

Watershed October 2007 Podcast

Dutch born photographer Anton Corbijn was drawn to the drab declining industrial north of England in the late 1970s by the sounds of a new wave of new music. This music had the energy and drive of punk but was imbued with a more profound poetic sensibility. The band were Warsaw who then changed to Joy Division. They were the children of Bowie and Punk and defiantly Mancunian. Manchester defined them in the way New York defined Talking Heads, Seattle defined Nirvana. Corbijn, drawn by the sound, started to document the music scene for the New Musical Express. He created some of the iconic black and white photographs of the era – Depeche mode, U2, Echo and the Bunny Men, Captain Beefheart amongst many others and went onto make pop videos of many of the bands he photographed. Have a look at his website <http://www.corbijn.co.uk/>

Corbijn's warm, rich dense black and white style infuses his directorial feature *Control*. The film charts the evolution of Joy division in the mid to late 1970s and the increasingly emotionally fraught complex life of their front man Ian Curtis to his untimely suicide in 1980 at the age of just 23. This is no ordinary musical biopic – the journey of an obviously talented musician from obscurity to stardom – instead Corbijn centres the film around the strains emerging in Curtis's life.

His evident love of music & poetry of a transformative nature – Wordsworth and the aforementioned bowie & punk, the pull of northern working class tradition - getting marrie/settling down, the pull of the creative impulse – his writing and music.

What I found intriguing whilst watching *Control* is that it feels as though it is capturing a long forgotten era – the music still sounds energetic and achingly new but the setting feels centuries away, yet it was only 30 years ago. The black and white of course contributes to this but it is more the absences – no mobile phones, no internet, basically no real mass communication. It is a story of music born of the sweat of clubs, of live performance and the bloody mindedness of mancurian spirit. Compared to the say the arctic monkeys Joy Division were almost pre-technology. They were also pre X factor! There is now a sense that being on television equates with being talented and that being talented is being seen on television. There is a great scene where Joy Division tour Europe. All you see is the band setting off in a Ford Transit, they come back in a Ford Transit and head to the pub. This is music as hard, invariably unrewarding graft certainly not glamorous. Yet however small their output the ripples from Joy Division seem to be getting bigger. Look at the extraordinary energy of their live

performance on You Tube (and weep that the television crew didn't hold on Curtis's angular explosive performance for longer.)

Control is Corbijn's testament to one of the UK's most talented bands and singer songwriters. Sam Riley and his co-performers do an incredible job and when you discover that very few tracks are mimed you realise the scale of their achievement. One final note, Control features the indefatigable presence of Tony Wilson, chief architect of the madchester music scene. Wilson co-produced Control and this is the second time he has been portrayed in a film. The first being in Michael Winterbottom's 24 hour Party People played by Steve Coogan. Wilson died a couple of months ago and Control in no small way a testament to his vision and spirit.

October at Watershed sees a follow up to marking 200 years since the Act of Parliament which legislated for the abolition of slavery. In March we invited writer and curator Karen Alexander to talk about screen depictions of slavery throughout the history of cinema. This was in the context of Michael Radford's new film Amazing Grace about William Wilberforce and the abolitionists' attempts to change the laws on slavery.

One finds that a lot of the depictions of slavery in the mainstream are, however well intentioned, from white perspectives. Steven Spielberg's Amistad springs to mind. This month Karen has counterpointed this with a season on films – and talks – which looks at how Black and radical filmmakers have reclaimed slavery as a topic for cinematic exploration. Too Good to Be Forgotten features rarely seen or little known films which explore and celebrate the survival of the Black family and Black lives across history and time. Ousmane Sembene, African cinema's founding father, who died in June of this year, said that his job as a filmmaker was to decolonise history. The films in this season, use stories to personalise history and raise a dialogue about the meaning of liberation and freedom. They deliver a more sobering take on the long shadow slavery has cast over the "civilised" world.

Films include Haile Gerima's Sankofa which pulls few punches as it transports a decadent fashion model back to life on a plantation. Gillo Pontecorvo's Queimada sees an opportunistic Marlon Brando spreading the seeds of rebellion on a fictional Caribbean island. More contemporary stories emerge with the landmark British film Burning An Illusion from 1981. Shot around Notting Hill in London, it is a love story which traces the emotional and political growth of a young Black woman who encounters sexism and racism, Burning an Illusion was the first British film to give a central voice to a Black woman.

This week's introductory film is Charles Burnett's *To Sleep With Anger*. This is one of my top ten films. It is one of those films which manages to tell a familiar story - its about a family and lets face it we all share that experience - yet introduces a subtle depth which evokes the American Deep South, the ghosts of slavery and the tension between the city and the country. It can be read in many different ways and yet is an entertaining family drama with characters of real depth and substance. Danny Glover has never given a finer performance to my mind. Spike Lee, Jim Jarmusch, John Singleton and Steven Soderberg got the coverage as the new wave of Indie American Cinema in the late 80s early 90s but Charles Burnett is the original voice and spirit of that movement. His classic *Killer of Sheep* from 1977 is being re-released, not before time, later this year and can be seen at the forthcoming London Film Festival.

If you get the opportunity try and catch up with Burnett's beautifully observed, radical work.

Karen's season is presented in association with a range of activities across the country for Black History Month - for more information look at the following website <http://www.black-history-month.co.uk>

That's all for now – for more on what is happening at Watershed visit us at watershed.co.uk on the world wide web