

# BERLINALE TALENTS 2015



TALENTS

THE WEEK  
THROUGH THE EYES  
OF TALENT PRESS

EIGHT REFLECTIONS  
ON SPACE IN FILM

GUEST ESSAY  
BY ALEX MCDOWELL

REVIEWS AND REPORTS  
FROM THE FESTIVAL

Members of the Berlinalde International Jury Claudia Llosa and  
Darren Aronofsky (Jury President) discussed space at Berlinalde Talents

More reviews and reports by recent and former Talent Press critics at [www.talentpress.org](http://www.talentpress.org)

## TALENT PRESS

Eight promising film critics spent the past week covering Berlinale Talents events and reviewing Berlinale films.

Their main task is to reflect on this year's Berlinale Talents theme "2015: A Space Discovery", by researching their long-form essays. Under the tutelage of experienced film critics they have written several reviews, reports and interviews. On the following pages you'll find the abstracts of their long-form essays as well as a selection of other articles from the workshop.

### The participants

**ORIS AIGBOKHAEVBOLO | NIGERIA** "The Nigerian critic has a different worry from critics from the US and other developed cinema cultures. They contemplate their tradition. He contemplates his novelty."

**HEITOR AUGUSTO | BRAZIL** "I think of film criticism as a way to initiate and establish deeper discussions in a society that cultivates what is ephemeral. I believe that such an attitude may represent a way to fight this very state of irrelevance that film criticism has been forced into."

**JULIA COOPER | CANADA** "For me, the 'feminist perspective' is a capacious and constantly evolving point of view. It is grounded in the belief that there are structural imbalances firmly in place that privilege and foster certain (white, hetero, male) voices over others."

**ALONSO DÍAZ DE LA VEGA | MEXICO** "Criticism is not, as many have deemed it, the ranting of the frustrated and the unaccomplished; it is rather a stand against triviality and irrelevance."

**ORIANA FRANCESCHI | UK** "This is the purpose of film journalism: to find great films and alert the world to their existence. Like the people involved in creating art here, there are those of us willing to write about it for next to nothing, or purely out of love."

**MICHAEL GUARNERI | ITALY** "I think of my work as the solitary, often unpaid, but always intellectually rewarding business of sitting in front of a white page, struggling to engage people in obscure, unusual, unclassifiable film-objects."

**MONTY MAJEED | INDIA** "With my writing, I strive to present different perspectives to view a film from, help the reader engage with it at a deeper level, and maybe even start a conversation around it."

**ANA ŠTURM | SLOVENIA** "I write because I want to see and perceive better. I think about the world and about what it means to be human through movies. Critique is the last thing that completes every work of art."

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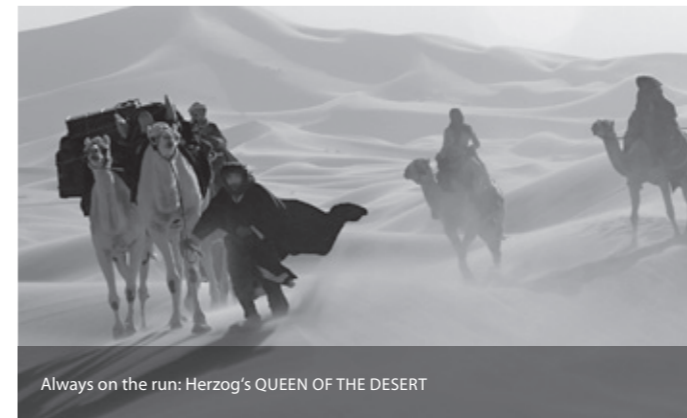
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Always on the run: Herzog's QUEEN OF THE DESERT



Dirk Meier during "The Survival Guide to Digital Workflows" session

## ON AN ODYSSEY THROUGH HISTORY

BY ALONSO DÍAZ DE LA VEGA

Space as an allegory for the human condition: why Wim Wenders' and Werner Herzog's heroes are constantly on the move.

We normally think of space as the physical dimension where we exist. Yet the mountains, the roads, the borderline between heaven and earth, express a distance, an endlessness, which we cannot fathom; an allegory for the human soul.

When we travel through space we find ourselves lost, journeying towards our source, our resolution: birth and death on the road. Jesus found himself in the desert, Odysseus found experience on his travels and travails. Our cinematic heroes, in explorations and adventures return to nature, to themselves, more truly and more strangely. On film, experiences outside the spirit are the path to blissful revelation. Recently, Brazilian director Walter Salles said at a conference for Berlinale Talents that road movies are a response to national crises; that Philip Winter, played by Rüdiger Vogler in Wim Wenders' Road Trilogy, was a response to the hobbling German identity in the 1970's. He is right.

### At a crossroads laid down by history

A child of the postwar, Philip Winter is looking for his European identity in America in ALICE IN THE CITIES; for a new German consciousness in THE WRONG MOVE; for freedom and the communion with nature in KINGS OF THE ROAD. Wim Wenders expresses in these films the search for a national identity of a country embarrassed by its past and trying to make amends with it. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Volker Schlöndorff, and Harun Farocki did the same, but only Wenders sent his characters on an odyssey that reconciled them with secret dreams and expectations. Another German director, Werner Herzog, lived under Lotte Eisner's ominous statement that his generation of filmmakers was orphaned and separated by Nazism from its forefathers.

He sent his characters but also himself on a trip across the world hoping to find answers to questions embroidered on his country's skin. In his more adventurous cinematic descendants, Odysseus found the defining forgers of German and individual identity. Wenders sought the German essence and would end up finding what binds that national spirit to humanity, while Herzog would reveal a universal discovery that derived from a German quest. Whatever the point of departure or return, both filmmakers coincided at a crossroads laid down by history.

## LIFE BEHIND THE CAMERA

BY MICHAEL GUARNERI

The space before the camera is filled by actors, props and in the promotional process by the "god-like" director. But who and what fills the space behind it?

"The world within reach" was one of the first slogans used to promote moving pictures. Starting from the Lumière brothers' "scenic views" and Méliès's interstellar expeditions, cinema has been keeping this promise beyond all expectations, transporting spectators across the universe for almost 120 years now. Yet, to this very day, the space behind the camera remains more or less uncharted for filmgoers, an "authorized personnel only" area.

The main reason is that, in the narrative cinema that constitutes the majority of the world's film production, the crew and its labor must be invisible in order not to break the spectators' willing suspension of disbelief.

So far, especially the work of actors, directors and screenwriters have received wide public recognition. In an attempt to leave the "ghetto" of the early twentieth century's nickelodeons and appeal to the upper class, film producers and distributors fostered the development of a "star system" and stressed the affinities between cinema and traditional art forms like drama and literature.

### The working space beyond the focus

In spite of not being interested in becoming a celebrity, colorist Dirk Meier (one of the experts of Berlinale Talents 2015) is happy whenever he gets the chance to provide a behind-the-scenes glimpse into film shooting and post-production. The insights he provides go against the widely-held, romantic myth that a movie is the solitary creation of a god-like director: filmmaking is a collective labor that requires a good dose of creativity as well as profound technical knowledge and skills. The director is the vertex of the pyramid – his task is to provide ideas that each department will contribute to transform into something concrete, made of moving images and sounds.

It is not just a matter of what goes on in front of the camera. Behind any on-screen world lies a huge amount of labor dealing with image and sound manipulation: "Hardly anything in cinema is 'life as it is'" states Meier, who, coincidentally, has just finished color-correcting Anton Corbijn's LIFE (USA), a biopic of the photographer who helped create James Dean's legend by staging the iconic "James Dean Haunted Times Square" picture. LIFE had its premiere in this year's Berlinale Special section.





Three individuals in a pool don't make a community

## POOLING SOCIETY BY ORIANA FRANCESCHI

How directors in the Berlinale programme define the swimming pool as a distinct space for reflecting social divisions.

From the outside, swimming pools are the epitome of wealth, leisure and new-money prestige: they shine like sapphires beside the home of the wealthy Brazilian family in *THE SECOND MOTHER* (*QUE HORAS ELA VOLTA*, Brazil) and on the architectural designs for the luxury houses being built on the artificial lake in *GÖTTLICHE LAGE*. Their grandeur overshadows the humble paddling pools in the gardens of the area's existing occupants. In both these films, as in Joanna Hogg's *UNRELATED* (United Kingdom), the pool is a symbol of a strict social division: Val, a maid, tells her daughter in *THE SECOND MOTHER*, "Jéssica, don't even look at that pool, it's not for you". Meaning, it's not for them, the working, "servile" classes.

Once characters enter the pool, though, normal social barriers melt away like ice. When Jéssica plays in the pool with the wealthy son of the family her mother works for, Val and the boy's parents become frantic, confronted with a scene of class-less unity that they, the older generation, are not ready to face. In *THE BLUE HOUR* (*ONTHAKAN*, Thailand), gay couple Tam and Phum find that they can only express their lust and love for one another in an abandoned swimming pool. There they can forget about the hetero-normative societal pressure to please their parents and sink under the water together; in the pool, as Phum puts it, "you don't need to care about anyone".

Once these social rules have ceased to control them, characters in swimming pools are altered. When they enter the pool, we are submerged also and, among the tangle of limbs and liquid, fragments of sun and debris, we are baptized with them. When we emerge into the light, they are reborn as their true selves.

When Val calls her daughter from the swimming pool towards the end of *THE SECOND MOTHER*, she is accepting herself as a person of equal worth to the family she works for. In *THE BLUE HOUR*, Tam embraces his sexuality for the first time. There are classic examples, too, of characters finding or revealing themselves in swimming pools: Ned in *THE SWIMMER* displays a gradual fall from grace, his stature within his wealthy Californian community becoming less God-like with every pool. In *THE GREAT GATSBY*, Jay Gatsby goes into the pool for the first time after telling Nick the truth of his origins. Nick replies, "They're a rotten crowd. You're better than the whole damn bunch put together." In Lührman's adaptation (USA), after Gatsby is shot, he floats in the water before the sun, appearing truly "Great" for the first time.



Cat-walk in the tub: NASTY BABY by Sebastián Silva

## BANAL DYSTOPIAS AT THE BERLINALE BY JULIA COOPER

Everything is as bad as possible: the everyday vision of dystopic spaces comes into focus at this year's Berlinale.

Often, when cinema imagines dystopic realities – imaginary worlds where things are as bad as they can get – the picture is post-apocalyptic. From the blasted, gray world of *THE ROAD*, to the fight-to-the-death theatrics of *THE HUNGER GAMES* trilogy, when films depict the dystopic worst-of-all-possible-worlds, things can get a bit dramatic. At this year's Berlinale I noticed a different, more everyday vision of dystopia coming into focus. Watching Chilean director Sebastian Silva's feature *NASTY BABY* and the experimental short films of American directors Jennifer Reeder and newcomer Joanna Arnow, I realized that negativity and unruliness don't need to signal the end of the world, but that they do present the dystopia of living in it.

These spaces are, in many ways, banal and naturalistic: yuppies living in a gentrified Brooklyn, American teenage girls hating high school – denoting nothing of the world's imminent end. But what colours these seemingly ordinary spaces as dystopic is a moral ambiguity and moments of surrealism that render them nihilistic, pulsing with an unruly ethics where, as one character puts it, no one and nothing will be okay.

### Sometimes dystopia is other people

Based on interviews with all three directors, my long form essay will focus on the unwieldy morality of each film, beginning with the ugly impulses of reproduction and gentrification in *NASTY BABY*. Originally titled *I CAN KILL*, the third act of Silva's film plays out a violent revenge fantasy where the person responsible for disrupting a Brooklyn hipster utopia is violently rooted out. The film's otherwise loveable characters become varying shades of repulsive in light of this event, and their plans to have a baby become tainted, nasty.

Arnow's and Reeder's films use experimental narrative and the short film format to heighten the dystopic aspects of the female experience specifically. Arnow's *BAD AT DANCING* revels in the painful experience of self-sabotage by making manifest the central character's neurotic anxieties. Meanwhile, Reeder's *BLOOD BELOW THE SKIN* depicts a world where mothers are unhinged, all men are perverts, and the only choice for young girls is to be either "a cunt slut or a bitchy tease." Sometimes, as these films would have it, dystopia is other people.



Exciting views into alien spaces: CONFETTI HARVEST

## GO GIRLS! BY MONTY MAJEED

Punching out spaces for girls one film at a time in the Berlinale Generation Kplus programme

The height of her white boots and the length of her freshly chopped hair turns many heads. Yet, Katelijne walks up to the aisle where her family and friends await her brother and his bride with her head held high with confidence. With one pull of a rope, the 11-year-old showers the crowd in confetti that she had painstakingly punched out of old newspapers. As Katelijne finds her voice and teaches her family that happiness lies in having the freedom to lose yourself in these little things, the Berlinale audience, largely filled with German girls around the same age as the protagonist of Tallulah Schwab's *CONFETTI HARVEST* (*DORSVLOER VOL CONFETTI*, Netherlands), applauded loudly. The space that Katelijne inhabits – rural Zeeland of the 1980s – is both familiar and unfamiliar to them.

For audience member, 10-year-old Ezgi Tatas, it was Katelijne's spirit that she related to. Although she hailed from a different background, Tatas, too, yearned to make her own decisions and do things on her own. The film, which was screened in the Generation Kplus section of the Berlinale this year, is one of the many that has a strong-willed girl at its centre. While Katelijne craves independence, little Rocio in Ana Bojorquez's debut feature *THE GREATEST HOUSE IN THE WORLD* (*LA CASA MAS GRANDE DEL MUNDO*, Guatemala) is responsible for taking care of her herd of sheep. In the Swedish film *MY SKINNY SISTER* (*MIN LILLA SYSTER*), Stella guards the secret about her sister's eating disorder and in Mark Noonan's *YOU'RE UGLY TOO* (Ireland), the protagonist, Stacey, deals with the untimely loss of her parents.

### Rising above the common gender stereotypes

In these films, girls are placed in demanding situations and have to find a way out on their own. The girls who flocked in to watch these films were glad that the protagonists rose above the commonly propagated gender stereotypes of being "silly, cry-sissies wearing pink all the time". In the many conversations we had with girls in the audience and those in the Kplus Children's Jury, they reflected that at first, some of the spaces these films brought to them – both geographical and cultural – appeared alien, but how the girls on screen dealt with difficult situations with courage and conviction turned them into worthy role models to look up to and learn from.



Stereotypical Africa: THE BODA BODA THIEVES, © Switch Films 2015

## HEART OF CINEMATIC DARKNESS

BY ORIS AIGBOKHAEVBOLO

What space does African cinema fill at European film festivals beyond stocking up stereotypical prospects?

Consider an article published in the *Hollywood Reporter* during the 65th Berlinale. Here is the opening sentence: "This could be the year that films with African-American themes break the color barrier." And here is its closer: "...there is room to celebrate, but the problems are still there." The optimistic tone of the opening sentence is subsumed by the tempered skepticism of its closer. This piece has been written every time an African-American picture achieves any form of success at the global box-office. The idea, which prevails still, is that a single triumph announces the beginning of a winning streak. Of course, it never happens that way. But hope springs eternal. So the *THR* piece mentions *THE HELP*, *12 YEARS A SLAVE* and *THE BUTLER*, all successful, yet too sparse in number to make a point about opportunities for African-American cinema.

If we switch the geography from North American fare to African fare, the situation hardly looks different, especially at European festivals which, short of Jerry Bruckheimer arriving on set in Lagos, are the most accessible means of cracking the international scene. The big three – Venice, Cannes, Berlin – attract influential producers, directors, reporters, and investors. But, save for films from South Africa, these festivals may not include many entries from Sub-Saharan Africa.

What may be responsible for the dearth? "Programmers are not educated about Africa," says Jean-Pierre Bekolo, the Cameroonian director whose debut feature *QUARTIER MOZART* won a prize at Cannes in 1992 and went on to enjoy a somewhat storied run at European festivals. "Yet we cannot blame the platforms because we are not producing enough items that are stunning." Perhaps western programmers aren't quite uneducated as much as miseducated. Take, for example, two films from the continent showing at this edition of the Berlinale: Mark Dornford-May's *BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO* and the feature *THE BODA BODA THIEVES*. Dornford-May's *BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO* adapts "La Bohème", Puccini's opera about youth, poverty, and death, inevitably offering a contemporary reinforcement of ancient stereotypes about Africa. Offering scant in the way of innovative filmmaking, *THE BODA BODA THIEVES* has a poor family as its center – a father struggling to make ends meet by riding a commercial motorcycle in Kampala, a mother breaking rocks for a pittance, and a child forced to earn a living for the family when father is injured. Also, as the title makes clear, there is a theft. Africa remains the heart of some kind of cinematic darkness.





Sebastian Brameshuber's OF STAINS, SCRAP &amp; TIRES



Joanna Hogg on the Berlinalde Talents panel "Room for Emotions"

## SPACE FOR GRACE? BY HEITOR AUGUSTO

**The short film genre leaves more space for the filmmakers to experiment with filmic forms. Do they use it?**

How do the short films being screened at the Berlinalde address the question of contemporary narrative strategies in their construction? By incorporating elements from the other arts, many of them challenge our understanding of *mise en scène*. It is important to reflect upon this matter, since the Berlinalde represents a platform to help people "set up a voice in the New European cinema," according to curator Maïke Mia Höhne. When filmmakers are released from following conventions, new creative possibilities are opened up. For short films in particular, the expansion of boundaries can be a plus, with less financial pressure the format offers more freedom to explore fresh approaches. But it can be a minus as well: when anything goes, you may lose the fundamentals.

OF STAINS, SCRAP AND TIRES (Austria, France) blurs the lines between fiction and documentary, a trend common in contemporary cinema. The camera work and the use of tools commonly seen in fiction films lead us to watch it as fiction. That hybrid approach enriches our understanding of the story, permitting us to redefine scenes such as the paintball fight (which hints at the idea of the European invader), the opening symphony (offering a view of man as the subject of commodities), and the dialogues between car dealers and sellers (showing Africa as a recipient of unwanted materials from the "first" world).

On the other hand, some movies in the shorts programme suggest a somewhat unfortunate enchantment with creative narrative strategies. DISSONANCE (Germany) is technically advanced in its merging of live action with animation, but overall it is a moral story that wants only to make a blunt point: that the boundaries of reality and imagination can be expanded. TAKE WHAT YOU CAN CARRY (USA, Germany) attempts disjointed dramatic sections that seem unconnected to the larger story. Unfortunately, the strength of the first section (an uncomfortable conversation between a girl and her boyfriend in which the conflict arises between the lines) is undermined by the dance sequence that follows it. Instead of developing that tension, the short opts for the belief that filming bodies dancing in bizarre way solves the dramatic conflict.

Reflecting on the broader context, as people who are interested in having a close relationship with contemporary cinema, we should be open to diverse narrative strategies that cannot be easily pigeonholed. The risk comes when the difficulty of categorizing a film is seen as a merit and validation in and of itself. We should not renounce our critical faculties, even when it comes to short films.

## ON PLACES AND PEOPLE BY ANA ŠTURM

**Constantly reshaping spaces are dictating people's lives and demand permanent adaptation. An approach on Berlinalde films dealing with changing landscapes.**

Landscapes have always shaped the way people live. They shape the ways in which people build their cities, cultures and histories. Landscapes are constantly changing and all that's within it changes with them. There are two films in this year's Berlinalde Competition programme in which unknown and waste landscapes play a crucial role. Herzog's QUEEN OF THE DESERT (USA, Morocco, 2015) is set in the Arabian desert and Isabel Coixet's NOBODY WANTS THE NIGHT (NADIE QUIERE LA NOCHE, Spain, France, Bulgaria, 2015) is set in the unpopulated "winter desert" of Greenland.

### Spaces in which we live are constantly reshaped

Both films are also set in a very interesting and exciting time, just before World War I. That was the time of some really significant geographical, historical and social changes that shaped the world we live in today. Both films also explore the way travellers, explorers or invaders can mark certain landscapes and predict the way they are going to change or develop. Spaces – personal, political, economic, geographical, environmental – in which we live are constantly reshaped; they are shrinking or expanding. What are the relations between people and landscapes? How do we shape the world we live in and how does the world and the landscapes shape us? How did the people in the beginning of the 20th Century understand the world and what drove them to explore unknown lands and cultures? What drove Gertrude Bell into the heart of the Arabic desert?

Landscapes are also crucial elements in shaping who we are as individuals. They can shape our inner selves. Places and buildings that we live in, or visit, can have a great influence on the way we grew up as children or on the way we live now. They can also influence our behaviour. We rarely think of that, but there are always rules about how we should behave in restaurants or libraries. Places and the environment that sometimes function as autonomous narrators play a key role in Joanna Hogg's films, for example in UNRELATED (UK 2008), ARCHIPELAGO (UK 2010), and in EXHIBITION (UK 2013). On the Berlinalde Talents panel "Room for Emotions: Embodying Architecture in Film" she said, "We invest so much of ourselves in the space where we live, that they sort of become humanised on some level – it's like that building has feelings and it's sad when we leave."



Production designer Alex McDowell at Berlinalde Talents

## DISCOVERING THE DESIGN SPACE FOR STORYTELLING BY ALEX MCDOWELL

**The Talent Press participants' essays reflecting on this year's Berlinalde Talents theme of "space in film" is joined by a notable guest writer and Berlinalde Talents expert, production designer Alex McDowell. He writes on Ken Adam, on McDowell's revolutionary and hyper-influential world building process for Steven Spielberg's MINORITY REPORT and on his World Building Institute's ongoing collaboration with Berlinalde Talents.**

### The power of design – Ken Adam's influence on Alex McDowell

Ken Adam's deep understanding of how production design instigates narrative action, combined with his vast imaginative instincts of the physicality of architecture characterizes him as one of the quintessential creative forces in cinema. He builds a direct and nuanced connection between the story and the space, while simultaneously understanding the power of a setting as iconic metaphor, which he often presents with bold stylization.

The opportunity to reevaluate Adam's sublime body of work might be a moment to take stock of the present art of cinema and to consider how we might allow ourselves, as filmmakers, to discover again his heroic slashing lines, tilted masses and shifting planes, and his ability to disrupt our familiar patterns. He brings into the world bold new spaces that are neither faint approximations of reality, nor overwrought spectacle.

I first became aware of Ken Adam's work long before I was aware that he existed, and for that matter, before I knew anything of production design. As a child, I was a huge James Bond fan and watched all the movies religiously. I cannot help but think that this early exposure to Ken Adam created a real expectation of the power of design to frame the spatial narrative, which in time, deeply affected my creative process and introduced me to the power of cinematic space.



Ken Adam with Alex McDowell at the "Bigger than Life" session

### To utilize fiction as a testing ground for reality

Cinematic space is constantly in flux, changing with every new relationship between each character and their environment, and most importantly, with every shift in the audience's viewpoint. Developing this complex and fluid story space is also continually collaborative on a fundamental level, and this is key to the organic unfolding of the narrative in the same way that an initial sketch develops to the full experiential



vision. The evolution and resolution of the image and story in pace with one another derive alchemically from the constantly changing relationships between each key collaborator as they intersect with the design imperative. The proof of the power of the designed space came to me from my involvement in a film that I designed for Steven Spielberg at the turn of the century. It came to represent a turning point between the linear industrial model of 20th century filmmaking, and the non-linear and fluid processes that underlie media production of the 21st century.



Outline for a car in MINORITY REPORT, image Courtesy of 20th Century Fox

### World Building for MINORITY REPORT

Uniquely, MINORITY REPORT began without any script in place, and as production designer I needed to make an early decision to develop a contextual world space that would allow director Steven Spielberg, screenwriter Scott Frank, and the creative team to immerse themselves in an holistic future vision for Washington DC in 2050, before the script was completed. By building a broad overview of a world as a container for the narrative, the characters and their journeys were mined directly from the conditions of their surroundings. Spielberg wanted to instigate future reality, not science fiction, and we were tasked to deeply explore the possibilities for the development of a world that would so fully convince the audience of its believability that they would accept the extreme outcomes that the film proposes.

We conducted serious and persistent research with a wealth of experts in architecture, engineering, science, urban planning, sociology, politics, technology, and advertising. These consultants provided an opportunity for art and science to intersect and to utilize fiction as a testing ground for reality. The team produced an encyclopedic overview of the future world, entitled the "2050 Bible" which laid out updated data of the world, and became a continuous resource for the design department and all key crew members. As a result of the depth of research we conducted, MINORITY REPORT is believed to have resulted in nearly 100 patents for

new technologies. Perhaps the most recognizable of these is G-Speak, a gesture-based system that evolved from the research work of science advisor John Underkoffler and was developed for Tom Cruise's computer interface in the film, which has become the quintessential reference for gesture control in real world technologies.

In many ways, MINORITY REPORT solidified my process of world building, as the film's broad requirements for empirical context demanded the development of a narrative space that allowed us to constantly discover new pathways within the world. The inherent connectivity of logic-driven design developed rich narrative arcs and an accurate envisioning of the near future.

### The World Building Institute at Berlinale Talents

My relationship with the cinematic space continues to evolve as both a creator and lover of the art of storytelling. Powerful films embedded with intuitive design for each unique world transport the audience into a "Space Discovery" – the theme of this year's Berlinale Talents. But in light of the current explosion of new realities (virtual, augmented, mixed and future) and a fresh awareness of the new potential for storytelling, I see World Building as the narrative container for all media platforms within a wide range of industries, where each new world space provides a new opportunity for discovery. From museums, theaters, educational spaces, and interactive media to developing narrative systems for cities, health, wellness, and science, we combine emergent technologies with highly interactive storytelling to create deeply immersive experimental spaces.

The World Building Institute is delighted to have partnezez with Berlinale Talents for many years and we are honored to be part of this year's Berlinale alongside so many colleagues and friends. It remains an amazing opportunity for us to be able to curate this creative dialogue with young filmmakers who are bridging the current and future of narrative design across all media.

#### ALEX MCDOWELL

Acclaimed production designer

#### HE HAS WORKED WITH:

**TIM BURTON, STEVEN SPIELBERG AND DAVID FINCHER.**

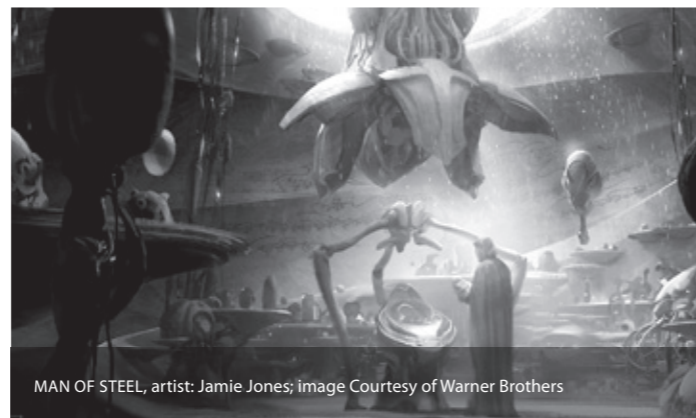
#### HIS FILMOGRAPHY INCLUDES:

**FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS | FIGHT CLUB  
MINORITY REPORT | WATCHMEN | MAN OF STEEL.**

He is co-founder and creative director of the USC | 5D Institute, Los Angeles, an interdisciplinary network focusing on the impact of technologies in design fields.



The car on set of MINORITY REPORT, image Courtesy of 20th Century Fox



MAN OF STEEL, artist: Jamie Jones; image Courtesy of Warner Brothers



"La Bohème" in Xhosa: BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO, © Wynand Vlok

## LOVE IN THE TIME OF OPERA BY ORIS AIGBOKHAEVBOLO

Golden Bear winner Mark Dornford-May returns to the Berlinale with BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO.

Arriving, perhaps unwittingly, to correct one stereotype and confirm another is the Berlinale Special film BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO, the fourth feature from director Mark Dornford-May. His characters are African, poor, and one has a terminal disease. But – wonders! – they sing opera. Nevertheless, the heavier weight of the association of poverty with Africanness skewers the operatic goodwill.

(South) Africans singing opera is familiar territory for Dornford-May who scored the Golden Bear with U-CARMEN EKHAYELITSHA, his adaptation of Bizet's "Carmen". In BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO, highly competent performers sing in Xhosa Puccini's acclaimed opera "La Bohème". Four young people go through life in Khayelitsha, buoyed by the assurance of their specialness and the intoxications of youth. One speaks of future stardom, another is called a diva; they all find out that life happens without regard for dreams, without regard for youth.

The stereotype is not Dornford-May's doing. Based on "La Bohème", Puccini's tragic opera, death, disease and poverty are unavoidable in any retelling. Yet BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO is problematic, if for beginning on July 16, the date in 1976 when protests against Apartheid spread through South Africa, leaving a multitude of deaths in its wake. Somehow the virtue of a narrative and environmental specificity is burdened by an existing stereotype. And the unavoidable result is that Africa remains the land alloyed with violence.

A talented director, Dornford-May's film has great photography – the grit of the suburbs is palpable. His actors are about as able to pull off fine acting as much as is possible when it appears one is yawning in another's face. Unsurprisingly it is when the actors shed the western singing for some South African song and dance that the screen bursts into pixels of joy, separate from the stridency of opera in Xhosa. But who can blame them? South is not exactly opera country.

The casualty of every adaptation is suspense. So deprived, the film comes out announcing to its audience that Khayelitsha is one of the worst hit places with tuberculosis. People still die of that disease. In BREATHE UMPHEFUMLO, one wishes a continent didn't have to.

## FINDING THE SELF IN SPACE AND FORM BY ALONSO DÍAZ DE LA VEGA

Directors Walter Salles and Sebastian Schipper discussed road movies at Berlinale Talents.

"The first road movies are documentaries like NANOOK OF THE NORTH," said Brazilian director Walter Salles during the Berlinale Talents masterclass "Road, Movie: Films in Motion". This genre, which sends its characters searching for meaning within a landscape, has existed since the early days of cinema as an offshoot of documentaries and as a response to national crises. He also stated that the character, Philip Winter in Wim Wenders' road movies, reflects the identity conflicts in postwar Germany as much as the deranged soldiers in "boat movie" APOCALYPSE NOW mirror the state of American society during the Vietnam War.

Salles was joined onstage at the Theater Hebbel am Ufer by moderator and renowned film critic Peter Cowie and German director Sebastian Schipper. They spoke about the significance and the production of road movies, including Schipper's latest film, VICTORIA (Germany). Although not part of the genre in the traditional sense – since the journey all takes place within Berlin – this film, made in a single 140 minute long take, much praised by Cowie, is an odyssey nevertheless. The music, said the British film critic, plays an integral role in the film. Schipper added that scores and soundtracks take the audience into the inner worlds of the characters. For that reason, he asked composer Nils Frahm to "create silence". Salles, on the other hand, claimed to show only the scripts to composer Gustavo Santaolalla, not the finished films. Space, the Berlinale Talents 2015 theme, was also part of the discussion, with Salles reflecting on one of his favorite aspects of Chinese director Jia Zhang-ke's works: his sense of geography. In honor of Jia's THE WORLD, shot in a theme park with smaller replicas of landmark buildings from all over the world, Salles interviewed him there for his documentary JIA ZHANG-KE, A GUY FROM FENYANG. The place, said Salles, is "an implosion of time and space", much like the imagination of the men behind cinematic odysseys, whose characters transcend their contexts to find the boundless confines of their souls.





Steering (the) TAXI: Jafar Panahi

## DASHBOARD DISPATCHES FROM IRAN

BY JULIA COOPER

**In his Berlinale Competition film TAXI Jafar Panahi takes us on a tour through contemporary Iran.**

If Sundance had TANGERINE, a fêted feature that caused a stir for having been filmed entirely on an iPhone 5S, then the Berlinale Competition has TAXI, a street film captured on Jafar Panahi's dashboard camera. The medium is the message, as Panahi films the streets of Tehran in real time picking up a motley string of passengers along his way. These companions hold forth on an array of issues central to life in Iran, from Sharia law and capital punishment, to film piracy and a woman's right to inherit her husband's property. TAXI is funny and sweet – the camera is often looking up into the twinkling eyes of its filmmaker – with coy references to his earlier films throughout. I found myself so enthralled by the absurdity of the film's comedic banter that I forgot, until the empty credits, that TAXI's idle chitchat is also the stuff of life and death.

Shedding the claustrophobic constraints of his last two features THIS IS NOT A FILM and CLOSED CURTAIN (both filmed under house arrest, the former smuggled out of the country on a USB stick) Panahi's TAXI is a fluid film that is rarely still. The artist is back in the world having taken his camera to the streets. Days after TAXI's world premiere, it remains unclear just how this banned director produced the film and under what circumstances it hoodwinked its way past Iranian officials to Berlin. In it, Panahi does not shy away from depicting the "sordid realism" that Iranian censorship forbids – instead, he welcomes into his meandering cab both the grit and banalities of life under Islamic regime.

Beyond the dashboard, the film also relies on iPhone footage and digital video – the latter is shot by Panahi's young niece who comes along for part of the ride, wielding a small video camera of her own. Earnestly, she asks her uncle how to make a "distributable" film and becomes fixated on what precisely is meant by this restriction "sordid realism." With a backpack almost as big as she is and an Angry Birds notebook containing class notes on the rules of cinema, she becomes frustrated (tight lipped, furrow browsed) when the world she films from her uncle's car window does not conform to the censorship rules she has been taught. Her frustration is the film's gain, for it is with this little stubborn director that we glimpse the future of Iranian cinema after Panahi: questioning, critical, and impossible to shut up.



Elisabeth Moss (Talents alumna 2004) in QUEEN OF EARTH, © Sean Price Williams

## ON QUEST FOR BLACK GOLD

BY MONTY MAJEED

**A discovery from the Berlinale Generation Kplus: the Turkish debut feature SNOW PIRATES.**

"I wish I was an oven and you would heat me like coal," says 12-year-old Gurbuz, the chubby and mischievous back-bencher, to his classmate, the beautiful Ebru, in a love letter he writes to her. This sentence encompasses the true spirit of Turkish filmmaker Faruk Hacıhafızoğlu's debut feature SNOW PIRATES (KAR KORSANLARI, Turkey, 2014). Like the three main protagonists, Gurbuz, Serhat and Ibrahim, every child growing up in Kars in the 1980s knows the real value of coal: it stands for survival. With the harsh winters taking a toll on their lives, it is their most prized possession. And thanks to the curfew imposed due to the military coup d'état, and the corruption in the system, it has become almost unattainable for poor families in their neighbourhood.

None of this stops these boys from setting out on an adventure hunting for black gold in the endless sea of snow. And nothing can discourage Gurbuz from pursuing Ebru, who doesn't even take a second to reject his invite to a date. Hacıhafızoğlu's protagonists are filled with hope, optimism and cheer even when the going is tough. Neither the bleak weather nor the authoritarian ways of their schoolteachers bog them down. The bad news pouring out of radio sets seem irrelevant to them when they face immediate problems like the peeling plaster of the walls and empty stoves in their homes. They find happiness in small things, be it reading a comic book under the table, walking like ducks on the snow or sledding at high speed down the many snow ramps. Their main source of entertainment is Serhat's retelling of the tall tales from the movies he watches on the tiny black-and-white television at a neighbour's house, and they picture themselves as superheroes of their own fantasies.

Unlike most coming-of-age stories, the beauty of SNOW PIRATES lies in the fact that Hacıhafızoğlu manages to retain this spirit of optimism right until the end, in a way, compensating for the lack of colours in the landscape. This also ensures that the film never becomes preachy in its approach. The static shots elegantly photographed by Turkoys Golebeyi successfully bring out the contrast between the uneventful and oppressed life in the neighbourhood and the vigour of the boys who inhabit it. What, however, doesn't work for the film is the scant use of background score which slows it down in parts and does not match up with the light-hearted and energetic performances that the young actors deliver.

## SOMETIMES THINGS ARE JUST BAD

BY ANA ŠTURM

**A toxic film monster that shows us a slowly degrading relationship between two long-time friends: Berlinale Forum's QUEEN OF EARTH.**

If LISTEN UP PHILIP (USA) was a dramatic comedy about two horrible men, QUEEN OF EARTH (USA) comes across as some scarily weird, but at the same time, extremely exciting hybrid between mumblecore, horror and psychological thriller, dealing with the trope of broken women. It's a toxic film monster that shows us a slowly degrading relationship between two long-time friends.

Elisabeth Moss is brilliant as Catherine, a young woman, trying to cope with some very recent and abrupt changes in her life. Her inability to deal with the death of her father and a broken relationship with her boyfriend increases her depression. Catherine's narcissistic sense of entitlement also brings about passive-aggressive behaviour in her friend Virginia. Much of the film consists of long conversations between the two. Mean dialogues and extreme close-ups create a tense environment in which everybody (including viewers) feels nauseated.

The time-shifting narrative, which is brilliantly underlined by a very misleading score, creates the film's increasingly unpleasant tone. Whenever we feel that we know what is going on, the music ads on another layer of meaning and completely changes our perspective of the story. We are constantly lost in the process of trying to understand what the hell is going on. Even though the characters inhabit idyllic natural surroundings, they are suffocating under the weight of their own fear and anxieties. When they are in the city and surrounded by the normalcy of other neurotics and misanthropes, everything is fine, but when they leave the city, they face only nature and themselves, and slowly fall into madness. Alex Ross Perry is quickly becoming one of the strongest voices of his generation. With QUEEN OF EARTH he has established himself as an uncompromising contemporary auteur. He doesn't spare any of his miserable characters anything. He shows us all of their faults, shortcomings and endless uncertainties. Because sometimes things are just bad.

## DANCING WITH THE CAMERA

BY MICHAEL GUARNERI

**Moved through movement: cinematographer Peter Zeitlinger on working with Werner Herzog.**

Cinematographer Peter Zeitlinger has been working with Werner Herzog since the 1995 TV documentary GESUALDO: DEATH FOR FIVE VOICES (Germany). "There is actually a clause in Werner's contract saying that whoever wants him as a director has to hire me as well," Zeitlinger stated during an informal chat we had in the lobby of his hotel, a couple of days before his "Measuring the Space" masterclass at Berlinale Talents.

When asked to describe his work to someone who is not "in the business," Zeitlinger simply said that, as a cinematographer, he helps film directors to turn the stories and ideas in their minds into something that can be seen on screen by other people. As an illustrative example, he picked his working partnership with Herzog: "Werner thinks in terms of emotions rather than images, so what he does is set the mood of the film, telling every single actor and crew member what moves him about the story to be filmed. Then, he brings together human beings, animals and things into a space of his choice, trying to provoke randomness.



Director of photography Peter Zeitlinger

For instance, when we are shooting, Werner never tells me 'do a close-up, do a long shot', and so on. He just gives me the freedom to navigate through the scenery he created and capture what I think is important."

Herzog trusts his cinematographer's instinct so much that he leaves to Zeitlinger 90% of the decisions concerning framing and camera movement: "Werner intervenes only when he gets the feeling that I am doing something too 'artistic'. If he sees too much sophistication in the shot he destroys it a little bit, because he finds aesthetics so boring." Surprisingly enough, the discussion about filmmaking ended with insights relating cinema to a completely different form of expression. "The camera is my dance partner: as I move around the set I hold it in my arms, taking little steps left and right, forward and backward, while the actors perform their own choreography at the same time. My hope is that through all this movement, the audience ends up being moved too."

## LEARNING THE COLOUR OF MONEY

BY ORIANA FRANCESCHI

**Nobody is blind to the colour of money: Josh Kim's HOW TO WIN AT CHECKERS (EVERY TIME).**

Oat's childhood is made up of baby-pinks and blues: a boat slipping down a still canal, flitting fish in a strip-lit tank, a sleepy Thai sun setting over the banana plants. The Berlinale Panorama film HOW TO WIN AT CHECKERS (EVERY TIME) (Thailand), Josh Kim's adaptation of Rattawut Lapcharoensap's book, takes us back to that twilight period between Oat's boy-and-manhood, before he "knew the colour of money".

It's a time when the colour red makes a bold intrusion into Oat's life; red is the colour of the ballot that could force his older brother, Ek, into mandatory service to the Thai military. At 21, every male citizen in Thailand is subjected to a random draft lottery: if a man draws a black card, he is free to continue living as a civilian; if he draws red, he says goodbye to his loved ones, cuts his hair, and serves wherever his country needs him. Oat's brother Ek, whose poverty forces him into sex work, is drafted, while Ek's wealthy boyfriend Jai bribes his way to a black ballot.

At home, red, white and blue blasts from Oat's television, peaking his interest in American popular culture and diet. At first, HOW TO WIN AT CHECKERS even mimics the music and narrative style of American gangster films like GOODFELLAS and DONNIE BRASCO.

This technique peters out a little clumsily in the middle, though, and the film's strongest moments are when it draws on the visceral experiences of childhood. These are made up of plastered fingers toying with the edges of leaves, the image of a precious object broken in play, and



Josh Kim's HOW TO WIN AT CHECKERS (EVERY TIME)

Oat's first bite of a cheeseburger in a scene that moves quickly from bliss to tragedy – as is the way before one's feelings develop beyond the all-consuming – when the taste of cheese makes him vomit.

In the steely grey of his future, adult Oat – who tells us he has found wealth through cheating, lying and winning – rides away from drawing a black ballot on his motorcycle, with his hair slicked back and a leather jacket on, James Dean style. The exact details of how he became so affluent are never divulged, but we have seen Oat learn the hard truths that poverty is a trap, wealth is the master of justice, and nobody is blind to the colour of money.

## DELICATE ISSUES, UNFULFILLING EXECUTION

BY HEITOR AUGUSTO

Two films in the Berlinale Shorts section address the challenges inhibiting gay representations on-screen.

Omar Zúñiga Hidalgo's *SAN CRISTÓBAL* (Chile) has a concise decoupage, showing a competence that's more than welcome in short narrative film. Hidalgo's directing is firm and consistent: there is no hesitance in what is shown. The camera, rather than observing from a distance, immerses itself in the scene. That approach favours the actors' delicate performances. Antonio Altamirano and Samuel González, who play Lucas and Antonio, who meet, fall in love, and have to face the threat of homophobia, are believable enough to elicit the audience's sympathy to a general dilemma faced by gay men and lesbians. Yet I would rather see a film exploring the characters' complexity apart from that aspect.

*SAN CRISTÓBAL* illustrates the idea of oppression based on sexual orientation, but does not extend the characters' lives to other dimensions. Lucas and Antonio seem to exist only to prove a predetermined point: as gay men, their right to love is not guaranteed. Though it's important to acknowledge the issues involved, the film presents Lucas and Antonio as types rather than people. We don't get a sense of their individual souls. *SAN CRISTÓBAL* works only with opposite notions such as the city guy vs. the village guy, or the one who has freedom vs. the one locked in. Even the scenes of intimacy work only as a contrast to the violence about to happen. If the homosexuality issue were removed from the story, the characters would simply disappear.

An alternative example of how to both deal with the challenges inhibiting gay representations on-screen and expand the characters' motivations beyond it is *BLOOD BELOW THE SKIN* (US), another film from the Berlinale Shorts section. Through creative editing that mixes events in a bizarre form that doesn't rely on cause and effect, Jennifer Reeder's short does not provide the audience with easy explanations. The gay question is there, as well as aspects of growing up, friendship, parents, and beauty – an approach that completes the cinematic experience.

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