from Charlie Brooker’s wonderfully dark, disturbing and thought-provoking TV show *Black Mirror*, Brooker explores a dystopian world

where the internet culture appears to serve as an absolute blue print for society. Life is a constant bombardment of screens which can offer you anything but reality. Porn appears every time you think of sex, you can play first person shooter at the shake of a hand, you can send people virtual gifts with virtual money you have earned by cycling on exercise bikes (which in turn powers all the computers). If you don’t keep your credits up you will be parcelled off with the fat yellow coats who pick up rubbish and are generally mocked on TV. The only way to escape this interactive virtual reality is to enter a TV show, where if you are lucky you might win the chance to be a singer or a porn star and live in the real world up above. It is hard not to see parallels with *God Bless America* and *The Hunger Games* in their scathing critiques of reality TV. But all this points to a manner in which a decentralised authoritarianism with open ended boundaries models its dictatorship upon control of our affective and cultural sensibilities. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt critique such a world, our world, in their book *Empire*. Their point is that whilst we have witnessed the decline of the sovereignty of the nation state, this does not mean that sovereignty does not exist. What

was once imperialism has been replaced by a more open ended, decentralised, deteriorating network of power. Hardt and Negri call this new power Empire. For all its differences, the transition from imperialism to Empire has not brought an end to poverty, inequality and wars. Many of the problems of imperialism still exist, yet no longer under one central, territorial state. They point out that “the distinct national colours of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow”²⁵. In this world industrial labour ceases to be the main model of social organisation and communicative, co-operative and affective labour take the helm. The smiling face of the flight attendant replaces the image of the industrial worker as the supreme model of capitalist production. Production increasingly collapses the distinction between work and leisure, under the watchword of “flexibility”, increasingly demonstrating the adaptive character of this system. This is the world

“ All attempts at escape are futile and soon even acts of subversion and protest are absorbed within the Media system ”

that Brooker captures so wonderfully in *15 Million Merits*. In this dark claustrophobic world the distinction between work and leisure really does collapse and the increased flexibility does not mean that there is more time for fun. Instead it means that every minute of your day becomes part of a never ending task. This is what Hardt and Negri call the biopolitical, the very social production of life itself. As Brooker shows, for all its blurred boundaries and affective sensibilities this society is as oppressive as they come. All attempts at escape are futile and

soon even acts of subversion and protest are absorbed within the Media system. This parallels Adorno and Horkheimer controversial claim that “Orson Welles is forgiven all his offences against the usages of the craft because, as calculated rudeness, they confirm the validity of the system all the more zealously.”²⁶ In a similar way, many protests, far from undermining the system, justify its legitimacy as *democracy*. Those who supposedly stand outside the system, often risk, in their act of opposition, confirming the system all the more furiously.

The alternative must be to find within life both the creative and subversive conditions which would explode, or at least unpick this world. If the world we live in constantly offers us popularism in the service of elites, we must find something different. This is far from a simple task, but it is most certainly a worthy one.

The Marxist tradition has often been associated with another kind of populism and at its worst moment too transformed into a populism in the service of the elites, but the best Marxist thinkers have often had a leaning to a different “elitism”. We already

know that Marcuse, following Benjamin, saw the revolutionary potential of the elitist art of the Bourgeoisie. But if this is elitist it is precisely because it strives towards a “new consciousness embodied in the work of art”²⁷ and this consciousness is in no way elitist. It is with great irony that what is called “elitist” today, often aspires to be more participatory, more egalitarian, and more democratic than those who call themselves populists. There rapidly emerges two forces, on the one side a populism in the service of the elites and on the other, those who fight for an “elitism” for

everyone. The latter may appear designed merely for a high-brow elite, but don't be fooled. That is precisely what the guardians of the status quo want you to think. As Žižek points out

*"This brings us to what is false about the anti-elitism of performance-arts venues: it is not that they are secretly elitist, it is their very anti-elitism, its implicit ideological equation of great art with elitism. Difficult as it may sometimes be for the broad public to "get into" Schoenberg or Webern, there is nothing "elitist" about great art—great art is by definition universal and emancipatory, potentially addressing us all."*²⁸

It is in light of this that we should reassess the dichotomy between elitism and populism. Alain Badiou, in discussing the relationship between philosophy and democracy appears to me to capture what is at stake. He points out that there is both something deeply democratic about philosophy and yet philosophers like Plato, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Deleuze and himself are not democratic in the usual sense of the word. According to Badiou "everyone can be a philosopher, but it is not true that every opinion is equivalent to another."²⁹ It is only in light of this that we can have what Badiou would call the militant of truth, in science, politics, art and love (or what I have been calling aspiration). For Badiou this is precisely what is missing today.

"Why is it in effect that today it is never really a question of man except in the form of the tortured, the massacred, the famished, the genocided? Is it because man is no more than an animal datum of a body, whose most spectacular attestation, the only saleable one, (and we are in a kind of supermarket), as we've known ever since

*the time of circus games, is suffering?"*³⁰

According to Badiou we are living in the times of a bad Darwin (with an ethical touch), where our only real purpose is survival. In contrast to this he tells us of Sartre's claim "that if man does not have communism, integral equality, as his project, then he is an animal species of no more interest than ants or pigs."³¹ What is missing in today's global capitalism is a project, something to aspire towards and it is precisely this that is often labelled elitism, but it is rather the contrary that is elitist to the core.

This is not to deny that great cinema comes in many forms. Great cinema can be found in B-movies, exploitation film, Trash cinema, Avant-garde and experimental cinema, independent film, world cinema, propaganda and Hollywood alike. What makes them great is their depth, their beauty, their commentary on the human condition, but that can come in many forms. The trouble with today's mindless populism is that it acknowledges no such standards, making money and pleasing the people are its only missions.

Increasingly the world around us is justified by the words "freedom," "democracy," "identity," "utility," and "choice," but such words are mere posturing if they have no relation to the quality of our lives. To live life under the light of truth, knowledge, virtue, justice, beauty and happiness is one of the greatest things we can aspire to do. Freedom is often a necessary condition for such a life, but to treat freedom as a mere substitute for a flourishing life is to fall prey to a mere fetishised abstraction. Freedom without flourishing is empty. The same applies to identity politics, both in its nationalist and multiculturalist form. If its celebration

of identity is devoid of any account of mankind's development it is useless. Against this the true philosopher taught the path to truth, the true scientist the path to knowledge, the true moralist the path to virtue and Goodness, the true politician the path to justice, the true therapist the path to happiness and the true artist the path to beauty and poetic truth. Contemporary nihilism brands all such aspiration as elitism. It praises keeping the peace, keeping everyone happy and serving the lowest common denominator. It disregards any greatness, insight, beauty and innovation as pathetic idealism and arrogant snobbery simultaneously. If we are forced to call what we do elitism, we will call it an elitism for everyone: An absolute stance against this arrogant populism. It is only by holding on to dreams and aspirations that don't make everyone happy that we can strive for the interest of the whole. It is only by attempting to overcome our aesthetically challenged cultural providers that we can overcome the induced stupor that numbs our feeling and induces apathetic subservience. It is only by being prepared to be called elitist that we fight the elitism that separates, segregates and kills. It is only by being prepared to make great, passionate, controversial, innovative and experimental art that we can fight for a *genuine* art at all.

1 See <http://wriggy.co.uk/2012/01/11/david-cameron-tells-uk-filmmakers-to-aim-higher-despite-cutting-uk-film-council/>
2 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamma_Mial_\(film\)#cite_note-boxoffice Mojo.com-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamma_Mial_(film)#cite_note-boxoffice Mojo.com-2) sourced 05/10/2012

3 Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How we Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. (Holt McDougal. 2007) Pp. 103-4

4 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative*. (Zero Books: 2009) p. 78

5 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative*. (Zero Books: 2009) p. 75

6 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil*. (Penguin Classics. 2006)

7 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil*. (Penguin Classics. 2006) 25-26

8 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/cultureshow/videos/2009/02/s5_e23_heat/index.shtml

9 Edmund Husserl "Renewal: its problems and method" in *Husserl: shorter works* (University of Notre Dame Press: 1981) p.326

10 Edmund Husserl "Renewal: its problems and method" in *Husserl: shorter works* (University of Notre Dame Press: 1981) p.382

11 Edmund Husserl "Renewal: its problems and method" in *Husserl: shorter works* (University of Notre Dame Press: 1981) p.328

12 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (Beacon Press) p22

13 Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. See <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/index.htm>

14 Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. See <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/index.htm>

15 Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. See <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/index.htm>

16 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (Beacon Press) p19

17 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (Beacon Press) p 8

18 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (Beacon Press) p21

19 Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*. (Harvard University Press; New Ed edition 2005)

20 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (Routledge, 2001) p.40

21 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (Routledge, 2001) p. 85

22 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (Routledge, 2001) p. 85

23 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (Routledge, 2001) p. 72

24 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (Routledge, 2001) p. 86

25 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. Harvard University Press. 2001) p.

26 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. (Stanford University Press: 2002) p.201

27 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (Beacon Press) p.7

28 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in The End Times*, (Verso. 2010) p. 272

29 Alain Badiou, *Democracy, Politics and Philosophy* see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-gjz2yORJk>

30 Alain Badiou, *The Century*. (Polity Press: 2007) p.175

31 Alain Badiou, *The Century*. (Polity Press: 2007) p.175



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- Broader social, cultural and economic issues for filmmakers
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- Social and political issues in films
- Contemporary Independent and World Cinema (This could include little known or important films or filmmakers from all over the world)
- Pornography and sex in film
- Art and cult cinema
- Activism and Filmmaking
- Film as part of a "Revolution in Progress"
- Underrated or under-acknowledged filmmakers or acknowledged filmmakers who have radically and experimentally broken boundaries in some way
- Redesigning cinema space and film experience
- Filmmaking and film in relation to cultural theory such as psychoanalysis, phenomenology, psychogeography, queer theory, body politics and Marxism

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