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March 07 - Watershed Podcast Transcript

This month – March 07 – marks the 200th anniversary of the slave trade abolition act. The driving force in this act was William Wilberforce MP for Hull. His campaigning for reform through parliament is portrayed in the new film **Amazing Grace** opening to mark the occasion.

I have to say I approached this film with a bit of caution when I saw it at the Toronto Film Festival last year. It seems to me it would be folly to see the abolition of the slave trade as purely the results of one man. We've been having some intense debates here in Bristol sparked by the imminent centenary and how to mark the occasion. Bristol's involvement in and money made from the slave trade was fulsome to say the least. This bloody and morally bankrupt trade is intertwined with the very fabric of Bristol's history.

First of all the film is directed by Michael Apter and he is not naïve when it comes to social issues, having directed the 7up series of ground breaking documentaries following the lives of people from the 1960s and films such as **Incident at Oglala** and **Thunderheart**. The resulting film, for me, is much more than the great (white) man theory of history but rather an astute insight into the workings of our great democratic parliament. **Amazing Grace** shows Wilberforce and other abolitionists trying to get the ethical and moral position of banning the slave trade through the House of Commons. And how did they do it? Through closing tax loopholes – and it took them 18 years to get the royal seal. The film made me think about contemporary politics, what the driving forces are behind politics, the role of big business – the argument at the time was that the economy would be ruined if the slave trade were abolished – and how capitalism and morality do not sit easily together in politics. I was thinking that it will take a tax law for business to address climate change. In **Amazing Grace** Michael Apter has paid due to the abolitionists and Wilberforce but also raised pertinent questions about contemporary politics – no mean feat. The film also has the pleasure of a terrific performance from Michael Gambon – not as Wilberforce mind you.

As part of the ongoing discussion here at Watershed we are holding a talk on Sat 24th March on **Slavery and the Cinematic Imagination** with writer and curator Karen Alexander. Karen will be looking at films such as D.W. Griffiths **Birth of Nation**, **Gone with the Wind** and Lars von Trier's **Manderlay**.

Amazing Grace opens on Fri 23 March until Thu 5 April.

Now once upon a time there was a boy named David. It was a hot balmy sunny day and he went for a walk in the park. Out of the corner of his little eye he noticed something in the grass, it was small, was it moving? It might be. Was it a human body part, it might be – maybe a finger or an ear. David found a stick and poked it, ants ran off it and revealed it was indeed a bit of someone's ear. Maybe this is a dream he thought, maybe I've been watching too many Bunuel films he thought, maybe I should make my own films he thought.

This may or may not be an episode from David Lynch's childhood. Lynch himself describes his route into filmmaking thus – quote from Sight and Sound interview.

'His new film **Inland Empire** pushes not only the surreal storytelling so typical and unique of Lynch but also sees him using the quality of the image in a much more painterly way. I had a weird experience with one of Lynch's earlier films **Lost Highway**. I saw it as the surprise film at a festival. I knew nothing about it, I was mesmerized, bewildered and terrified in equal measure. I confess to leaving the film with a pounding headache. It was the best headache I had ever had. Lynch films do that to you.'

In a recent Guardian interview at the National Film Theatre Lynch talks about the influence of painters Edward Hopper and Francis Bacon. And it makes sense, You can indeed see and feel the lyrical melancholy of Hopper and the violent disturbing intensity of Bacon throughout Lynch's work. Just think of Jack Nance's character in **Eraserhead** or Dennis Hopper's psychotic Frank in **Blue Velvet** – maybe both influences come together in **The Elephant Man**?

His surreal dreamy disturbing new film **Inland Empire** took root in work Lynch was doing for his own website **davidlynch.com**. Shooting on a relatively domestic digital camera and putting the results on his website kept Lynch working and thinking whilst probably trying to secure funding for the next feature. The results with the help of Laura Dern grew from a web project into a fully fledged fantastic 3 hour cinematic journey into a distinctly Lynchian universe. Be warned it may well all make sense in dreams.

Inland Empire opens Friday 9 March and plays til Thu 22 March.

The podcast ends with an interview with Watershed's resident artists, Hazel Grian, creative director of Licorice Film and creator of the latest alternate reality game **Meigeist** **www.meigeist.com** and artist Luke Jerram, recipient of this year's **Clark Bursary – 6th UK Digital Art Award**. Luke's project **Dream Director** explores the creative possibilities of affecting the dreaming content of an audience as they sleep and creating an 'artwork in dreamspace.' To find out more please visit **www.dshed.net/studio/residencies/clarkbursary**