

Watershed Podcast Sept 2007

Welcome back dear pod listeners. I've just returned from resting on the sands of northern Spain - the siesta has to be one of the most civilised of inventions - in between the serious work of constructing sand castles and finding some ice for the rather generous measures of gin and tonic - I took the opportunity to renew my acquaintance with the great Spanish city of Bilbao - a real working city with a huge port and an elegant centre. Not dissimilar to Glasgow but maybe that's just me.

I like many a cultural tourist I suspect have become familiar with the city through the Guggenheim museum. As I approached the centre I wondered whether Gehry's radical approach might now seem folly, maybe it would look dated, maybe the titanium and sandstone would look too whimsical for such a grand earthy working city. But no the building is still simply extraordinary from all angles but especially as you approach it from the centre. The titanium sparkles between the grand dark stone buildings, its curves echoing the curves on the hills behind. As you get closer the building expands inviting you in to play and explore. Even Jeff Koons, whose work I have to admit I do not care for, even his huge flowering dog sitting guard on the building puts a smile on even the sternest of faces. If you haven't already then try to catch up with Sidney Pollack's documentary, *Sketches of Frank Gehry*.

But what of the exhibitions I hear you say. Excellent I would reply. The monumental sculptures of Richard Serra, the equally monumental work of Anselm Kiefer, the intricate intimate etchings of Albrecht Durer and a revelatory history of Basque Art. All the work bounces off each other to illuminating effect - themes and interrelationships are uncovered – the experience enhanced by the playful elegance of the interior of Gehry's masterpiece.



City view of the Guggenheim in Bilbao



Outside the Guggenheim in Bilbao

I've just revisited the gallery on the web at www.guggenheim-bilbao.es. This experience has got me thinking, what is the relationship between these two things - the web Guggenheim and the building Guggenheim. Can the experience of visiting one replicate the other, especially when web 2.0 is out there and people are migrating onto webs Second Life and what does it mean to see a piece of art, a film online rather than in a gallery or a cinema. Next I'm onto thinking about Watershed and wondering if our cinema audience will migrate onto Second Life - what is this internet doing to us. These and many other issues I will be discussing with author and internet entrepreneur Andrew Keen whose new book, *The Cult of the Amateur*, is a timely call for reflection on the impact of the web on culture. The event entitled; *Is Today's Internet Killing Our Culture?* Is on Friday 7 Sept at 7.30pm at watershed.

Meanwhile back in the cinema its that time of the year when I think 3 screens are simply not enough for the sheer volume and range of world cinema that's coming through. At the more mainstream end of the scale Michael Winterbottom, who is without doubt, one of the most talented and dynamic British directors, has got together with global star Angelina Jolie to tell the true story of the experience of political journalist Marian Pearl whose husband Daniel was kidnapped and murdered in Pakistan *In A Mighty Heart*. Winterbottom shoots in that edgy close up documentary style reminiscent of *In This World*. When I saw it at Cannes earlier this year my concern was that I am constantly thinking, I am watching Angelina Jolie and wonder whether this gets in the way of Mariane Pearl's story. The flip side of course I that the story gets out to a wider more mainstream audience than say *In This World*. There is no argument with Winterbottom's strategy.

This month also sees the re-release of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango In Paris*. I first saw this film in the early 80s where it came with a triple x certificate - if that was possible, I'm sure it was in Presbyterian Glasgow - a public health warning and shrouded in the furtiveness of pornography. Of course it is less explicit and not as titilatory but certainly ground breaking in its exploration of desire and sex. Of course the real drama is the crisis In the Brando Character his despair and inability to connect with real emotion. And off course the film is Brando's, his performance is gargantuan bringing him back to critical acclaim after year's in the wilderness. Your take on Brando and the film may well differ if you are coming from a male or female perspective but that's for another time. To coincide with the re-release there is a season of Brando films on at the Arnolfini (www.arnolfini.org.uk), which includes *A Streetcar named Desire*, *On The Waterfront*, *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*.

Back to the north Spanish coast - whilst I was away I tried to avoid my mobile phone. However one day I got a txt from a very good friend - it read simply "Bergman Dead". A shame but not unexpected I thought and reflected on Bergman's huge influence in the world and art of cinema. The next day I get another text which read "Antonioni Dead!" This is surely not coincidental. Another defining figure in the art of cinema gone. Along with the African auteur Ousmane Sembene who died a couple of months ago this is the passing of three great figures in the film world. Their contributions to cinema will of course live on, but how might we best mark their influence - maybe a joint retrospective in the Guggenheim would be appropriate to artists of such stature.