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Watershed January 2010 Podcast

The New Year prompts reflection on what has just happened and us having notched up a whole decade of a new century prompts wider reflection. There have already been a host of such thoughts and observations but what struck me and a lot of film writers is that it marks the first decade of the second century of cinema. Obviously it depends on when you think cinema was invented of which there are many arguments but for the sake of geometrical neatness lets just say the first full decade of cinema was from 1900 - 1910 (please note dear listener that this is neither a scientific project nor a rigorous academic exercise!) as a diversion I should say that cinéphiles are obsessed and absorbed by lists and particularly top tens. Why? Well, there is nothing like a top ten list to get a bit of passionate argument and debate amongst film aficionados. "But is it meaningful?" I hear you ask - well in some cases I think it can be if it is about considered critical engagement and ultimately about the value of things. The thing, remember, is not the list but what it says.

My question then for the second century of cinema 2000 - 2010 is this: "Have we seen as much innovation in the language of film in this decade as there was in the first decade?" Discuss. You have to remember that the experimentation and range of work produced in the first decade was immense and intense as the pioneer filmmakers explored the potential and possibilities of the new medium. The master pioneer was of course George Méliès who in 1902 took us on a voyage to the moon via the illusion that cinema creates.

And so we cast a critical eye over the first decade of this second century to consider which films will stand out as being innovative, memorable and/or groundbreaking examples of cinema. Over the coming year we will be screening selections from each year and inviting contributions and debate from a range of speakers. Please feel free to join in and email me your thoughts at mark@watershed.co.uk. We will hopefully be getting esteemed film magazine Sight and Sound and Bristol University in on the act. Precise details will follow.

I somehow figured the selection would be a relatively easy task then looked at a short list from the year 2000. These include such titles as Spike Jonze's **Being John Malkovich**, Lars von Trier's **Dancer in the Dark**, Bruno Dumont's **Humanity**, Wong Kar Wai's **In the Mood for Love**, Christopher Nolan's **Memento**, The Coen Brother's **O Brother, Where Art Thou?** (now you see that one I found hugely and unremittingly entertaining but should it get in.....) So difficult choices! At the moment my view is a stand off between Lars Von Trier and Wong Kar Wai and what we might do in February is screen both, have a discussion, and compare notes. Watch this space and keep an eye on the February brochure for more details.

Certainly two films which will figure in any self respecting cinéophile's 2010 list are John Hillcoat's **The Road** and Jacques Audiard's **A Prophet**, both towering achievements at the beginning of the year and lined up to be amongst the best of the year.

Hillcoat's may be a bleak and terminal vision via the apocalyptic novel of Cormac McCarthy's but it is brilliantly realised for cinema and one that we surely all have to reconcile with. As I write, The Copenhagen Earth Summit is surely going to prove inconclusive. Hillcoat is prepared, as we must, to visit one vision of what might be. If in facing up we can

be encouraged to behave and think differently then he will have succeeded. Stories were always really advisory morality tales – think little red riding hood – so think of **The Road** as a terrifying nursery rhyme for adults!

Jacques Audiard's **A Prophet** steps immediately into the canon of great films. Audiard takes what is now a cliché ridden tired genre - the prison movie - and remakes it from the inside out giving it renewed urgency and relevance. **A Prophet** is gripping powerful filmmaking. It absorbs the viewer in a way I have not experienced so completely for a long while. Trust me - and this is not hyperbole - **A Prophet** is exceptional authentic passionate cinema. See it.

The Road opens at Watershed on Fri 8 January.

A Prophet opens at Watershed on Fri 22 January.