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Watershed May 2013 Podcast

In a recent interview Cannes Film Festival Artistic Director Thierry Frémaux was asked about young directors making micro budget feature films.

His response was:

"Vive la Max Ophuls! Not everyone can make a film. Too often people aren't making a film they're simply doing the mise-en-scene – which can be very good – the only problem is that it lacks the words, the emotions, the outlook on the world, an auteur attitude."

I was struck by the line "they're simply doing mise-en-scene." This refers, I think, to the fact that they are only really focusing on the image in front of the camera not with all the other elements e.g. script, plot, and character development. In effect not actually saying anything but simply showing something.

You could argue that it is an archetypal French response. They after all established the Auteur as the pinnacle of the filmmaking creative process.

Famously in the 1950s in the seminal French film journal Cahiers du Cinema under the editorship of Andre Bazin they published a landmark articles *Les Politique des Auteurs* which divided the world into two filmmaking types. One glorious side were the Auteurs - John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Jean Renoir, Howard Hawks for example - directors who were in complete control of the medium and whose work carried from film to film deeper consistent themes. In effect a cinematic world view which would be characterised by their surnames becoming adjectives - Wellsian, Fordian.

And in the other, duller, corner were Metteur en Scenes: directors or rather "stagers" who simply made one film then another with no deeper message or stylistic consistency. A safe pair of hands perhaps but not saying anything

of note. Famously Francois Truffaut as a young firebrand film critic said a bad Jean Renoir movie would always be more interesting than the best of any film by Jean Delannoy.

If you look at the line up of this year's Cannes Film Festival you can see the auteur theory still very much in evidence. New films by established figures like

Francois Ozon

Takashi Miike

Alexander Payne

Mahamat-saleh Haroun

Coen Brothers

Arnaud Desplechin

James Gray

The latter certainly strikes me as a prime example of the festival adopting the Truffaut position that a bad James Gray film is more interesting than a good film by say Taylor Hackford.

I will be reporting direct from this year's Festival - well tweeting actually - discovering the newest titles from both auteurs and metteur en scenes to hopefully bring to Watershed and Bristol audiences.

You can follow me on twitter @msc45 or via watershed.co.uk/dshed.

Someone who would most definitely be in the Auteur camp is Spanish filmmaker **Pedro Almodovar** who is probably the highest profile, most well known and recognised foreign language film director of his generation. The release of a new Almodovar film is an event similar to how a Hitchcock or a Bergman film was received in the 1950s. Almodovar's recent films speak of sumptuous Elegance and glamorous quality. However you always have to remember that Almodovar comes from a punk attitude albeit of a very Spanish camp glam rock vintage.

In Madrid in the 1970s a time when Spain was living under Franco, a dictator who had maintained a tight conservative control over the country since the

Spanish civil war, the young Almodovar was making super 8 films and showing them in the underground Madrid club scene. The films had no sound with Almodovar providing the dialogue live and cassette tapes for music. He became a key figure of what became La Movida Madrileña scene which flourished when Franco died in 1975. With the old dictator dead Almodovar's radical renaissance came to the fore. His first feature film - still shot on super 8 - was *Folle, folle, fólleme, Tim* (1978) (I'll leave you to work out the translation). With transgression and compassion at their heart films like *Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (What Have I done to Deserve This? 1984) and *La Ley del Deseo* (Law of Desire, 1987) reached beyond Spain and the name of Pedro Almodovar flashed first across the film festival world then with *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (Woman on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown 1988) into international arthouse success.

In the 90s he became THE quality European auteur. Yes his films still had delirious transgression at their core but now wrapped up in stylish cinematic elegance. A premier at the main competition in Cannes was a regular occurrence with avid cinephiles and critics waiting for *Un Film De Almodovar*. (Like Hitchcock and Bergman before him the surname was all that was necessary) His films even crossed over into the mainstream of UK cinema with *Todo Sobre mi Madre* (All About My Mother 1999) playing in multiplexes. A phenomenal achievement for a European director working in their own language made all the more exceptional when you think that film featured amongst others a transsexual prostitute and a pregnant nun.

So I was a little surprised to see that the new film de Almodovar *Los amantes pasajeros* (**I'm So Excited!**) was not being feted with a high profile screening at Cannes. However having seen the film I can see that he has returned to his punk subversive playful roots with a delightfully bawdy comedy. Imagine John Waters and Luis Bunuel getting together to make a Carry On film and you will get a sense of what is in store or simply imagine Almodovar having libidinous intoxicating cinematic fun.

It opens at Watershed on Fri 3 May and you can join the Peninsula Crew After Party on the evening of the Sat 4 May (22:30 til late) at Watershed Café/Bar.

For more information on I'm So Excited! Visit:

<http://www.watershed.co.uk/whatson/4187/im-so-excited/>

For more information on the Peninsula Crew After Party visit:

<http://www.watershed.co.uk/whatson/4199/peninsula-crew-after-party/>