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In Cannes film is not a matter of life and death it somehow seems more important than that - to reword the legendary football manager Bill Shankly. I can see why he coined the phrase because at that particular moment in time whether it is a football match or seeing a film, when all attention is focused, it seems that nothing is more important. The difference though is where the film can transport you, whose story it tells: an odyssey through austerity America, a French teenage girl seduced into travelling to Syria or a Finnish boxer who chooses a woman over a title fight.

The whole experience of Cannes is like the film business itself; the patina of excess and glamour yet disarmingly and paradoxically producing work of social critique, political urgency and sublime beauty. Where else could Ken Loach's simple yet powerful story of austerity Britain I, Daniel Blake or Christian Mungui's moral maze of contemporary Romania be watched by the tuxed and the glad-ragged and win prizes. The impact of the awards however is that these films will get more widely noticed and as a consequence hopefully seen by more people. (Bear in mind that the average Hollywood blockbuster has a marketing spend of circa \$20m)

This year felt like a vintage. Of the 30 films I saw I only walked out of three. All the rest were either filmmakers who are clearly on the top of their game and making urgent, engaged and/or moving films - Loach, Arnold, Mungiu, Dardennes, Almodovar - or films which shifted gear and took you in deliciously unexpected direction - Two Lovers and a Bear, Raw - or were interesting/dispiriting to see how previously admired directors have taken a

stumble – Oliver Assayas's Personal Shopper and Bruno Dumont's La Moute being cases in point

Here are some observations and reflections.

Melodrama is back

Following the success of Todd Haynes Douglas Sirk influenced Carol last year it was good to see melodrama swoon back into the competition with Almodovar's Julietta and Nicole Garcia's From the Land of the Moon. Both films transport us with effortless ease and in Julietta's case breathless pace into a cinematic landscape where female sexuality breaks the social order and a familial web is spun which has unforeseen consequences further down the years. In both films it was refreshing to see how the elegance and sweep of the visual style belied the unfolding intense emotional turmoil.

Cinema as a moral maze

The Dardennes Brothers specialise in finely tuned philosophical arguments which incrementally draw the viewer in, slowly revealing the repercussions of characters actions. They take small everyday detail and enlarge into a wider critique of society and individual responsibility The Unknown Girl starts with an unanswered door knock in a Doctor's surgery after hours. The resulting inaction has tragic consequences and a detective like crime movie reveals as much about the local neighbourhood in Liege as it does about the motives of the protagonist. It may well be their most accessible film to date complete with car chase - albeit at a modest pace !

Similarly Christian Mungui's Graduation shows the pervasive everyday corruption in Romanian life through a father trying to ensure his daughter gets her grades so that she might get a university education ironically abroad in

the UK. It is a heartfelt reflection on the post caucescu generation who thought life would be better but find themselves compromised by the same corruption in pursuit of what they see as the next generations betterment.

Poetry and the talking bear

Paterson was a brilliant reminder of how potent Jim Jarmusch can be in his observations of the simplicities of a local neighbourhood - this one being Paterson New Jersey seen through the eyes of local bus driver and poet Paterson (Adam Driver). This was a film I wanted to live in – not something I have felt since Wim Wenders' Wings of Desire – I wanted to ride the bus that Paterson drove round Paterson, drop into the bar where Paterson walks his dog to every evening and sit by the falls reading William Carlos Williams epic poem Paterson.

In Canadian film Two Lovers and a Bear when the talking polar bear – yes you heard that correct - I was all for collecting my bag and leaving, however something made me wait and by the end of the film I wanted the talking polar bear to have his own film. Sometimes a film can make you think that.

The Cinema of Dissent

A term referred to by Ken Loach in his Palme d'Or acceptance speech and which is encapsulated in Ken Loach's career but also I suspect he was referring to all those filmmakers from around the world and over the short history of film who have used film to address social and political issues. One of Loach's first films Cathy Come Home made in the mid 1960s for the BBC brought the issue of homelessness into a wider public sphere and political debate. It will be interesting to see if over 50 years later a new Loach film will have similar public and political impact. It certainly deserves to.