from Oscar to Razzie

Do Awards Matter?

And, why Sundance won't sell-out

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the Sundance effect:

how hollywood caught the vanguard flu

by Kevin Canek

Where would we be without the Sundance Film Festival? Chances are we probably would have never known about films like Sex, Lies, and Videotape, Clarks. Shine, Welcome to the Dollhouse, I Shot Andy Warhol, Crumb, The Celluloid Closet, American Movie. Three Seasons, Buffalo 66, The House of Yes, Genghis Blues, and Pulp Fiction. And those are only winners from past festivals. There are also the "buzz films" snatched by Hollywood speculators that become mainstream sleeper hits such as The Full Monty and The Blair Witch Project.

Ah...glorious Sundance! It is the terminally hip, annual independent film festival (founded in 1981) that runs in the latter weeks of January in Park City, Utah. For a Santa Cruz equivalent, it is Pacific Avenue on First Night plus snow, impoverished filmmakers (young and old), animating Hollywood executives, legions of buzz surfers, actors, critics, and Robert Redford. Sundance is ground zero for tapping the cinematic root of inspiration, something for which American cinema is starving. While the mainstream will never cease its obsession with "safe" films, which never push too forcefully against traditional narrative models and issues, Sundance has prided itself as "a champion of films that challenge and probe audiences and expand the boundaries of the art of film" (sundancechannel.com).

Now, Sundance is in its adulthood. It is no longer, has not been for some time, a surprise source from which vanguard films emerge, but a stable farmer's market of organic film. Hollywood caught on to this a few years ago, sparked (or spurred) by the unrepentant benefits of independents' success. By 1995, the cell phone races were furious, and impromptu contracts were being signed with gloved hands. Fears which had risen earlier in Sundance's career ("Will Success Spoil Sundance?" LA Times Feb. 4, 1985), were becoming confirmed.

Independent radicals (the ones who claim they never watch the Oscars) disapprove of Hollywood's intrusion on the festival. Their concern is that either indie filmmakers will try to conform to a style that will catapult them into L.A., or the festival itself will become so commercialized that its "alternative" identity will be co-opted. The first fear will not materialize: organizers and audience members are keen on detecting a Tarantino wannabe. As for becoming devoured by commercialism, Sundance has allowed some conservative sponsors (Blockbuster Video, Mercedes-Benz, Entertainment Weekly, AT&T), but as a non-profit organization they will (hopefully) be able to keep those sponsors at arm's length.

If there is an area to be in question for the festival's independent authenticity, it is accessibility. Sundance's Audience Award, which is given out for best drama, documentary, and international film, has traditionally been the most coveted at the festival. While the Grand Jury Prize features seven individuals with different professional backgrounds in film (this year, the...
Grand Jury for drama included Clarke director Kevin Smith, New York Times critic Janet Maslin, and producer Lawrence Bender, the Audience Award offers a rare treat in the world of artistic judgement: Democracy.

Sundance's popularity threatens its democracy. It is difficult for even the most devoted film buff to afford the festival's prices, let alone fly out to Utah. Nicole Martin, a 3rd year UCSC film major, travelled with ten other peers from the school's Film Arts Coalition (FAC) to experience the festival for a week. Martin was unable to finish her visit however because, as she simply put it, "I ran out of money."

It is not that individual tickets are too overpriced ($8-10 for Audience Award films) but the wallet must maintain a stamina comparable to Disneyland with three kids. How diverse is the audience's taste if we only have viewers who can afford the grand prices to be there? A further complication comes from the Hollywood folks. Reports have come out from this year's festival that stars with cash will buy out seating of an entire theater.

six other festivals with "dance" suffixes (Slamdance, Sundance, Lapdance and more) would gladly pick up the indie torch if the internet does not first. Distinctions between

Sundance's popularity threatens its democracy. It is difficult for even the most devoted film buff to afford the festival's prices, let alone fly out to Utah.

The Greater Benefit

Taking off the badge of the sell-out police (as it is so tempting to be in Santa Cruz), let us check out what Sundance is doing for the mainstream.

"The mainstream?" you scream, "Who cares about the mainstream?"

While it is fun to live in a liberal bubble, the majority of California and the rest of America does not practice our same liberal open-mindedness. If my friends or future children decide to come out of the closet in Nebraska, I would like them to live. Away from the cities, in bucolic America, there is the multiplex theater. Just the multiplex. The multiplex does not show Boys Don't Cry, Happiness, Kids, or Pricilla Queen of the Desert. It shows The Talented Mr. Ripley, Supernova, Stuart Little, and Bicentennial Man. The multiplex is the definitive example of "under-representation."

Without representation and exposure of a people, a huge chunk of America will not know about itself. This

continued on 13

Below: The American Mecca of indeplicant films.
With all the emphasis put on the various awards given to films, television, and music there is little attention paid to the actual concept of "rewarding" a work of art. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will hold its 72nd annual Academy Award ceremony on March 28 in recognition of the past year's "outstanding achievement in film." The Academy, originated in 1927, has more than 6,000 members to date. Exclusive membership is granted to those invited by the Academy's Board of Governors. The voters consist of former Oscar nominees, those who have made an outstanding contribution to a film, as well as those who have been "sponsored" by two existing members and approved by the Board. One purpose of the Academy is to "advance the arts and sciences of motion pictures...and recognize outstanding achievement." The controversy behind the awards deals with whether or not such a goal is ever truly accomplished.

The telecast itself is the most highly viewed annual media event in the world that originates from the United States, and there is months of preparation for this eagerly anticipated night. A wide range of people find themselves glued to the television set year after year for the event that epitomizes the wealth and glamour of the industry. The audience ranges anywhere from those considering themselves film-buffs to those simply intrigued by the hype, the glamour, and tradition of it all. The Oscar itself (an 8.12 lb, gold platted statue) has become one of the most sacred and revered symbols within the film industry.

Why is such an event, let alone a figurene, deemed so precious in all realms of the entertainment world and why does it continue to receive an excessive amount of attention? With 244 films in competition this year, only a fraction will be nominated and even a smaller number will actually win one of the 25 categories. Each year hundreds of films are ignored for awards including many so called "popcorn" genres such as horror, adventure, youth, science fiction, or action. Two recent exceptions to the Best Picture winner's history have been, *The Silence of the Lambs*, a psychological thriller from 1991, and *The Unforgiven*, a 1992 western. Surprisingly, this year's Best Picture category includes another psychological thriller, *The Sixth Sense*. For the most part, the same actors are routinely snubbed their way through speeches after being rewarded for a role in the predictably victorious films. Minorities and new comers usually have the odds stacked against them, and even highly acclaimed performances by actors are also typically ignored due to a preference for old-timers or more "carefully selected" choices. For instance, the Oscars have routinely snubbed controversial directors like Spike Lee, Oliver Stone, and only recently, Steven Spielberg. Conservative voters in the Academy have become the norm and are now as common as the sequence on any given actress's over priced dress.

For the most part Hollywood's highest honor is given for sentimental or political reasons rather than actual merit. Members of the Academy vote for nominations in one of the 13 branches they belong to (actors for actors, directors for directors, etc.) When the time comes to decide who will walk away with the prize, all voting members get to cast their ballot for each of the major categories, including those they have no qualifications for. Assuming an actor's knowledge of cinematography is minimal or an editor's understanding of set design is limited, there are times when the winner of a particular branch is questionable. The average age of the Academy member is sixty making the generation gap between voters, active filmmakers, and average filmgoers a vast one.

There are many factors that go into the voting process and none that are too sincere or involve acknowledging "outstanding achievements." The Academy Awards are all about money and nothing makes it more obvious than voting on films that can still benefit from box office profits. Actors that win get instant dollars added to their already exorbitant salaries, in the same way winning films can bank on increased revenues of $20 to $50 million in the weeks following the telecast. A few of the winners that have benefited from the Academy Awards were 1989's *Driving Miss Daisy* which increased its revenues by $32 million and 1990's *Dances With Wolves*, which made a rather nice profit of $48 million after winning Best Picture.

Acknowledgments made by the Academy are debatable and each "winner" is really no better than each loser. The film industry is a compilation of creative works that if nothing else, all deserve to be acknowledged. The idea of bestowing titles like "Best" for a film, an actor, director, or whatever the sort may be, is unfitting. It is especially improper since most granted with such a title are done so for political or economical reasons rather than a genuine belief they deserve it. Who is to say that those who are able to vote in the Academy for the films that are considered eligible by the Academy, are any better at judging them than the massive amounts of people who spend their money watching them?

Creative talent is a matter of opinion. Therefore, it shouldn't be decided upon that one piece of work may succeed at being superior over others. Complimenting a film is one thing, rewarding it is another. How can it be encouraging for artists to strive for excellence when their performance will simply be judged as better or worse than another? It is wrong to compare different pieces of art to each other because the very beauty of art lies in the fact that it can be different, it can be original, and it can still be just as special.

The Academy Awards may claim to recognize outstanding achievements but they ignore many just the same. No matter how fancy or glamorous they make the awards and ceremony to be, the members of the Academy have no qualifications for choosing what production or performance should be admired and honored by millions of people around the world. As it may seem to be the case, there is no special knack to judging creative works. Furthermore, the question shouldn't be how we do it, but in fact whether or not we should.
And the loser is...

by Nathan Brashill

While all the critics and corporate big-wigs will crossing their fingers on March 26th in hopes of taking home Oscar, Tinsel Town cynics will be banking on another statuette: The Razzie.

Each year, on the eve of the Academy Awards, the Golden Raspberry Awards Foundation dishes out golden raspberries (or Razzies) to the year's worst achievements in filmmaking.

These annual accolades include: Worst Picture, Worst Actor, Worst Actress, and The Joe Eszterhas Dis-Honorable Worst Screenplay Award.

The Razzies began in 1980 in the living-room of founder John Wilson, author of Everything I Know I Learned at the Movies: A Compilation of Cliche's and Un-Trueism Gleaned from a Lifetime spent Entirely Too Much in the Dark.

Before the Razzies, Wilson earned a B.A. in Motion Picture/Television studies and production from UCLA in 1977. He has also been a producer, copywriter, and creative consultant for entertainment marketing for 18 years, and has appeared somewhere in the neighborhood of 4,000 movies.

The Razzies are generally a spoof of major award shows (more particularly the Oscars). Granted, there are hundreds of Razzie-worthy films produced each year, but the GRAF almost sets its sights higher by "dis-honoring" the big-budget Hollywood schlock, as low-budget straight-to-video movies. Past Razzie dis-honorees include the infamous Howard the Duck, Hudson Hawk, Leonard Part 6, as well as Mommie Dearest, Showgirls, and The Postman.

"Winners" of the much coveted Worst Actor/Actress of the Year Award have included Madonna, Burt Reynolds, Prince, Brooke Shields, Bo Derek, Bill Cosby, and Kevin Costner. But, let us not forget Razzie's All-Time Champion, Sylvester Stallone with his record-breaking 8 wins and his mind-blowing 21 nominations.

Past Worst Career Achievements have gone to Ronald Reagan, Irwin Allen, Linda Blair, and Bruce (The Rubber Shark) from the Jaws films. Showgirls, holds the record for the largest number of wins with 7 total Razzies.

This year's Razzie nominations (at least the major categories): Worst Picture: Big Daddy, The Blair Witch, The Haunting, Star Wars: Episode I, and Wild Wild West. Worst Director: Jan DeBont, The Haunting, Dennis Dugan, Big Daddy, Peter Hyams, End of Days; George Lucas; Star Wars: Episode I; and Barry Sonnenfeld, Wild Wild West. Worst Actor: Kevin Costner, Kevin Kline, Adam Sandler, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Robin Williams.


Posman, and An Alan Smethie Film: Burn Hollywood, Burn as well as this year's Wild Wild West and Star Wars: Episode One.

Nominations and "winners" are determined by mailing ballots to more than 450 GRAF members in 34 states and 8 countries. Currently, in the centennial tradition of the American Film Institute, the GRAF is working on "One Hundred Years, One Hundred Stinkers," listing of the top one hundred worst achievements in film over the last century.

The actual Razzie statuette is a plastic raspberry (sprayed painted gold) that sits atop a mutated Super 8 film reel with a value appraised to be somewhere in the neighborhood of four dollars and twenty-seven cents.

The 20th Annual Golden Raspberry Awards will be held on Saturday, March 25th at 8:00pm, an event usually covered by major radio news networks, CNN, and worldwide wire press services such as AP,UPI, and Reuters.

For a complete listing of nominees and up-to-date Razzie info visit www.razzies.com.
Quick, name your top three favorite short films. Too hard? Then name any three short films. Still can’t come up with any? Well you’re probably not alone if you can’t remember seeing any film shorts lately, but that should be changing soon.

Recently, the short film has been rarely viewed outside of festivals and student showings. While film shorts once made up an integral part of regular film programs—which might also include cartoons, previews, and newsreels in addition to the feature—the destruction of the studio system combined with the desire to run films more frequently for higher profits, ended the main venue for wide distribution of short subject films.

Of course, short films have continued to be made despite the difficulty of finding an audience for them. Short subjects are ideal for new filmmakers, who usually can’t find financing for feature length projects but may be able to produce something shorter. Established filmmakers also make shorts to experiment with new ideas. Shorts can be ideal for subjects such as spoofs which don’t contain 90 minutes of material, but could be told effectively in five or ten minutes. The problem has been, of course, that very few people have the opportunity to see these mini-films.

Now the internet is changing that forever. Short films have a new audience as web sites dedicated to film shorts provide distribution, and Internet technology continues to become more accessible to a wider audience. Though the majority of the population may not yet have the powerful computers and fast Internet connections needed to make everyday Internet film viewing practical, trends indicate that it’s only a matter of time before this changes. Currently, fifty percent of American households are connected to the Internet and numbers are growing. Even those who do not have access to the Internet at home or work can log on at public terminals found in places like universities and libraries.

The short films found on the Internet are incredibly varied in subject, taste, and quality. Most film sites host large collections of animated films, as these tend to be a bit less technologically taxing to view, and are therefore more accessible to a larger audience. As for live-action films, almost any kind of subject can be found. Particularly popular are shorts which spoof well-known theatrical releases. More than any other film, The Blair Witch Project seems a favorite of short filmmakers satire. To name just a few, other film spoofs include: a multitude of Kubrick homages, like Pies Wide Shut (ifilm.com); the tasteless, Saving Ryan’s Privates (atomfilms.com); the incredibly funny, Swing Blade, (mediatrip.com) which combines Swingers with Sling Blade and has great production values; and the popular and hilarious, George Lucas in Love (mediatrip), which takes a cue from Shakespeare in Love, as a young George Lucas with writer’s block learns to use the world around him as fodder for his great space epic, Star Wars.

All other types of film can also be found as Internet shorts, from thriller to romance to drama to avant-garde. About the only genre that isn’t plentiful on the Internet is special-effects laden action films, probably because almost by definition, short filmmakers are low-budget filmmakers. But if you are looking for computer effects, not explosions, offerings abound as specialists show off their skills with short films.

Different Internet film sites have taken different approaches to this new form of distribution. Some are highly selective, accepting only the best films while others are more democratic, providing distribution for almost anyone who wants to show their film. This approach, used by ifilm, allows for a huge collection of
films with new shorts constantly being added. ifilm's policy is to accept any films submitted except porn or home movies. This means that anyone can get their film on the net, but it also means that it can be challenging to find the shorts worth viewing amid the multitude of films of questionable quality. ifilm does provide lists of the most frequently viewed shorts and the shorts with the highest viewer ratings. While the latter list is helpful in navigating through the huge number of films, the list of most frequently viewed films can be a wildcard.

Both the very funny Black People Hate Me and They Hate My Glasses, and the too-painful-to-watch, Dr. LoveStrange or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bug (which combines wretched acting with extremely poor production values), have appeared on the list of most frequently viewed films. However, ifilm is definitely worth using, as in addition to its huge collection of film shorts, it hosts the Spike & Mike's Sick & Twisted Festival of Animation films.

A site with a very different philosophy is atomfilms. The films on this site are pre-screened and selected and the site itself actually serves as a showcase for films the company is trying to sell to other venues like airlines and television. Filmmakers whose work is shown on the site get paid, as atomfilms buys the exclusive licensing rights. Atomfilms has even made itself know at the Sundance Film Festival where it competes with traditional distributors for rights to the films presented there. While the shorts on atomfilms aren't as hit or miss as those on ifilm, the quality does vary. For example, despite good production values, Saving Ryan's Privates is essentially a one-joke idea that gets way too stretched out. (For a better Saving Private Ryan spoof, try Swing Blade on mediatrip.)

Another site that is very selective in choosing its material is mediatrip. Film shorts are only one part of this entertainment site which also provides television, radio, music, and feature film channels. While the selection of short films on mediatrip is the most limited, the films do have are consistently of the highest quality. Mediatrip is worth a visit if only to see George Lucas in Love, which has become a cult classic and is the film to see if you can only see one internet short.

Short films are a great way to experience entertainment on the net. Since it can be hard to navigate and find the best films, the fact that the films are short keeps down the frustration. One of the best ways of finding good films on the Internet is through word-of-mouth, as the films your friends bother to recommend are generally worth seeing.

Below: A trio of film spoofs: ifilm.com's strange Dr. LoveStrange or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bug, and a pair of private Ryan pieces: atomfilm's Saving Ryan's Privates and Frying Private Ryan at ifilm.com.
Brit Flicks:
yes, there were cool movies
before Trainspotting

by Ariel Schudson

Shallow Grave was cool. Trainspotting was cool. And more recently, Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels was cool and won awards. So it seems that there is an awakening taking place over in the United Kingdom. Now, while it is true that these films are unusual, exciting, and exemplary pieces of film, it is not true, however, that they are the first of their kind.

From 1959 to approximately 1964-65 Britain experienced a cinematic revolution. It was the transition from the old “null studio artifice” of traditional classical narrative and story patterns, to something more up-to-date, and relevant to the audiences watching. This revolution of sorts was called the British New Wave, and called upon audiences to be able to identify with their antagonists, instead of feeling disconnected by their lack of correct representation on the screen.

Several directors played a key role in the creation of the British New Wave. Karel Reisz, John Schlesinger, Lindsay Anderson, and the best known Tony Richardson, all figured into the creation of this new group of human and reality based films. There were no princes or fairytales in these films, neither was there any real “villains” at the end. These were films that faced the harsh realities of being young and working class in England. According to writer and critic Arthur Marmor, this period of British cinema had three major tendencies: social criticism and satire, authentic presentation of working-class lifestyles, and genuine innovation in breaking away from purely naturalistic film. These same reasons were why the watching public was very interested in these films and was notably more fond of them than of the films that had come out in previous years of post-war Britain.

This realism-based very much around life’s harsh realities, the fragility of the family and the emotional discourse resulting from that, and the unusual visual portrayal of working class existence. Instead of following traditional narrative structure, these films chose to break it up, segment it, and tear it down. They speed up scenes, like the stealing of the car in Richardson’s Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, making it look almost like an old silent film.

The continual flashbacks within the same film add to the main character’s “angry young man” persona, but also serve to solidify him as the quintessential working class anti-hero. That camera pan only leaves us with the obvious influence upon certain recent cinema figures like Guy Ritchie (Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels), Danny Boyle (Trainspotting, Shallow Grave) and Neil Jordan (The Butcher Boy). These recent films have not only utilized these same types of camera work, but also explored some of the different realms that the British New Wave presented.

Many films in the British New Wave explored the establishment of some type of youth culture as a result of feeling let down by their family, betrayed, or just kicked out. These ideas are quite pronounced in the group of boys in Lock, Stock...
and even more exemplified in the lifestyles and relationships within *Trainspotting*. Boyle and Ritchie play with a world in which the only real protagonists are young kids, quite reflective of the universe of young unfortunates that figured into the films of the New Wave.

One parallel that also seems to run between the two groupings of films, then and now, is also their reliance on current and controversial literature in order to make these films a much more real and present-day experience. Tony Richardson fought with the British Board of Film Censors a great deal just as a result of his use of “working-class language” which they found inappropriate. *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* became a big deal between the censor and the filmmaker and author of the story. The BBFC discussed Alan Sillitoe’s novel to be “full of wrong-headed social sentiments” and the main character, Colin, to be anarchic and “a good hero of the British Soviet.” After Sillitoe and Richardson conceded to certain extent with the language in the film, took some stuff out and reworded some things, they were allowed to release the film.

Clearly by the time *Trainspotting* was made (from the book by Irvine Welsh) British New Wave, their older sibling had paved the way for them, and not only was working class vernacular not a problem, but their frank discussion of heroin, crime, and familial violence was explicitly represented. As well, the stylistic representation that had been a major part of British New Wave cinema, with the quick cuts, and the visual choppiness that set it apart from classical narrative, lent themselves brilliantly to the anti-narrative styles of the literature being used.

The one thing that recent British films don't seem to be doing as much (with noted exceptions) as British New Wave cinema candidly discussed is the roles and positions of women. Although there has been a certain amount (al-though not much) written about the British New Wave, and their “angry young man” themes, there were also films that contributed greatly to changing and recognizing the role of young women at the time. Tony Richardson’s film *Taste of Honey* is a perfect example.

In *Taste of Honey* (1961), a girl named Johns is to deal with an exceptionally irresponsible single mother. Jo decides that she has had enough, when she gets thrown aside by mom for a new boyfriend, and leaves. Jo meets a black sailor named Jimmy, and realizes her own sexuality by having a one night stand with him. (Sad note for any fans of The Smiths: the line "I dreamt about you last night, and I fell out of bed twice" in "Reel Around the Fountain" originated in this film.) Jo becomes pregnant, and ends up with a friend named Jeff, a young, gay boy, trying to establish a home for themselves, and a family, as their own families have alienated them.

This film was of significant importance as it showed the emergence of a discourse that surrounded young women and their sexuality, something that previous British cinema had not thought it wise to approach. Other films followed, and that advanced discussion of a previously taboo subject, and also began to break down all the stereotypes previously created for women in British film. As Julie Christie said of her role in John Schlesinger’s *Darling*, “She was extraordinary...Here was a woman who didn’t want to get married, didn’t want to have children like those kitchen-sink heroines; no, Darling wanted to have everything...”

All in all, it was the non-conventional nature of the British New Wave that has helped to spawn the non-conventional nature of the recent UK films now. It was the desire to open up doors, and as Marmick said, authentically portray while genuinely innovate, that created a whole period of films that still lead us to the theaters today.

Julie Christie in *Darling* (1964).

Here was a woman who didn’t want to get married, didn’t want to have children like those kitchen-sink heroines; no, Darling wanted to have everything...."
21st Century Noir: more shades of gray?

by Elizabeth Baung

“My name is Lester Burnham. I am forty-two years old. In less than a year, I will be dead. Of course, I don’t know that yet.” Taken out of context, this voice-over narration seems like it could have been dictated by Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade, famous characters from hard-boiled detective novels and film noir of the forties and fifties, rather than by Kevin Spacey in the film American Beauty (Mendes, 1999), it’s actual source. An audience familiar with the characteristics of film noir can recognize the similarities that exist in films like American Beauty and classic noir films like Sunset Boulevard (Wilder, 1950), The Big Sleep (Hawks, 1946), or The Maltese Falcon (Huston, 1941).

Several films made in the eighties and nineties possessed noirish qualities that closely link them to these earlier films. With films like Body Heat (Kasdan, 1981), The Last Seduction (Dal, 1994), Devil in a Blue Dress (Franklin, 1995), and L.A. Confidential (Hanson, 1997) being released in the last decade or so, the idea of neo-noir has come to the fore for which these newer titles fall under. What is interesting is how the genre is changing from classical noir to neo-noir and now to a blend of different genres and subjects. Many films made recently (some fresh out of theaters) contain film noir characteristics, but would not be considered straightforward film noir like many neo-noir of the early nineties. Like American Beauty, films like Fight Club (Fincher, 1999), Dark City (Proyas, 1998), and Bound (Andy/Larry Wachowski, 1996) all seem to be inspired by film noir, but are rooted in drama, comedy, science fiction, crime, and thriller genres. Since film noir is a genre hard to define (much unlike the western or musical genres) it can become

Jennifer Connelly resembles Rita Hayworth in Dark City easily adapted into other genres, which seems to be a common device used in many recent films. Film noir is a genre defined through style, not plot or setting, therefore it can exist in diverse areas of film. The dark, futuristic environment of Dark City, where the buildings charge by themselves each night, is a far cry from the state suburbia of American Beauty, yet both are intimate with noir concepts. With each of these newer films, the references to classic and newer film noir contrast lighting, almost constant darkness within the character’s world (or world of the film), the weak or dying “hero,” the femme fatale, and the idea of the underworld are all defining concepts of film noir and at least one (in most cases several) can be found in the films mentioned above. Science fiction and noir blend to form the creepy thriller Dark City. In this film the future sometimes looks like a forties nightclub, and Jennifer Connelly’s character like Rita Hayworth in Gilda (Vidor, 1946). The thwarting and changing sets of the enclosed city, the reality that its always night, the claustrophobic space, and the shadowed lighting effects make it a deeply rooted film noir, but a surface science fiction. An obvious example of the weak/tying “hero” is found in the recent Fight Club; in this film the protagonist is so weak that he is taken over by himself (and you thought Walter Neff was feeble). The femme fatale, played by Helana Bonham Carter, is also present, in both personalities of the character’s self, as a sexual object and an annoyance he cannot rid himself of. Watching Fight Club one gets the sense of lingering doom; the characters are intensely engaged in their fighting and forming of an army, but they fail to acknowledge their

The Burnham Dinner Table in American Beauty
surroundings, and the impact they will have upon them.

One of the earlier films that began blurring the lines between neo-noir and film noir as it exists in other genres was the lesbian thriller Bound. Although the film is a neo-noir, it has qualities which tie it to these more recent examples. By making the weak “hero” a woman, the relationship between the hero and the femme fatale becomes more complicated; the dynamics of two women caught in a corrupt world where men are the enemy is a different view from straightforward neo-noir such as L.A. Confidential, and helps to widen the road that noir took in the later nineties, and will take into the millennium. A film like Bound helps to establish the argument that American Beauty is and should be read as film noir. The voice-over narration, the femme fatale opposed with the virtuous femine (represented by the two teenage girls), the dead protagonist, and the over-stated suburban as a claustrophobic space, prove that film noir can exist outside of the perverted heart of a city. American Beauty, like Dark City, is rooted in film noir, but would never be classified as film noir at your local Blockbuster (if they even have a noir section). When Beauty reads the video stories it will fall under the general heading of “drama,” which is probably just as well—we wouldn’t want to confuse the masses. Since noir’s birth in the 1940s it has come and gone, seeming to thrive in certain decades and perish in others. The 1990s brought many changes to the genre, and it will be interesting to see how we will come to define film noir in the 21st century, if we will be able to at all.

Jennifer Tilly is more interested in the “girl next door” than her husband, Joe Pantoliano in Bound.

Sundance continued from p. 8

unknowingly, unfortunately, is usually internalized as fear which festers into hate and is expressed through violence. Whether knowingly or unwittingly, Hollywood tends to support what can only politely be called close-mindedness.

Sundance fits into this because of its stable popularity. Sundance 2000 marked the fifth year that big studios signed big contracts with independent filmmakers. They had not wanted to lose out on marginal success if it provehold a lucrative market. Luckily, this greed spawned an unusually beneficial side-effect. Independent films (Shine, Fargo, Gods and Monsters, Hilary and Jackie) started to get in the Oscars. As more independent films are bought up, shown, and recognized in mainstream arenas like the Oscars, Hollywood will allow its parsimonious toe to sink deeper into the liberal waters.

Change has occurred within the industry as well. There is an identifiable trend in the 1999 fall and winter released films (the prime season for Oscar consideration). Chances were taken in content and structure that we have not really seen since New Hollywood (1968-72). Consider the sexual politics explored in Being John Malkovich, the complex and searching structure of Magnolia, and the frank extremism in American Beauty. All three films have landed in the multiplexes and pissed people off. That’s okay, wait until one of them wins an Oscar. Remember that Oscars validate importance and encourage acceptance into dominant American ideology.

It is not as though this new trend of avant-garde Hollywood film has reached down and dug up the real deep issues. Politics—racial, sexual, and religious to name a few—are difficult ground for the industry. But the crack in the door, which is what we are looking at, could allow some interesting Sundance-type films into the multiplexes of Montana. These films cannot be too abrasive because if they are, mainstream will focus more of the outrage than they will on the issue at hand. Small steps, as permitted by Sundance’s visibility, will put Hollywood on a more even keel with America.

Below: The signs of Sundance.
by Sarah Ostlieuce

IT'S ALIVE!! Yes, it's true, the executives over at ABC have made themselves a monster, one that would make Dr. Frankenstein proud. No, the monster isn't Regis Philbin, he's more like Frankenstein's henchman, Igor, but you're getting closer, it's the quiz show genre.

This is no ordinary monster either, although it does have quite a few similarities. Like other monsters it makes weird noises, looks hideous, and has a complex nature and a mob following. This monster, though, is disguised as a television program, but don't be fooled; if you look close enough, you'll notice that right under the thin surface layer it's really just an hour long commercial book-ended and dissected by other smaller commercials. What could be worse than that you ask? Well, it's been lurking around since television's childhood.

Igor holds the brain of the soon to be Frankenstein in the Mel Brooks comedy Young Dr. Frankenstein after winning only a dollar. The networks were making money by giving away money and all sides were happy. Until that is, 1968, when Herbie Stompel, s. looser, revealed that the quiz show, Twenty-one, was rigged, America had been betrayed, lawsuits were filed by angry contestants citing that they had been deprived of winning more money, (they lost the suits), and Eisenhower, President at the time, said that he [shared with the networks the] sea of distrust and all quiz shows were shut down and put away. It hasn't been until now, decades later, where cynicism and nationalistic go hand in hand, that the genre has been revived to its original popular.

"Quiz Shows appeal to something deep in the human psyche, and it's not just vats of money. People like watching real people like them test their knowledge (and) make the biggest financial decisions of their lives in front of the whole country."

-Michael Davies, Creator of ABC's Millionaire, Washington Post

One was rigged. America had been betrayed, lawsuits were filed by angry contestants citing that they had been deprived of winning more money, (they lost the suits), and Eisenhower, President at the time, said that he [shared with the networks the] sea of distrust and all quiz shows were shut down and put away. It hasn't been until now, decades later, where cynicism and nationalistic go hand in hand, that the genre has been revived to its original popular.

The resurrection

In fact, until the premiere of ABC's Who Wants to be a Millionaire? last summer, the prime time quiz show had only withered by over the years. Cable was having some success, Comedy Central's Win Ben Stein's Money was a hit and the Game Show Network was turning a profit, but they had ratings that wouldn't cut it on broadcast networks. Occasional attempts to resurrect the genre kept fizzling. Even Jeopardy!, as trusted as the news, suffers from declining and aging audiences.

On the contrary, Millionaire, with an average audience of 28.5 million viewers, has no fear when it comes to ratings concerns. The show in fact is single-handedly reviving ABC with its phenomenal success and low production budget. One episode of Millionaire is estimated at $750,000 (excluding a million win). Meanwhile an hour long drama like ABC's The Practice or N.Y.P.D. Blue cost at least $1.2 million per episode and franchises like NBC's Friends and Frasier cost more than $3 million a show.

Michael Davies, the man behind the monster, Executive Producer/Creator of Millionaire, has been hailed as the arguable heir to Mark Goodson, King of Quiz Shows. When asked in the Washington Post why the show has become such a hit Davies states, "Quiz Shows appeal to something deep in the human psyche, and it's not just vats of money."
"We'll use it [Millionaire] to launch our own new shows and to blunt shows the other guys have. This is business. We're playing hardball," ABC executives stated in the New York Times.

executives stated in the New York Times, while noting that NBC has used similar tactics in the past. The show, deployed at calculated intervals to squash competition, is making other networks cry foul. A most recent example of such subterfuge occurred when ABC fired a special edition of Millionaire into a time slot directly opposite of NBC's Twenty-One, reducing them to their lowest ratings ever.

"I think what they did to us was a cheap shot," Ancier stated, also in the Times, "If they continue to do this, at some point they can do tremendous damage to this business."

Despite such protests, the other networks couldn't move faster in pushing out their own quiz shows that, mind you, shows is causing in Hollywood there is an intrinsic support for a way of thinking that is driving Americans straight down debt lane. Everyone knows that television is the non-stop advertising Mecca for personal desires. But that doesn't stop many from watching. It's understood that in order to enjoy the entertainment that television sometimes provides there have to be commercials. It's even been accepted that the show you are watching will have cross-marketing aspects such as product endorsement.

However, the prime-time quiz show, by lauring money in the face of a nation stricken with a quite lucrative.

Van Doren, the contestant who beat Herbie Stempel on Twenty-One

"It's crack." Said President of NBC Entertainment Garth Ancier, in the San Francisco Chronicle, "It's wonderful because you get these giant ratings. But no one believes it's going to work forever."

Whether or not it lasts, Millionaire, has become such a monstrous hit that ABC is on a rampage using the show as a weapon of attack. "We'll use it to launch our own new shows and to blunt shows the other guys have. This is business. We're playing hardball," ABC bear remarkable resemblance to Millionaire. FOX was first to copy cat ABC with Greed and Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire, which is probably the most blatant example of consumerism encouraging the national decay of morals. NBC followed with reviving the scandal tainted Twenty-One and is currently working on releasing a reconfigured $1,000,064,000 Question. Finishing last in the race was CBS having released their quiz show remake, Winning Lines and now working on a reality game show, Survivor.

Besides the havoc that the rampant rise of quiz $5.4 trillion personal debt, is outdoing all previous attempts to merge the commercial with the program. But who wants to owe a millionaire? Well 89% of Americans said they would rather enter the new millennium debt free which implies undoubtedly to ABC executives that there couldn't be a better time or title for the resurrection of the quiz show genre.

Although, in the same survey, when polled about their upcoming New Year's Resolution, 23%ds of the country resolved to lose weight. Such a contradiction suggests a certain truth to the saying, 'you can never be too rich or too thin' and the idea that a show entitled Who Wants Liposuction? might also be the silver lining.

Al is not lost though, even monsters do good on occasion, besides, the fact that the networks are giving away their money, there is the aspect of reality television. A positive angle in the unfortunate unemployment of television actors and writers is that there is a breakdown in seeing the usual four hundred celebrities represent what people are and look like. Not that showmanship or money mongers are better but that regardless, they are closer to the real thing and are promoting a positive reason for being somewhat educated (on respect that other monstrosities, due to their nature, such as Jerry Springer or Nikki Lake could never achieve).
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