A reader comments on films and filmmakers

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To *WSWS* arts editor David Walsh,

Some of the directors I have the utmost respect for are Howard Hawks, Michael Powell, George Cukor, Luchino Visconti, Max Ophuls and Nicholas Ray. I tend to like individual films more than particular directors, however, so I would not consider myself an auterist in the strict Andrew Sarris sense.

Some films I like which come immediately to mind are: *Raising Arizona*, *Das Boot*, *Queen Margot* (1994), *Drugstore Cowboy*, *The 400 Blows*, *Red River*, *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *The Wages of Fear*, *Onibaba*, *His Girl Friday*, *Tabu* (1931), *Pandora's Box* (1929), *Olympia* (1938), *Le Dernier Combat* (1983), *A Room With a View*, *Breathless* (1959), *Johnny Guitar*, *Rear Window*, *Air Force*, *Un Chant D'Amour* (1950), Andy Warhol's *Trash* (1970), *Thief of Baghdad* (1940), *La Ronde* (1950), *The Earrings of Madame De...*, *Moonstruck*, *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) and *Scorpio Rising*.

I also recently watched Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* and *Black Robe* and found them very interesting, although I can't vouch for how historically accurate they were. He certainly strikes me as a more rigorously intelligent and robust director than Peter Weir.

I love Gus Van Sant's first three films, but have not cared for anything past *My Own Private Idaho*. He staked out unfamiliar territory with those low-life dramas and found the right mixture of humor, tragedy and most importantly humanity. That's a quality I find lacking in many of today's films. Not the manipulative, sentimental, mechanically produced emotion of a Spielberg film, but the honest, unforced humanity of someone like Howard Hawks.

I am constantly re-watching and re-evaluating films and so naturally my opinions on particular filmmakers have evolved over time. As it has been some time since I've viewed some of the films on this list I have no doubt that my opinion may be different if I were to view them again today. Almost no film is perfect and I am not blind to the perceivable flaws in many of these works. It's too easy to run off a list of films like *Citizen Kane* and *L'Avventura*, however, in an attempt to remain respectable and inside the accepted critical parameters.

I admit to preferring the stylization of Powell and Ophuls to the dishonest sentimentality of a Ford or Capra. I also find it hard to acknowledge as great directors those who replace humanism with a gaudy, self-indulgent visual style--people like Peter Greenaway, Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell. Although I haven't written off David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* pilot quite yet, I fear that he too may eventually fall into this category. Certainly, nothing he has done since the pilot for that television series has merited any serious consideration whatsoever. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, *Wild at Heart* and *Lost Highway* all strike me as thoroughly bad films in spite of some inspired imagery in his last.

I think it's important to analyze a film from all perspectives and you seem to do that very well in your reviews. Your analysis of *Saving Private Ryan* is a superlative example of this in the way you integrated facts regarding World War Two into the review. I don't have the space here to go into all of the reasons why I dislike Spielberg's work so much, but suffice to say that he shares many of the defects of other "brat-pack" directors like Scorsese, Lucas and even the prodigiously talented Coppola. Your comment about his being too complacent or content with the world and his place in it was right on. The lack of loose ends or ambiguity suits his earlier escapist entertainment fine, but is not appropriate for the kinds of grand statements and issues he is taking on today.

JJ

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