

# *senses of cinema*

## 2003 World Poll - Part 3

👤 Various 🕒 February 2004 📁 2003 World Poll 📖 Issue 30

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**Thomas Zummer**

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## **Miguel Mar as**

Of course, the easiest thing would be to list what I think were the best films commercially released in my city (Madrid, Spain) in 2003:

*Tokyo Story* (Yasujiro Ozu, 1953)

*Mystic River* (Clint Eastwood, 2003)

*The Flower of Evil* (Claude Chabrol, 2003)

*Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (Peter Weir, 2003)

*Dolls* (Takeshi Kitano, 2002)

*The Uncertainty Principle* (Manoel de Oliveira, 2002)

*My Mother's Smile* (Marco Bellocchio, 2002)

*The Man Without a Past* (Aki Kaurismäki, 2002)

*Gangs of New York* (Martin Scorsese, 2002)

*Marie-Jo et ses 2 amours* (Robert Guédiguian, 2001)

*Catch Me If You Can* (Steven Spielberg, 2002)

*Ohayô* (Yasujiro Ozu, 1959)

*Solaris* (Steven Soderbergh, 2002)

*Pollock* (Ed Harris, 2000)

*25th Hour* (Spike Lee, 2002)

*La vida mancha* (Enrique Urbizu, 2002)

*Te doy mis ojos* (Icíar Bollaín, 2003)

*Uzak* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2003)

*Sunshine State* (John Sayles, 2002)

*Eden* (Amos Gitai, 2001)

But then, why become a hostage of what Spanish distributors and Madrid theatre-owners, all in cahoots and at the service of the MPAA, decide, with urgency or belatedly, with lots of advertising or on tiptoe – to let us see, sometimes not the latest film of those very filmmakers, or some movie whose impact we had already experienced years or even decades before? What counts for me as new is rather what is NEW for me, what I have finally seen or discovered for the first time in 2003, no matter where or how, on videotape or DVD, at Film Archives or simply travelling abroad.

So, the other new films of 2003 were for me the following:

When new Korean films are becoming fashionable, the confirmation of veteran Im Kwon-taek's talent, with *Tabaek sanmaek* (1994) and *Chunhyangon* (1999).

Ermanno Olmi's *Il mestiere delle armi* (2000) and Franco Piavoli's *Voci nel tempo* (1996) to remind us that the Italian cinema is not totally sequestered – yet.

Pablo Llorca's short *Las olas* (2003), which was for me the best Spanish film of the year; another short item, Víctor Erice's *Alumbramiento* (to be seen in the as yet unreleased collective feature *Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet*) was the previous year's best. It seems meaningful to me that cinema has to take refuge in short subjects.

While other Argentinian films are widely distributed and successful, its astonishing vitality seems to me rather in the hands and eyes of young people like Juan Villegas (*Sábado* [2001]), Luis Ortega (*La caja negra*, [2001]), Celi na Murga (*Ana y los otros*, [2002]) or Santiago Loza (*Extraño*, [2003]), among others. Although one should not forget that this country's cinema was also very interesting in the past, as I learn from Carlos Hugo Christensen – who made there *Si muero antes de despertar* (1951), *16 años* (1943), *El Canto del Cisne* (1944) or *El demonio es un ángel* (1949), like *A Intrusa* (1978) in Brazil, *La balandra Isabel llegó esta tarde* (1949) in Venezuela or *Armiño negro* in Peru – or Hugo del Carril (whose 1955 *Más allá del olvido* uncannily foreshadows Hitchcock's *Vertigo* [1958]).

Humberto Mauro not only is the author of the great *Ganga Bruta* (1933). He had directed before *Sangue mineiro* (1929) or *Braza dormida* (1928). Nor was he alone in the Brazilian silent cinema: at long last I saw the mythical *Límite* (1929) by Mário Peixoto, which is no legend, but a real masterpiece.

*Elegy of a Voyage* (2001), *Eastern Elegy* (1996), *A Humble Life* (1997) and *Dolce* (1999) confirm the great if uneven talents of Aleksandr Sokurov.

In the year of Leni Riefenstahl's death, I saw three further proofs that some sort of talent remained at work even during the Third Reich: Alfred Braun's *Augen der Liebe* (1944), Traugott Müller's *Friedemann Bach* (1941) and Helmut Kautner's *Auf Wiedersehn, Franziska* (1941).

Chris Marker's 1989 13-chapter TV series *L'Héritage de la Chouette*, Ken Burns' 1990 TV series *The Civil War*, or Edgardo Cozarinsky's *Ernst Jünger: Journal d'occupation* (1985), *Domenico Scarlatti à Seville* (1990), *Boulevards du Crépuscule* (1992) or *Citizen Langlois* (1996) proved again that some TV chains can be at times friendly partners of cinema. But always very carefully: you must try to see Pedro Costa's *Où gît votre sourire enfoui?* (Jean-Marie Straub & Danièle Huillet, cinéastes) (2001) in its true longer, cinema version.

Straub & Huillet's *Operai, contadini* (2001), Godard & Miéville's *The Old Place* (1999), Chantal Akerman's *From the Other Side* (2002), Gitai's *Kippur* (2000), Nicolas Philibert's *To Be and to Have* (2002), Abbas Kiarosmani's *Ten* (2002), Aki Kaurismäki's *Juha* (1998), Abderrahman Sissako's *Waiting for Happiness* (2002), Claire Denis' *Friday Night* (2003) and even Hayao Miyazaki's animation feature *Spirited Away* (2001) prove that everything is yet possible, only very difficult to do and harder still to see.

I finally saw, and loved, Steve Kloves' *Flesh and Bone* (1993).

Seeing again, on DVD, Preminger's *In Harm's Way* (1965) and, at the Spanish Film Archive, Minnelli's *Goodbye Charlie* (1964), I recalled how unjustly such great late works were treated in the change of policy by *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1964–65, lastingly damaging their critical reputations at a moment when the U.S. cinema needed more than ever such kinds of filmmaking, which are sorely missed today and which only Clint Eastwood seems able or willing to pursue and update.

In short, this all should indicate that, while it is becoming harder each year, I feel there is still some sort of cinema resistance in a world increasingly full of traitors and tricksters.

The very bad films were so many and so alike, so widely praised and awarded, even often so successful, that one should not further promote them damning their authors either locally (David Trueba's *Soldados de Salamina* [2003], Marc Recha's *Las manos vacías* [2003] and other national trash and forgery) or globally (Lars von Trier and his acolytes, Bertolucci's painfully disgusting *The Dreamers* [2003] most of the films hailed weekly by the media). Some interesting films are so overrated that they become a nuisance (Van Sant's *Elephant* [2003] would be my choice as the greatest and least convincing blow-up job of the year).

Miguel Marías is 55, a film critic since 1966, a former director of the Spanish Film Archive and the author of books on Manuel Mur Oti and Leo McCarey.



## Philip Matthews

The following top ten is the one I published in the *New Zealand Listener*, December 27, though here without comments. The films are ranked in order. The criterion was that a film had its NZ theatrical release or first NZ festival screening in 2003. That's why a few of these films might have been in 2002 lists in the US or elsewhere.



*Spider* (David Cronenberg, 2002)

*Irreversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002)

*Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, 2002)

*Noi Albinoi* (Dagur Kari, 2003)

*In This World* (Michael Winterbottom, 2003)

*Sweet Sixteen* (Ken Loach, 2002)

*Whale Rider* (Niki Caro, 2002)

*Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002)

*American Splendor* (Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini)

*The Weather Underground* (Sam Green and Bill Siegel, 2003)

The following votes are new to this poll, and are also in order.

## Honourable mentions:

*Kill Bill: Volume 1* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003)

*The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002)

*Bloody Sunday* (Paul Greengrass, 2002)

*Woodenhead* (Florian Habicht, 2003)

*The Cuckoo* (Alexander Rogozhkin, 2002)

*City of God* (Fernando Meirelles & Kátia Lund, 2002)

*A Mighty Wind* (Christopher Guest, 2003). This is really here as the year's most pleasant surprise. I hated the previous two films from this ensemble, finding them patronising and overrated. I think it was the great, sad performance from Eugene Levy in this one that won me over.

## Most overrated:

*Mystic River*

*Winged Migration (Travelling Birds)* (Jacques Cluzaud, Michel Debats & Jacques Perrin, 2001)

*The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Peter Jackson, 2003). In Jackson, film-goers have mistaken personal stamina and mogul-like ambition for greatness. There's not much that's truly visionary or original about these films. I enjoyed the first one, but the second and third fell far short – they're an odd mix of hack-Shakespeare and B-grade monster movie.

*Secretary* (Steven Shainberg, 2002)

*Lost in La Mancha* (Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe, 2002). Completely dispiriting. If you come expecting *Hearts of Darkness* (Fax Bahr & George Hickenlooper, 1991) or *Burden of Dreams* (Les Blank, 1982), the main thought that will occur is, why did Terry Gilliam give up on his "dream project" so easily?

## Best screen acting:

Ralph Fiennes in *Spider*

Samantha Morton in *Morvern Callar*

John Malkovich in *Ripley's Game* (Liliana Cavani, 2002). Malkovich's sly and cruel performance is the only reason that this film exists. In its mix of suavity and amorality, it's what Anthony Hopkins was trying, and failing, to do with Hannibal Lecter.

Philip Matthews is a film reviewer with the *New Zealand Listener* magazine. He lives in Auckland.



## James May

*La Commune (Paris, 1871)* (Peter Watkins, 2000)

*Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (Guy Maddin, 2002)

*Ten*

*Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki, 2002)

*Lost In Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003)

*Elephant*

*Platform* (Jia Zhangke, 2001)

*The School of Rock* (Richard Linklater, 2003)

*The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*

*demonlover* (Olivier Assayas, 2002)

Favourite performances: Bill Murray (*Lost In Translation*), Johnny Depp (*Pirates of the Caribbean* [Gore Verbinski, 2003]), Jack Black (*The School of Rock*), Amin Maher (*Ten*).

Worst Movie: *Lost in La Mancha*.

Strangest Movie: *Blissfully Yours* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2001).

Huh?: *Spider*.

MVP: Harris Savides (*Elephant, Gerry* [Gus van Sant, 2002]).

Scariest Mom: Mrs. Friedman

Much like the narrator of Dostoevsky's "Notes from Underground", Jim May is an irretrievably marginalised figure living on the fringes of society. His one redeemable virtue, however, is a deep, abiding love of cinema.



## Olaf Möller

Olaf Möller's Eleven Elevations 2003

*Los Angeles Plays Itself* (Thom Andersen, 2003)

*Abar Aranye* (Goutam Ghose, 2003)

*Aku ingin menciummu sekali saja* (Garin Nugroho, 2002)

*Aro Tolbukhin: En la mente del asesino* (Agusti Villaronga, Lydia Zimmermann & Isaac P. Racine, 2002)

*Batang West Side* (Lav Diaz, 2001)

*Bayaning Third World* (Mike de Leon, 2000)

*Secret Things* (Jean-Claude Brisseau, 2003)

*Jôhatsu tabinikki* (Yamada Isao, 2003)

*Nacktschnecken* (Michael Glawogger, 2004)

*Resurrection of the Little Match Girl* (Jang Sun-woo, 2002)

*Vibrator* (Hiroki Ryuichi, 2003)

Olaf Möller's Eleven Ecstasies 2003

*Balamos* (Stavros Tornes, 1982)

*Kaiidan: Ikiteiru Koheiji* (Nakagawa Nobuo, 1982)

*Makchalo on sannimdeul* (Yu Hyunmok, 1967)

*La Morte ha fatto l'uovo* (Giulio Questi, 1968)

*Ouranos* (Takis Kanellopoulos, 1962)

*La Pattuglia sperduta* (Piero Nelli, 1954)

*Phenix* (Andrej Zdravic, 1975)

*Porno jidaigeki: Bohachi bushido* (Ishii Teruo, 1973)

*Sončni krik* (Bostjan Hladnik 1968)

*Tsugaru jongarabushi* (Saitô Kôichi, 1974)

*I Voski* (Nikos Papatakis, 1966)

Olaf Möller is a writer, translator and curator based in Cologne.



## Sarah Nichols

I missed a lot last year. When you commit to the movies, there's always one more that needs to be seen, one more that begs analysis, one more that works into your skin and stays there.

Here then, in no particular order, are some of the films that got under my skin in 2003:

*There's Always Tomorrow*, (Douglas Sirk, 1956) (seen as part of the Museum of Modern Art's "Movie Love in the '50s" series)

*Lost In Translation*

*I Vitelloni* (Federico Fellini, 1953) (a new print)

*Kill Bill: Volume 1*

It's a short list, yes, but these were the films that allowed me to slip into their worlds, unseen, and have me stay.

Ardent cinephile, sometime writer, Sarah Nichols has published in *The Macguffin* and the journal *Interdisciplinary Humanities*.

## Darragh O'Donoghue



I'm afraid I'm the kind of cautious old duffer who, when forced by penury to choose between going to an exciting cinematic novelty or some tatty "classic" seen 20 times before, always opts for the latter. But, honestly, has there been anything this year to divert me from seeing *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967) on 70mm, space-aged jewel in a complete Tati retrospective at the Irish Film Centre (or "Institute" as it pretentiously styles itself these days?); a restoration of *The Red Circle* (1970) in a not-so-full Jean-Pierre Melville season (where the hell are all the prints of *Le Deuxième souffle* [1966] anyhow?); a period reconstruction of silent shorts by Keaton, Chaplin and Lloyd at the National Concert Hall; *Sátántangó* (Béla Tarr, 1994) at last, funnier and more haunting than its admirers led me to believe; rare screenings of Bob Quinn's *Cloch* (1975) and *Poitín* (1977) (and his Markerian masterpiece *Atlantean* [1981/4] on video); new prints of *Aranyer Din Ratri* (Satyajit Ray, 1970); *Bigger Than Life* (Nicholas Ray, 1956); *Gertrud* (Carl Dreyer, 1964) at a life-affirming NFT Dreyer season; *The Great Dictator* (Charles Chaplin, 1940); *In a Lonely Place* (1950, Nicholas Ray); *Metropolis* (1927, Fritz Lang), *Ossessione* (1943, Luchino Visconti); *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966); *Van Gogh* (Maurice Pialat, 1991)?. More personally, the belated discovery that Bob Hope was one of the funniest men in movies, and how had I missed him all my life? etc., came with *The Paleface* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1948) and others.

When I did take a risk, I was invariably disappointed. *Gangs of New York* (Martin Scorsese, 2002) was a boorish farrago, with only slightly more brains than *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995); *Catch Me If You Can* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) was a sinister sermon masquerading as a (flaccid) caper; Nicolas Cage's hilarious double return to form was marred by writer-director self-congratulation in *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002). Lucas Belvaux's acclaimed *Trilogy* (2002) spent so much time being generous to its characters it forgot to be interesting, while Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2001) betrayed an unmistakable shift to self-parody. The *Cinéfrance* festival at the IFI was as mediocre as ever, with derivative newcomers plodding it out with clapped-out veterans. What struck me most about the few new films I *did* enjoy this year (and which were probably released everywhere else ages ago) is that they combined nostalgic flourishes of *mise en scène* with a Dreyer-like reverence for the face of favourite players: Paul Thomas Anderson and Adam Sandler in *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), Todd Haynes and Julianne Moore in *Far from Heaven* (2002), and, most of all Sofia Coppola and our greatest actor, Bill Murray, in *Lost In Translation* (2003), as expressive as Falconetti.

It's on TV, though, where surprise and epiphany are most likely to occur, subversive masterpieces scheduled as afternoon matinees like dynamite in a doll's house – *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann, 1949); *Buchanan Rides Alone* (Budd Boetticher, 1958); *The Fountainhead* (King Vidor, 1949); *The Naked Spur* (1953, Anthony Mann); *The Other Love* (André De Toth, 1947); *7th Cavalry* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1956); *Stella Dallas* (1937, King Vidor); hours of Looney Toons and Tom & Jerry daily on Boomerang.

And although, *pace* Dan Harper, I think the wide dissemination of previously unavailable movies on DVD cannot make up for profound impoverishment on the big screen, I must say that my happiest discovery of 2003 was the 2002 TF1 DVD of Henri Diamant-Berger's 1921 *Les Trois mousquetaires*. The restoration of this presumed-lost serial by the director's descendents is unforgivably botched – running times and scenes are re-arranged, intertitles are replaced by subtitles and narration; the soundtrack is a crass melange of sound effects and pompous music. The film itself is the kind of thing I usually hate – prestige literary adaptation – although one executed with more wit, flair, excitement and warmth than we seem to be able to muster these days. What marks this out as special though (and which the exquisitely restored images display) is the location filming, with shot after shot gleaming as precise and evanescent as Lumière or the Impressionists. So, instead of a list of the year's best new films, here's ten extraordinary films that were new to me in 2003 (the *auteur* bias is probably further evidence of my decadence):

*The Physician of the Castle* (Pathé Frères, 1908)

*The Bank* (Charles Chaplin, 1915)

*Orphans of the Storm* (D.W. Griffith, 1921)

*Lady Windermere's Fan* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1925)

*Un chapeau de paille d'Italie* (René Clair, 1927)

*Umarete wa mita keredo* (Yasujiro Ozu, 1932)

*The Southerner* (Jean Renoir, 1945)

*T.V. of Tomorrow* (Tex Avery, 1953)

*Home from the Hill* (Vincente Minnelli, 1960)

*Pakeezah* (Kamal Amrohi, 1971)

P.S. Oh, I nearly forgot. I used *Senses of Cinema* as the subject of an essay at library school, and got an A. Cheers

Darragh O'Donoghue failed to complete his PhD in French Crime Films and Literature. He now works in a Dublin public library.



## John Orr

*Dogville* (Lars von Trier, 2003). The best von Trier ever.

*Mystic River*. The best Eastwood in years.

*Friday Night*. Impressionist traffic jam in Paris.

*Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*

*Black Tape: A Tehran Diary* (Fariborz Kambari, 2002). Chinese-box docu-fiction from Iran.

*To Be and to Have*. Best documentary of the year.

*Capturing the Friedmans*. Second best documentary of the year.

*Intacto* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2002). Best thriller of the year.

*16 Years of Alcohol* (Richard Jobson, 2002). Best Edinburgh movie of the year.

*Thirteen* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2003). Best teen movie of the year.

Best acting: Kidman and Bettany in *Dogville*, Crowe and Bettany in *Master and Commander*, Depp in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Penn in *Mystic River*.

John Orr is Professor Emeritus at Edinburgh University and the author of several cinema books, including *Contemporary Cinema* and *The Art and Politics of Film*.



## Alan Pavelin

Best UK new releases I saw in 2003:

*Werckmeister Harmonies*

*The Son* (Luc & Jean-Pierre Dardenne, 2002)

*Springtime in a Small Town* (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 2002)

*Russian Ark* (Aleksandr Sokurov, 2002)

*About Schmidt* (Alexander Payne, 2002)

Alan Pavelin has been interested in international cinema since the 1960s, and has been writing about it since the 1980s. He has a particular interest in the portrayal of religious themes in film, and wrote a small self-published book, *Fifty Religious Films* (UK, 1990).



## Alberto Pezzotta

Almost any Italian critic would agree that the most important Italian movies of the year are *La meglio gioventù* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2003), a six-hour chronicle of an Italian family from the '60s to 2000, shot for TV but shown in Cannes and theatrically released after the TV producers sort of rejected it; and *Buongiorno, notte* (Marco Bellocchio, 2003), a meditation on and metaphorical transfiguration of the abduction and killing of president of Democrazia Cristiana, Aldo Moro, in 1978. I also loved *Caterina va in città* (Paolo Virzi, 2003) a lot.

Living in Milan, being a film critic, compelled to watch almost every movie released theatrically, I didn't find much of interest among the average Oscar and festival winners. I found wonderful Spike Lee's *25th Hour* (2003) truly loved by Italian critics and audiences too, which seems curiously underrated abroad. *Mystic River* is certainly a movie worth watching (which I wouldn't say of Jane Campion's *In the Cut* (2003), possibly the worst bluff seen in 2003, together with the ludicrous *Il cartaio* [2003] by Dario Argento), but Eastwood seems not to have mastered consciously all the ambiguities of the plot. Among the best movies of 2003 I'd include three movies not released in Italy in any form: *Crimson Gold* (2003) by Jafar Panahi (best movie of Cannes 2003); *Memories of Murder* (Bong Joon-ho, 2003), *Old Boy* (Park Chan-wook, 2003) (both seen at MIFED). Instead we had the chance to see any movie by the Makhmalbaf family, and minor self-appointed global cults, like *Kitchen Stories* (Bent Hamer, 2003) or *Vodka Lemon* (Hiner Saleem, 2003). Only the worst French movies get released here.

Among the best DVDs: the French Suzuki and Truffaut series, the Hong Kong Shaw Brothers Collection. Personal cult: all the movies by Massimo Dallamano on Japanese DVDs.

Looking forward to any new work by: Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tien Zhuangzhuang, Philippe Garrel.

Alberto Pezzotta writes for *Corriere della sera* and many Italian film magazines. He has written books on Hong Kong Cinema, Mario Bava, *Taxi Driver*, and Abel Ferrara. He is based in Milan, Italy.



## Jit Phokaew

*Divine Intervention* (Elia Suleiman, 2002)

*Valerie Flake* (John Putsch, 1999)

*Kokkuri-san* (Takahisa Zeze, 1997)

*Saltimbank* (Jean-Claude Biette, 2003)

*Koridorius* (Sharunas Bartas, 1994)

*A Place on Earth* (Artour Aristakisian, 2001)

*While the Right Hand Is Sleeping* (Shirakawa Koji, 2002)

*One Night Husband* (Pimpaka Towira, 2003)

*The Last Bolshevik* (Chris Marker, 1993)

*Hi, Tereska* (Robert Glinski, 2001)

*The Cherry Orchard* (Shun Nakahara, 1990)

*The Farewell* (Jan Schuette, 2001)

*AmnesiA* (Martin Koolhoven, 2001)

*A Virus Knows No Morals* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1985)

*Gas Attack* (Kenny Glenaan, 2001)

*The Wild Bees* (Bohdan Slama, 2001)

*Mathias Kneissl* (Reinhard Hauff, 1970)

*From the Journals of Jean Seberg* (Mark Rappaport, 1995)

*It's Easier for a Camel* (Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi, 2003)

*Haru* (Yoshimitsu Morita, 1995)

Favourite short films:

*Take the 5:10 to Dreamland* (Bruce Conner, 1976)

*The Day the Milkman Didn't Come* (Anja Langenbacher, 1998)

*High Kukus* (James Broughton, 1973)

*Blow Up My Town* (Chantal Akerman, 1968)

*Amelia Rose Towers* (Jackie Farkas, 1992)

If there was an interesting trend in movies in 2003, I think it is the improving quality of genre films, particularly the female-action and horror/thriller genres. Genre films that I liked very much this year include *So Close* (Corey Yuen, 2002) and *Naked Weapon* (Ching Siu-Tung, 2002) in the female-action genre, and *A Tale of Two Sisters* (Kim Ji Woon, 2003), *Ju-on: The Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2003), *My Little Eye* (Marc Evans, 2002), *Willard* (Glen Morgan, 2003), *Intacto*, and *Darkness* (Jaume Balaguero, 2002) in the horror/thriller genre.

Favourite Thai films of 2003:

Led by *One Night Husband* in my top ten, Thai films that I am particularly fond of this year include *I-San Special* (Mingmonkol Sonakul, 2002), *Last Life in the Universe* (Pen-Ek Ratanaruang, 2003), *Fake* (Thanakorn Pongsuwan, 2003), and *Sayew* (Kongdej Jaturanrasamee, Kiat Songsanant, 2003).

Jit Phokaew is a Bangkok-based cinephile.



## Mike Plante

Please Keep Making This Type of Film, Not the Other Kind:

Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* and *Gerry*

The Masters Steamroll On:

Guy Maddin's *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* and *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003)



Beat Takashi's *Zatôichi* (2003)

Aki Kaurismäki's *The Man Without a Past*

Hope for the Future:

*Uzak*

*Napoleon Dynamite* (Jared Hess, 2004)

*The Nest* (James Fotopoulos, 2003)

*Nói Albinói* (Dagur Kári)

*Osama* (Siddiq Barmak, 2003)

*The Triplets of Belleville* (Sylvain Chomet, 2003)

*War* (Jake Mahaffy, 2004)

Best Event:

Animal Charm live videos in Las Vegas – I asked a group of college students about all the films they had been seeing at CineVegas and where they were from. The main kid cracked a Pabst Blue Ribbon open and said, “We just graduated high school.”

Short Films:

*bobbycrush* (Cam Archer)

*Cheap Ludes* (John Doornik and Jeroen Mol)

*Crimenals* (Gregory Araya)

*Fast Film* (Virgil Widrich)

*Leche and Mala Leche* (Naomi Uman)

*Meditations on Revolutions 5* (Robert Fenz) / *Out of the Ether* (Kerry Laitala)

*Rome NY* (Ada Bligaard Soby)

*Slowly Silently* (Jinoh Park)

*Trick Pony Trilogy* (Ben Coonley)

Mike Plante is a short film programmer for the Sundance Film Festival, a programmer for CineVegas, and publisher of *Cinemad Magazine*.



## Jared Rapfogel

Rare is the year in which one film truly towers above the rest, but on one viewing, *Blissfully Yours* strikes me as unparalleled in 2003, the freest, most gently radical, and most flat out heartbreakingly beautiful movie I've seen in several years. I found Apichatpong Weerasethakul's last film, *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000), an intriguing but only semi-successful experiment, and so I was unprepared for his achievement here. It's the rarest of the rare, a film that feels utterly new and uncategorisable – kissing cousin to many recent Iranian films, with their free approach to narrative and their documentary/fiction hybrid form, but with a serenity, a mysteriousness, and a lyricism entirely its own. It is essentially a film about nothing more than presence, being; about time, place, touch, sight, sound. And by the end, it seems not to be representing these things, but to have become them, to embody them.

*Blissfully Yours* has failed to reappear in NY since its two screenings at Lincoln Center in February, and I've felt impoverished in its absence.

Best new releases (in NY) of 2003 (in roughly descending order):

*The Son*

*Love and Diane* (Jennifer Dworkin, 2002)

*In My Skin* (Marina de Van, 2002)

*Blind Spot* (Andre Heller & Othmar Schmiderer, 2002)

*The Red Circle*

*Monday Morning* (Otar Iosseliani, 2002)

*Russian Ark*

*Divine Intervention*

*Ten*

*One From the Heart* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1982)

*Capturing the Friedmans*

*Secretary*

*Bad Santa* (Terry Zwigoff, 2003)

*Pirates of the Caribbean*

Undistributed so far (descending order):

*Blissfully Yours* (Weerasethakul, 2002)

*S21: Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (Rithy Panh, 2003)

*The Road* (Darezhan Omirbaev, 2001)

*Raja* (Jacques Doillon, 2003)

*Goodbye Dragon Inn* (Tsai Ming-liang, 2003)

*Dogville*

*Crimson Gold*

*Uzak*

*Ford Transit* (Hany Abu-Assad, 2002)

*Bright Leaves* (Ross McElwee, 2003)

New to me:

Films of Darezhan Omirbaev (esp. *Kairat* [1992])

R.W. Fassbinder retro

Nicholas Ray retro

Yasujiro Ozu retro

Josef von Sternberg retro (especially *Docks of New York* [1928])

Films of Vincente Minnelli

Films of Bruce Baillie

Films of Karl Kels

Films of Gregory Markopoulos (especially *Ming Green* [1966], *Himself as Herself* [1967], and *Through a Lens Brightly: Mark Turbyfill* [1967])

Two by Douglas Sirk: *All I Desire* (1953) and *There's Always Tomorrow* (1956)

*Model Shop* (Jacques Demy, 1969)

*Pirosmani* (Giorgi Shengelaya, 1969)

*Deep End* (Jerzy Skolimowski, 1970)

*Uncle Vanya* (Andrei Konchalovsky, 1970)

*The Iron Mask* (Allan Dwan, 1929)

*Stroszek* (Werner Herzog, 1977)

*Minnie and Moskowitz* (John Cassavetes, 1971)

*The Fierce One* (Tolomush Okeev, 1974)

*Serene Velocity* (Ernie Gehr, 1970)

Hollis Frampton's "Magellan Cycle" (1973–84)

Jared Rapfogel is a regular contributor to both *Senses of Cinema* and *Cinema Scope*.



## Bérénice Reynaud

I avoided listing DVDs and re-releases, because, with the Shaw Brothers collection being made available for the first time in 30-odd years, there were too many masterpieces that were competing with more recent films.

Instead, I ranked films that were released in my place of residence (Los Angeles, USA) in 2003, and/or which I could see at the following occasions:

At the Sundance (January), IFC (June), Outfest (July), San Sebastian (September), Vancouver (October), the Vienne (October), FCMM-Montréal (October) and AFI (November) film festivals – as well as films seen in the last week of December 2003 in Paris, France (plus a couple of films produced this year that were submitted to me on cassette for submission to one of the festivals I work for).

Faced with the abundance of movies I liked, I have prepared two lists of 20 each. One is for the films that 2003 will be remembered for; another salutes the arrival of original new voices and new talents on the cinematic scene.

## List One

In 2003, two formidable documentaries towered over the rest of film production:

Wang Bing's nine-hour epic of minute, intimate investigation of the slow destruction of an industrial complex in North-East China, *Tiexi District: West of the Tracks* (2003).

Thom Andersen's brilliant 169-minute deconstruction of the way Los Angeles is represented in movies: *Los Angeles Plays Itself*.

Three other documentaries also make the cut on top of the list – the fact is remarkable enough to be mentioned.

Chantal Akerman's sharp, lyrical meditation on the institutionalised racism at the Mexican-American border: *From the Other Side* (France)

Andrew Jarecki's unexpected collaboration with a family destroyed by the (still unproven) accusation of sexual molestation of children: *Capturing the Friedmans*.

Errol Morris' uncanny portrait of Robert McNamara and the role played by warfare in the construction of the modern world: *The Fog of War*.

Through the vagaries of film distribution in the US, two outstanding directors released *two* masterpieces the same year:

Jia Zhangke's *The Platform* and *Unknown Pleasures*.

Gus van Sant's *Gerry* and *Elephant*.

This is followed by a number of remarkable films made by true-and-proven directors. In some cases (Tsai, Dardenne, Sissoko, Kaurismaki, Wang, Bani-Etemad, Resnais, Depardon) the film is at the level of their best work to date; in some others (Kiarostami, Denis, Eastwood), they are finely crafted, yet less ambitious work in an impressive filmography.

*Goodbye Dragon Inn*

*The Son*

*Waiting for Happiness*

*The Man Without a Past*

*Drifters* (Wang Xiaohuai, 2003)

*Under the Skin of the City* (Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, 2003)

*Pas sur la bouche* (Alain Resnais, 2003)

*Untouched by the West* (Raymond Depardon, 2003)

*Ten*

*Friday Night*

*Mystic River*

I will conclude, paradoxically, this first list with films that are brilliant entertainment, as well as a variation/spin-off on the legacy of classical samurai films (and *not* kung fu, as it was sometimes ignorantly said about the new Tarantino). Now – I was never a Tarantino lover till *Jackie Brown* but the sheer beauty (as well as the humour) of some sequences of *Kill Bill* won me over. On the other hand, Kitano could read the phone book for me, and I'd still be fascinated, but, oh boy, he does more than reading the phone book in his last film...



*Zatôichi*

*Kill Bill: Volume 1*

List Two: New Voices (alphabetically by name of director)

*Since Otar Left* (Julie Bertuccelli, 2003). Coming from documentary and with a cast of three wonderful actresses, Bertuccelli went to Georgia to shoot her first fiction film of female bonding, hope, lies, utopia and displacement in the post-Berlin wall world.

*Memories of Murder*. For his second feature Bong uses the story of a series of unsolved sex murders in a rural area to reflect on the repression that affected Korean society in the 1980s.

*Welcome to Destination Shanghai* (Andrew Cheng, 2003). Produced independently and shot in digital, Cheng's second feature mixes surreal, abstractly staged scenes with intimate interaction between a cast of disparate characters to express the societal malaise faced by Shanghai in the midst of modernisation and urban development.

*The Triplets of Belleville*. An homage to Tati, utopian urban architecture, music-hall of the '30s and adventure film – all wrapped up in one of the wittiest, more imaginative and exhilarating animation films of the last few years.

*My Life Without Me* (Isabel Coixet, 2003). At long last, the emergence of a new female voice in female cinema – a great screenplay, a sensitive gaze, an assured directorial touch, a marvellous use of Sarah Polley's acting talent.

*Lost In Translation*. Coppola confirms the talents displayed in *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) – she knows how to represent women, men-women relationship, invisible emotions – she flounders a little bit when expressing a very US centred vision of Japan.

*The Old Testament* (Cui Zi'en, 2002). One of the most significant events in recent Chinese cinema – shooting digitally, with a shoe-string budget, in total independence/illegality, Cui Zi'en has directed no less than seven features in the last two years following this first film – all exploring gay consciousness and lifestyle in China, with a healthy dose of surrealism, humour, formal experimentation and wit.

*The Journey of Maryam* (Sepideh Farsi, 2003). A fascinating, nostalgic mixture of documentary and fiction, the film uses a subjective camera to express the point of view of a young woman pretending to be looking for her missing father and discovering instead a city, Tehran, she had lost to exile.

*Eager bodies* (Xavier Giannoli, 2003). With his first feature the director explores with finesse and with the help of a great newcomer (Laura Smet) what the French are good at staging: the hysteria of love – in this case exacerbated by the advent of a possibly fatal disease and the proximity of death.

*No Rest for the Brave* (Alain Guiraudie, 2003). After a series of ground-breaking shorts and featurettes, Guiraudie continues to imaginatively explore his very idiosyncratic world – a fantastic, utopian use of regional locations in the South-West of France, with a subtle, humorous queer touch.

*A Certain Kind of Death* (Blue Hadaegh & Grover Babcock, 2003). A subtle tour-de-force – how to make a sensitive, moving, beautiful documentary about people who die alone, without next-of-kin, in a city like Los Angeles – an insightful meditation on the meaning of life and death.

*This Happy Life* (Jiang Yue, 2002). This is not Jiang's first documentary (with his colleague, Duan Jinchuan, also first-rate documentarist in China, they have a small production company), but certainly his most perfect, and the first one to reach international attention through the intimate, fly-on-the-wall recording of the relationship between two railroad workers faced with loneliness, relationship and the transformation of the Chinese workplace.

*Invisible Light* (Gina Kim, 2003). After years of making “video diaries”, Kim turns to fiction but stays within the same obsessive claustrophobic, narcissistic universe of eating disorder and female loneliness – a rare, original, rigorous directorial hand.

*The Missing* (Lee Kang-sheng, 2003). Tsai Ming-liang’s main actor since the early ’90s, Lee turns to directing; he casts his previous co-actors in the film, uses his own name for a character kept off-screen, and produces another fascinating variation on Tsai’s universe – maybe he had provided more of Tsai’s original material than we were aware of – a fascinating example of a long-term artistic collaboration.

*Suddenly* (Diego Lerman, 2002). Exhilarating, original, imaginative unfolding of the relationship between four women, that starts as a kidnapping, continues as a road movie and ends up as the *mise en scène* of the fluidity of emotional and gender identifications in a changing world.

*Blind Shaft* (Li Yang, 2002). After years as a documentary filmmaker for German television, Li came back to China to shoot this tragic story of murder and survival in coal mines – using real locations and mostly local performers.

*The Station Agent* (Tom McCarthy, 2003). A great script, insightful, well-directed performances, a generous look at human relationship that is witty, subtle, and pregnant with an interesting, secret melancholia.

*American Splendor*. The brainchild of producer Ted Hope, an imaginative collage of documentary, animation, found footage and re-staged biography with two first-rate actors.

*My Father and I* (Xu Jinglei, 2003). One of the best young actresses of her generation, Xu wrote, produced, directed and starred in this first film – the story of an unconventional relationship between a young woman and her father – in which reaching out for a flawed parent involves admitting one’s own personal failures at human relationships.

*Let’s Love Hong Kong* (Yau Ching, 2002). Mixing a story of (unrequited) lesbian desire with the witty, utopian (re)construction of a Hong Kong that is both no more and not yet, in her first feature Yau finally gives – *from the inside* – a voice to female queer concerns in Chinese culture.

B er enice Reynaud is the author of *Nouvelles Chines, nouveaux cin emas* (Paris, 1999) and *A City of Sadness* (London, 2002). Her work has been published in *Cahiers du cin ema*, *Lib eration*, *Sight and Sound*, *Screen*, *Film Comment*, *Senses of Cinema*, *CinemaScope*, and *Cinemaya*, the *Asian Film Quarterly*, among others. She teaches at the California Institute of the Arts.



## Vadim Rizov

Films I'd like to have seen in 2003 include two by my favourite filmmakers: Jafar Panahi's *Crimson Gold* and Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. Worse yet, here in the US I can't even see the highly acclaimed work of Jia Zhangke, and I have yet to see the Dardenne brothers' highly acclaimed *The Son*, from all the way back in 2002, but which only made it to extremely limited New York release in 2003. Perhaps that's why I'm only able to come up with eight worthy candidates for the top ten at the moment:



Enough complaining:

*Gerry*. So vast and formidable it becomes a film about ideas and then becomes so empty-headed as to come back again and be about nothing but pure visual stimulation, like the best blockbusters. Casey Affleck and Matt Damon get lost in the desert, and inevitable themes of Man vs. Nature emerge; besides, never is it possible for someone to get cinematically lost without doing so symbolically as well. But *Gerry* comes back round the other side: as the dialogue drops out and the film becomes a pure study of exhausted motion, viewers lean forward in their seats to see the slightest of motions. Gus Van Sant recalibrates our notions of what we prioritise in cinema, and why we value character and plot over visual stimulus.

*The Good Thief* (Neil Jordan, 2003). The idea is that Neil Jordan is supposed to go back and forth between commercial projects like, say, *In Dreams* (1999) (well, probably no one intends for them to turn out like *In Dreams*) and more personal, obscure films like *The Butcher Boy* (1997). Then there's *The Good Thief*. Like Jarmusch, Jordan visualises a group of cultural outsiders coming together in an alien environment to forge a new culture; here, the outsiders are audacious and visionary directors who have trouble getting funding, like Emir Kusturica and the Polish brothers. Rarely has revolt from the system been so lightweight and enjoyable.

*Raising Victor Vargas* (Peter Sollett, 2003). Some criticised this tale of inner city puppy love as a whitewashed novelty, unrealistically airbrushing all traces of uncomfortable sexuality or threatening violence from the ghetto. The fact remains that Sollett is one of the few non-documentary filmmakers to take a look at inner city life in recent years. And his romance is sweet without being desperate; if life isn't this innocuous and lovely, it should be.

*The Man Without A Past*. Kaurismäki continues to reinvent himself as a Capra for people who long ago gave up on the human race. His steady minimalism annoys some, but it's the best idiom for approaching such a potentially "quirky" and "life-affirming" story; here, his honesty and poignancy remove the quotation marks from those terms.

*King of the Ants* (Stuart Gordon, 2003). Stuart Gordon continues his reign as the most underrated filmmaker in the exploitation scene, or what remains of it. His most thoughtful (and brutal) film yet name-drops Beckett and notions of cosmic nihilism in between bloody decapitations, genre-hopping between procedural satire, revenge thriller, romantic comedy, and every other played-out genre. Now they work again.

*Anything Else* (Woody Allen, 2003). Woody Allen made his best film in years and almost no one noticed. Instead of straining for an elegiac quality, it comes naturally to him now; no more the need to ape Bergman. Always his own fiercest critic, *Anything Else* is an explicit warding-off of any would-be followers, as Jason Biggs trips himself up by idolising Allen; Allen plays himself as a lunatic. The results are far angrier – and interesting – than anything he's done in years.

*The Flower of Evil*. Another late-stage, minor entry from Chabrol unthinkingly dismissed as merely such by many. Set aside your misplaced craving for thrills, and the results are formal perfection, a chilling but elegant meditation on the nature (and failings) of fate and redemption. In its offhand portrait of French public housing, it reveals Chabrol's continual curiosity about the larger world.

*Bad Santa*. Shallower but better than *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001). Here, Zwigoff reinvents himself as a pure caricaturist, but out of that mean-spiritedness comes a sympathy for human failings that far transcends the schizophrenic mixture of satire and sympathy that made up *Ghost World*. He also lets Billy Bob Thornton give the year's most perfect comic performance.

Vadim Rizov maintains an Internet outpost at <http://www.geocities.com/edwartell> [HTTP://WWW.GEOCITIES.COM/EDWARTELL].



## Jack Sargeant

*Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (George Clooney, 2003) and *Auto Focus* (Paul Schrader, 2002) ... sleaze and Hollywood ... two interests.

*Secretary* – saw this early one morning and the audience was all old men ... it added to the screening.

Overall this was a pretty average year for movies...

Jack Sargeant is author of *Deathtripping: The Cinema Of Transgression*, *Naked Lens: Beat Cinema* and *Cinema Contra Cinema*. His underground film events and tours are legendary, combining academic lectures, screenings and occasional outbursts of virulent nihilism. He divides his time between the UK and Australia.



## Howard Schumann

*Elephant*

*Nowhere in Africa* (Caroline Link, 2002)

*The Cuckoo*

*Shattered Glass* (Billy Ray, 2003)

*The Barbarian Invasions* (Denys Arcand, 2003)

*The Son and Ram Dass: Fierce Grace* (Michael Lemie, 2002) (tie)

*Capturing the Friedmans*

*Spellbound* (Jeffrey Blitz, 2003)

*Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony* (Lee Hirsch, 2002)

*Father and Son* (Aleksandr Sokurov, 2003) and *Respiro* (Emanuel Criales, 2002) (tie)

Howard Schumann is a movie critic for **CineScene.com** [[HTTP://WWW.CINESCENE.COM/](http://www.cinescene.com/)] .



## Girish Shambu

Lars von Trier:

Suffering, in Lars' universe, is the key to truth and transcendence. In *Dogville*, a supernaturally beautiful Nicole Kidman is defiled and martyred in a small American town. In *The Five Obstructions* (2003), Lars dispatches Danish veteran director Jorgen Leth around the world on a torturous assignment to remake Leth's 1966 short *The Perfect Human*. While watching these films you're cursing, "Lars, the sadistic bastard..."; a week later, you're shaking your head and muttering, "There's no greater moviemaker alive..."

Sharon Lockhart:

With *Nô* (2003), this Los Angeles-based avant-garde filmmaker has produced a lovely work that is about documentary and fiction, work and culture, life and art. In our televisual age of maximum montage, her film consists of a single shot, held for 30 minutes, as a Japanese man and woman carefully go about covering an empty field with hay. And it's spellbinding.

A quintet of marvellous American auteur-films:

*The Secret Lives Of Dentists* (Alan Rudolph, 2002); *Raising Victor Vargas*; *Blue Car* (Karen Moncrieff, 2003); *Lost In Translation*; and *The School Of Rock*.

Please Please Mr. Distributor Man...:

*Uzak* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2003), *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and *Time of the Wolf* (Michael Haneke, 2003).

Documentaries:

*American Splendor* and *Capturing The Friedmans*. Harvey Pekar: “Ordinary life is pretty complex stuff”.

David Cronenberg’s *Spider*, a chilling and heartbreaking masterpiece of a film. May it grow into cult favedom in a DVD after-life the way it never did at the theatres.

Highest Pleasure Quotient:

Daring compositions. *Mise en scène* of precision and detail. Elliptical transitions that move thrillingly from one frame to another. No, for once we’re not talking about art cinema but instead the world of...alternative comics.

OK, so it’s not film, but any red-blooded cinephile would, I wager, stop short in their tracks upon encountering the prime examples of this criminally neglected art-form. The best alt-comics artists are true auteurs, employing an arsenal of cinematic effects to create meaning, as in the movies, through images and words. Recommended as a starter for the uninitiated: “The Death Of Speedy” by Jaime Hernandez, which might be not-incongruously thought of as Robert Bresson’s *Au Hasard Archie*.

Girish Shambu is on the faculty at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York.



**Brad Stevens**

*Above The Below* (Harmony Korine, 2003)

*Auto Focus*

*Catch Me if You Can*

*Cremaster 3* (Matthew Barney, 2002)

*Crimson Gold*

*La Fidelite* (Andrzej Zulawski, 2000)

*Little Eden* (Metrov, 2003)

*Platform* (195 minute version)

*Tinikling* or “*The Madonna and the Dragon*” (Samuel Fuller, 1989)

*Uncovered* (Jim McBride, 1994)

Not forgetting two outstanding cinephile documentaries: *Abel Ferrara: Not Guilty* (Rafi Pitts, 2003) and the ten-part series *Chaplin Today* (various directors, 2002-2003).

Brad Stevens is the author of *Monte Hellman: His Life and Films* and a forthcoming book on Abel Ferrara.



## Stephen Teo

*Japanese Story* (Sue Brooks, 2003): A narrative twist and Toni Collette make it the year's best.

*The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1966) and *Come Drink With Me* (King Hu, 1966): Best restored movies of 2003.

*Pirates of the Caribbean*: Johnny Depp is irresistible; a wonderful tribute to *The Crimson Pirate* (Robert Siodmak, 1952).

*Infernal Affairs* (Andrew Lau, Alan Mak, 2002) and *Infernal Affairs II* (Andrew Lau, Alan Mak, 2003): Hong Kong cinema back in high form.

*Ten*: Kiarostami on the back seat of a car.

*The Finished People* (Khoa Do): Remarkable for blurring drama and documentary.

*Perfect Strangers* (Gaylene Preston, 2003): Underrated.

*Intolerable Cruelty* (Joel Coen, 2003): Coen Bros touched by the spirit of Preston Sturges.

*Memories of Murder*: Superior Korean whodunit.

*Mystic River*: Clint Eastwood, tragic American.

Overrated:

*Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*. Expensive handling gives it class, but single-track plot is almost boring, and characters are much too watertight. Raoul Walsh, I miss you!

*In the Cut*: “No sense of cock”, someone says in the movie. “No sense of Hitch”, say I.

*Whale Rider*: Resolutely grim and sombre, would have benefited from some humour.

*Kill Bill: Volume 1*: Too loose farrago of violence, lacks substance for a picture called “Volume 1” (and probably a bad idea to break it into two in the first place).

Film culture highlight:

2003 Hong Kong International Film Festival: memorable for unfolding at the height of the SARS crisis as Hong Kong was transforming into a ghost city, yet audiences thronged into venues, donning face masks. For a semblance of what it felt like, put on a mask while you watch *Russian Ark*, *Blissfully Yours*.

Film criticism highlight:

*Leslie Cheung*, edited by Clare Stewart and Philippa Hawker (ACMI, Melbourne, 2003). A moving booklet published as part of a tribute to the late actor; the best thing that ACMI has published thus far.

Stephen Teo is a writer who has contributed many articles to *Senses of Cinema* and other film journals. He is the author of *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* and the forthcoming *Wong Kar-wai*. He has completed his PhD candidature at the RMIT University.



## Peter Tonguette

*Ten*

*Mystic River*

*The Hunted* (William Friedkin, 2003)

*Stuck on You* (Peter and Bobby Farrelly, 2003)

*The Secret Lives of Dentists*

*All the Ships at Sea* (Dan Sallitt, 2003)

*Kill Bill: Volume 1*

*Anything Else*

*Looney Tunes: Back In Action* (Joe Dante, 2003)

*The Singing Detective* (Keith Gordon, 2003)

Favourite scenes/sequences: Bugs and Daffy stuck in the paintings at the Louvre (*Looney Tunes: Back In Action*); “Bonnie and Clyde: The Musical” (*Stuck on You*); the whole family gets the flu (*The Secret Lives of Dentists*); Jerry meets Amanda (*Anything Else*).

Favourite film criticism: Tag Gallagher's DVD of film criticism; Armond White's review of *Stuck on You* [HTTP://WWW.NYPRESS.COM/PRINT.CFM?CONTENT\_ID=9338] (*New York Press*); Jonathan Rosenbaum's review of *25th Hour* [HTTP://WWW.CHIREADER.COM/MOVIES/ARCHIVES/2003/0103/030117\_1.HTML] (*Chicago Reader*); F.X. Feeney's review of *The Secret Lives of Dentists* (*Film Comment*); Bill Krohn's "The Cliff and the Flume" [HTTP://ARCHIVE.SENSESOFCINEMA.COM/CONTENTS/03/28/CLIFF\_AND\_FLUME.HTML], (*Senses of Cinema*); Kent Jones's "The Eastwood Variations" (*Film Comment*).

Peter Tonguette is an Ohio-based film critic and essayist.



## Andrew Tracy

*Los Angeles Plays Itself*. Thom Andersen's nearly 3-hour video documentary about the historical, geographic, and aesthetic misrepresentation of his native city by a century of cinema and television is both whimsically aggrieved and wholly impassioned, brimming with a barely concealed anger at how these distortions serve to bury an archetypal 20th-century history of social development and political change. Relying almost wholly upon other people's work to provide the content, Andersen arranges and shapes these shreds into an epic portrait of his beloved home, to give face and voice to a city and people so often rendered anonymous and silent.

*Shara* (Naomi Kawase, 2003). This elliptical tale of loss and rebirth falls into the emerging genre of poetic infanticide movies dotting the art-film landscape (including Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* [2000] and Thomas de Thier's *Feathers in my Head* [2003]), but the freshness and exhilaration of her visuals is undeniable. Observing a family's emotional fallout eight years after the unexplained disappearance of their youngest son, Kawase's camera bobs, weaves and scurries with more stubborn tenacity than the Dardennes', converting the rooms, streets and alleys of a small Japanese village into a labyrinth resounding with echoes of the past and promises of the future. Kawase's delicate artistry explodes in the climactic spectacle of the rain-soaked street festival, the characters bursting out of their guarded and repressed shells and basking in the light of their true, ecstatic selves.

*Elephant*. Explanations are not this film's concern – it strives instead to give shape to our incomprehension. Moving back and forth through time with the same gliding grace of its travelling shots through the halls of the school, *Elephant* presents its psychologically/ideologically/politically charged subject as a tour through a frozen cave of horror, as inevitable and inexplicable as the clouds which rush overhead in the opening and closing shots.

*The Missing* (Ron Howard, 2003). A bizarre success from the depths of Hollywood, Ron Howard's stylistically austere and thematically complex Western, from an elegant and subtle script by Ken Kelman, has much to say about the ongoing relevance of the Western genre to our lives today. Understated yet cohesive, couched in a deceptively straightforward narrative, *The Missing* presents a portrait of the American family distinctly different from the self-justifying fortified unit which dominates mainstream cinema; rather, it's a mixture of bloodlines, identities and cultures, a tentative union whose testing has less to do with its blind confidence in its rightness than its ability to accept difference, irregularity and the wayward nature of human passions.

*Time of the Wolf*. Eschewing the glacially sadistic perfection of his pre-*Code Unknown* work, Michael Haneke presents another vision of the family in dissolution, as an abruptly fatherless family attempts to make its way through the post-apocalyptic landscape of rural France. Refraining from both the conventions of the genre and any platitudes about the nature of man once stripped of civilisation, Haneke coolly, precisely observes humanity in action and interaction, cruelty (the sudden murder of the family's pater in the first scene) and goodness (an attempted sacrifice in the last) seen as equally valid responses to our perpetual state of desperation.

*Goodbye Dragon Inn*. Though lacking the metaphysical poetry of *What Time Is It There?* (Tsai Ming-liang, 2001) Tsai's latest tour through his obsessions represents perhaps the apex of his fascination with cinematic time, blended with a tribute to the atmospheric power of the cinema itself. Following several characters through a series of encounters (and non-encounters) during a screening of King Hu's *Dragon Inn* in a decaying, soon-to-be condemned movie house, Tsai blends their individual solitudes into a sweetly inconsolable sadness, a universal sorrow which envelops characters, audience, and the world in the flickerings of the projector.

*To Be and to Have*. Disarmingly simple yet resoundingly deep, Nicolas Philibert's documentary about the teacher and students of a rural French schoolhouse intentionally surpasses mere sociological observation to touch something far deeper.

*The School of Rock*. There are probably a dozen ways in which Richard Linklater's gentle comedy could be funnier, smarter, sharper, more incisive and satirical, and not a one of them matters. A formulaic package of smarmy Saturday afternoon distraction has been transformed by genuine conviction, warmth and affection into something joyous and uplifting, a film that forgoes the isolating politics of stardom to create a truly participative, communal vibe. This film touches a nerve which has been deadened by the relentless onslaught of Hollywood "entertainment" – it's been a long time since I've seen such true happiness envelop an audience.

*The Last Letter* (Frederick Wiseman, 2003). Frederick Wiseman's first fictional feature is a record of a performance by Catherine Samie, recounting the final days of a Russian-Jewish doctor awaiting her death at the hands of the Nazis in the Ukrainian ghetto. The beautiful black-and-white photography of Yorgos Arvanitis sometimes isolates Samie's head and hands floating whitely in a sea of blackness, sometimes brightens blindingly and projects her shadow upon the walls; Wiseman's subtly disorienting editing and sudden camera movements complement the intricate lighting scheme. These, and only these, are the sparse elements of the film. Nothing else intrudes into this disembodied light-and-shadow world. All that remains are the words, the rich intonations of their speaker, and Samie's aged, wrinkled face, made beautiful by the force and vitality which shines from within. Simple and unadorned, *The Last Letter* crafts in miniature what Claude Lanzmann erected as monument in *Shoah* (1985): history suspended before the judgement of eternity.

*La Commune (Paris 1871)*. Peter Watkins' epic-length recreation/commentary/metatextual dissection of the establishment and destruction of the Paris Commune is a stirring document of political conviction, contemporary resonance, and democratic art-making. Challenging cinema and television conventions as well as genre, *La Commune* is a weighty object thrown in the laps of audience complacency, a roiling, ungainly and unmanageable sprawl of drama, information and interpretation expounded with a force and conviction breathtaking in its forthright passion.

Special Mention: Guy Maddin's *Dracula: Pages From a Virgin's Diary*, which features a one-minute burst of fevered narrative as brilliant and exhilarating as his masterpiece *The Heart of the World* (2000); *Lost In Translation*, Sofia Coppola's meditation on rootlessness and emotional want that maintains its power through the inevitable critical backlash and unfair, snobbish charges of classism; *The Outskirts* (Petr Lutski, 1998), a truly strange amalgam of Soviet realism and ironic post-Communist commentary; *The Singing Detective*, Keith Gordon's inherently reductive, flawed and compromised version of the landmark Dennis Potter miniseries which nevertheless features more riches, intelligence and warmth than almost any other American film this year; and François Ozon's *Swimming Pool* (François Ozon, 2003), a minor effort which nonetheless luxuriated in the sheer sensual pleasure of filmmaking.

Worst Film of the Year: *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, Quentin Tarantino's pandering, dull, and poorly made salute to trash cinema.

Andrew Tracy is a scrounging freelance writer pursuing a History M.A. in Toronto. His column "Cinefile" appears regularly in various publications.



## Keith Uhlich

First, an excerpt from an interview with Manny Farber and Patricia Patterson, as published in Farber's book of collected criticism, *Negative Space* (Da Capo Press, New York, 1998).

*What is the role of evaluation in your critical work?*

*It's practically worthless for a critic. The last thing I want to know is whether you like it or not: the problems of writing are after that. I don't think it has any importance; it's one of those derelict appendages of criticism. Criticism has nothing to do with hierarchies (1).*

Second, a hierarchy:

Best: *Shattered Glass*. Worst: *Peter Pan* (P.J. Hogan, 2003). Two films about lost boys, both with potentially intriguing sexual subtexts. Chuck Lane's (Peter Sarsgaard) protracted firing of Stephen Glass (Hayden Christensen) reveals the homoerotic social structure of an American corporation, and is, to boot, the finest lovers' quarrel of the cinema year. *Peter Pan* is all sexual surface, toned uncomfortably down into a "kid's film" when its metaphors are the stuff of adult dreams and nightmares. One wishes Steven Spielberg had abandoned *Hook* (1991) to mine this material instead.

Best: *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. Worst: *The Matrix Revolutions* (Larry & Andy Wachowski, 2003). The concluding instalments of two Hollywood trilogy behemoths. Jackson does it right, brilliantly blending spectacle and art into a universal fantasia. The Wachowski's, hip to their own academia-created legend, regurgitate Saint Matthew's Gospel and L. Frank Baum with a chop-socky twist: Cosmic imbalance never so dully righted itself.



Best: *Lost in Translation*. Worst: *Daredevil* (Mark Steven Johnson, 2003). The connection here is passion. Coppola's romantic Tokyo reverie makes the heart swoon with charged glances, a gentle touch of hand to ankle, and a profound concluding kiss. One would think *Daredevil* could muster something similar as its blind protagonist traverses his fantasy cityscape in pursuit of the superhero's singular romantic quest, but it's all perfunctory. Where now are the comic book dreams of youth?

Best: *Travel Songs 1967-1981* (Jonas Mekas, 2003). Worst: *Capturing the Friedmans*. Personal film and video diaries form these movies' emotional backbones. Mekas dives straight into experience, celebrating life's forward thrust, where Jarecki regresses to a privileged pedestal, bemoaning suburban *status quo*. Let us not mistake good reportage for great cinema. Mekas is the corrective to the incorrectly canonised *Friedmans*.

Best: *Gerry*. Worst: *Phone Booth* (Joel Schumacher, 2003). American minimalism in the form of Van Sant's desert trek and Schumacher's urban thriller throwback. Van Sant appropriates Béla Tarr's stylised Steadicam visuals, adding his own layer of gay allegory to a ravishing vision quest that is man in destructive search of his "better" self. Greatness is apparent in *Phone Booth*'s Larry Cohen penned dialogue, but Schumacher tarts it up with his glossy, advertisement-ready visuals, dishonestly undercutting potent satire in the name of ineffective suspense.

Best: *The Company* (Robert Altman, 2003). Worst: *The Singing Detective*. The postmodern musical at its best and worst. Altman continues to reinvent cinema form and content with his widescreen video production, analysing the cold heart of the dance world through both literal and figurative ballets. The most erotic "dance" of this year's cinema: Neve Campbell and James Franco's pool table *pas de deux*, so honestly followed by an initially tentative, finally romantic, scene of post-coital breakfast preparation. Elsewhere, Keith Gordon's horrific movie redo of the great Dennis Potter miniseries trivialises the musical examination of a writer's creative process. Every shot, every cut, every performance (Note to Mel Gibson: Think *past* the makeup!) is improperly dissonant when they should all sing loud and clear.

Best: *In America* (Jim Sheridan, 2003). Worst: *The Missing*. Strangers in the strange land called America. Sheridan's modern day fairy tale of Irish immigrants in New York uses familiar movie and music touchstones as emotional backdrop for an honest and touching inquiry into human experience. Howard degrades the Western genre with his ugly, middlebrow screed of familial rescue and reconciliation on the range. Cate Blanchett and Tommy Lee Jones are laughably dull and solemn, while the non-white characters are all exotic caricatures – misguided, bleeding-heart political correctness begets the worst sort of Hollywood racism.

(Tie) Best: *The Triplets of Belleville* and *Goodbye Dragon Inn*. Worst: *Dogville* and *Mystic River*. Superficially: Brevity vs. length. Chomet and Tsai's 80-minute movie dreams easily trounce the epic intentions of von Trier and Eastwood's near three-hour endurance tests. But more than that is Chomet and Tsai's trust in visual expression over explicative dialogue. More is said through the Tati-like physical movement of *Belleville*'s characters and the rigorous photography of *Dragon Inn*'s haunted movie theatre than in any of *Dogville* and *River*'s interminable pseudo-philosophical monologues.

Best: *Looney Tunes: Back in Action*. Worst: *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton & Lee Unkrich, 2003). Which do you prefer? *Looney Tunes*' exhilarating, involving, democratic trip through art history's past, present, and future, or *Nemo*'s regurgitated late-Disney moralising about family unity served up in a prettified digital package? Let *The Company*'s Alberto Antonelli (Malcolm McDowell) have the last word: "I hate pretty!"

Film criticism:

Best: Tom Carson's illuminating praise in *Esquire* of Chomet's *The Triplets of Belleville*. Worst: Michael Atkinson's clueless *Village Voice* commentary [[HTTP://WWW.VILLAGEVOICE.COM/ISSUES/0352/ATKINSON2.PHP](http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0352/atkinson2.php)] on Altman's *The Company*.

Some favourite movie moments:

Steve Martin and Mary Woronov sharing the screen (and protective glass enclosure) in *Looney Tunes: Back in Action* – The Jerk and Hanoi Hannah together at last in delicious cartoonish lust.

From the same film: A throwaway establishing shot of the Eiffel Tower with ascending *Red Balloon* (Albert Lamorisse, 1956).

Gandalf (Ian McKellan) and Pippin's (Billy Boyd) first sight of Minas Tirith in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*.

The final, respectful glances between The Bride (Uma Thurman) and O-Ren Ishii (Lucy Liu) in the climactic fight scene of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Volume 1*.

Watching Eric Rohmer's *Perceval le Gallois* (1979) for the first time, gaping and goggle-eyed at the audacity of it all for 140 glorious minutes.

Some favourite lines (both from Peter Webber's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* [2003], courtesy that now-proven ham Tom Wilkinson):

“My God, woman, you could sell sour milk to cows!”

“Is this Indian yellow? Distilled from the urine of sacred cows, fed only on mango leaves. You've glazed my wife in dried piss!”

**Keith Uhlich** is a critic and writer based in Brooklyn. You can read him online at [www.culturedose.net](http://www.culturedose.net)

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## Paul Verhoeven

These are the films I saw in 2003, as they were released in Sydney; hence the presence of so many 2002 films.

*The Red Circle*

*Lost In Translation*

*Punch-Drunk Love*

*The Leopard* (Luchino Visconti, 1963)

*Kill Bill: Volume 1*

*Far From Heaven*

*Dolls*

*Ararat* (Atom Egoyan, 2002)

*Intolerable Cruelty*

*Russian Ark*

Runners up:

*Battle Royale* (Kinji Fukasaku, 2000)

*Solaris*

*Jackass: The Movie* (Jeff Tremaine, 2002). A guilty pleasure, I grant you, but strangely compelling.

*Secretary*

*28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002)

*Tape* (Richard Linklater, 2003)

I ought to make particular mention of *Solaris*; remaking anything by Tarkovsky would be a daunting task. Given the thematic, directorial, literary and historical weight behind the original, I feel that both Soderbergh's direction and Clooney's performance shone. Also, *Battle Royale* stood out by way of ultra violence, brutal satire, and the presence of Beat Takeshi as a sadistic taskmaster.

The medium of video (or DVD) is my central form of film consumption. Given the ongoing quest of every active cinephile to digest mass-amounts of film, these are ten that I discovered at home this year that I found particularly satisfying.

*A Fistful of Dynamite* (Sergio Leone, 1971)

*Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937)

*Cries and Whispers* (Ingmar Bergman, 1972)

*Cecil B. Demented* (John Waters, 2000)

*No Such Thing* (Hal Hartley, 2001)

*High and Low (Tengoku to jigoku)* (Kurosawa Akira, 1963)

*Porco Rosso* (Miyazaki Hayao, 1995)

*Two-Lane Blacktop* (Monte Hellman, 1971)

*Sorry, Wrong Number* (Anatole Litvak, 1948)

*Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974)

Newly discovered directors: Chantal Akerman, Hayao Miyazaki, Sergio Leone, Ingmar Bergman, Yvonne Rainer, Nagisa Oshima

I feel that this list of directors is necessary, due to the immense impact even one of their works can have (and have had, on me). Two of these directors in particular deserve mentioning in more detail. Rainer's *Privilege* (1990) shattered misconceptions surrounding menopause via seemingly disparate interviews from cross-sections of women in society, combined with innovative, stylised documentary footage and cameos from the director herself (in which she "meets" onscreen with her acted self – the kind of brazen experiment once considered "Allen-esque"). Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1976) is one of cinema's most indelible, hypnotic works; a languid masterpiece. While I pay homage to these last two, all these directors have made an equally strong impression upon me.

Paul Verhoeven is a film studies major at UNSW, a sometime film critic, and a voracious cinephile.



**Fiona A. Villella**



The following list is culled from a variety of sources: films released theatrically in Australia in 2003; films screened at festivals or film societies; restored prints; straight-to-DVD titles; films I caught up with on video/DVD and programs made for television.

Reasons for including each film vary: cutting-edge realism (*Bully*), distinct political and social justice orientation (*Ararat*, *Osama*, *Ten*), formally original and exciting (*Blissfully Yours*, *Morvern Callar*, *Spider*, *Ten*, *Turning Gate*), multiplex releases of great charm (*Down with Love*, *Finding Nemo*, *The School of Rock*), innovative play with genre (*Down with Love*, *Femme Fatale*), cinema masterpieces (*Sunrise*, *The Leopard*, *City of Sadness*), intelligent, innovative television (*Sopranos*) and so on.

In alphabetical order:

*Ararat*

*Blissfully Yours*

*Bully* (Larry Clark, 2001)

*City of Sadness* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1989)

*Down with Love* (Peyton Reed, 2003)

*Finding Nemo*

*Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*

*Morvern Callar*

*Osama*

*The Sopranos* (Seasons 1-3)

*Sunrise* (F.W. Murnau, 1927)

*Ten*

*The Leopard*

*The Man Without a Past*

*Spider*

*Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself*

*25th Hour*

*Femme Fatale*

*The School of Rock*

*Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2002)

*Turning Gate*

Fiona A. Villella is co-editor of *Senses of Cinema*.



**David Walsh**

Best films I saw in 2003:

*Crimson Gold*

*The Pianist* (released in December 2002)

*Capturing the Friedmans*

*Cry Woman* (Liu Bingjian, 2002)

*Our Times* (Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, 2003)

*Abjad* (Abolfazl Jalili, 2003)

*Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs – The Iraqi Connection* (Samir, 2002)

*The Flowers of September* (Pablo Osores, Roberto Testa, Nicolás Wainszelbaum, 2003)

*Blind Shaft*

*This Little Life* (Sarah Gavron, 2003)

*Molly and Mobarak* (Tom Zubrycki, 2003)

*Fuse* (Pjer Zalica, 2003)

*The Human Stain* (Robert Benton, 2003)

*About Schmidt*

*11'09"01* (various directors, 2002)

Best 2003 North American theatrical releases:

*Under the Skin of the City*

*Capturing the Friedmans*

*The Human Stain*

*The Magdalene Sisters*

*The Last Letter*

*About Schmidt*

*Divine Intervention*

*The Cuckoo*

*11'09'01*

*Love & Diane*

*Intolerable Cruelty*

*All the Real Girls* (David Gordon Green, 2002)

*Mondays in the Sun* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2002)

*Rana's Wedding* (Hany Abu-Assad, 2003)

*Raising Victor Vargas*

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## **Jake Wilson**



*All or Nothing* (Mike Leigh, 2002)

*Crimson Gold*

*Catch Me if You Can*

*The Pianist*

*Battle Royale*

*Time of the Wolf*

*In the Cut*

*Looney Tunes: Back in Action*

*demonlover*

*Blissfully Yours* Contrary to reports, there were a number of interesting Australian films released this year, most notably Sue Brooks' moving and experimental *Japanese Story*. The very best Australian work I saw, however, and one of my personal highlights of the year, was Leo Berkeley's *Stargazers*, a 5-hour independent "TV series" shot on video with a minimal budget and crew and improvised performances from six wonderful actors. An inspired blend of Rivette-influenced modernism and dry, very Australian humour, this was completed in the late '90s, but has yet to receive its first public screening – I can only urge readers to check it out should they ever get the chance.

During the second half of the year, I learnt a lot from reading and occasionally arguing with posts on the publicly archived **Yahoo! group a\_film\_by** [[HTTP://GROUPS.YAHOO.COM/GROUP/A\\_FILM\\_BY/MESSAGES](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/a_film_by/messages)]. The moderators, Fred Camper and Peter Tonguette, are to be congratulated for gathering together such a distinguished group of cinephiles and critics.

Jake Wilson is a Melbourne writer, and co-editor of *Senses of Cinema*.



## Thomas Zimmer

I am doubtless among the worst people to write a "Best of" list for cinema. A turgid, boring or even stupid film can be redeemed for me through a three-second burst of brilliance, which need not be related to plot, narrative, structure, or anything else. In a similar manner, an otherwise fine film can be marred by a minor negligent or unseemly moment. There is, I suppose, a certain randomness in this approach, a willingness to suspend the habitual guideposts of genre, topic, duration, and so on, and to address works in a somewhat singular fashion. So, with that, in no particular order, here are films I have liked in 2003.

*Millennium Mambo* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 2002). A cinema of constant dispersion and deferral, with such unexpected unspoken tenderness (at the fall of snow, for example).

*Paradise Crushed* (Leslie Thornton, 2003). Thornton's *Peggy and Fred in Hell* is one of the most extreme and sustained attempts at tracing the contours of cinematic incompleteness, a kind of *perpetuum mobile*, a self-organising generative machine, and *Paradise Crushed*, the 12th "episode", is among other things a chilling allegory of our accelerating culture of violence.

*Elephant*. The first few shots of *Elephant* are mesmerising in their beauty, their seemingly random meandering, their strange forms of attention and subtle pacing. But, as time and space are continually attenuated and dilated, and the same "event" is traced from multiple trajectories, the cinematic space becomes palpably claustrophobic and determinate. There is no resolution or end, more like an abrupt truncation, of characters who, in spite of occupying all of the stereotypical positions and clichés, remain opaque textual markers, enigmatic, unsympathetic, and ultimately inexplicable.

*Pistol Opera* (Seijun Suzuki, 2001). A bizarre remaking of *Branded to Kill* (1967) some three decades later, Suzuki's film is an eccentric, high-energy pulp-phantasmatic mix of surreal violence and strange tenderness...

*Hulk* (Ang Lee, 2003). There are hardly any surprises in Ang Lee's *Hulk*: the story is well-known, the characters pre-defined, the variations on the tragic arc of events minimal. Even the notion of using complicated split-screens as a form of cellular edit is not unheard of, but here it is so engagingly well done, and so unfailingly drives the narrative, as an active parsing of spacetime that builds tension, and deepens engagement. Plot, story, empathy, all slip into the background, and narrative is frame-driven, as time and space split, fission, metastasise and coalesce...

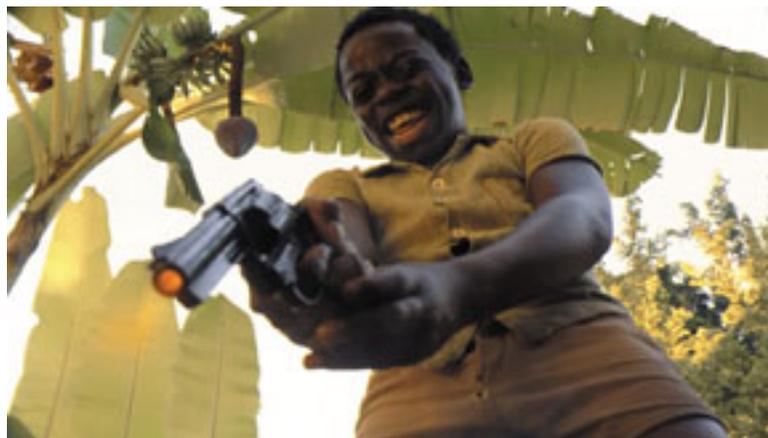
*Pirates of the Caribbean*. Johnny Depp's charismatic and weird portrayal of Captain Jack Sparrow is ambiguous in every register – ethical, sexual, in terms of motivation or desire, as human or monster, hero or anti-hero, but his performance underscores the odd notion that pirates were, in their day and fashion, media stars and celebrities. Weaving a gaudy thread from Long John Silver and Jean Lafitte to Keith Richard and Michael Jackson, Depp's performance is brilliantly off-kilter and unbridled...

*Kill Bill: Volume 1*. Engaging, unrelenting, and surprisingly easy to watch. Uma Thurman is tremendous. *Kill Bill: Volume 1* is an excessive pastiche of everything that Quentin Tarantino likes, marred by one single egregious and unforgivable moment...

*The Core* (Jon Amiel, 2003). The premise is unlikely, but the pacing, trajectory, characters and effects are immediately satisfying; a scientific fable that harkens back to Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, or at least to their popular cinematic counterparts. The special effects are well done, and range from the fantastic (a diamond geode the size of Rhode Island floating in the mantle) to the chilling (the burst of cosmic radiation that pokes through the earth's magnetosphere and severs the Golden Gate Bridge at midday).

*Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (Jonathan Mostow, 2003). Though I had expected a heavy-handed sequel with an obdurate fascination for the most obvious sorts of intertextualities, citations and self-parodies, there is an admirable restraint in the demeanour of the film, making its repetitions (of *mise en scène*, story-arc, character) and variations (switching gender, disposition, roles) work in an understated manner, shaping the proleptic (foreshadowing, cognition) and analeptic (culminating, recognition) configuration of all three *Terminator* films into a haunting tale of repetition and eternal return.

*Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (McG, 2003). Curiously, this has become somewhat of a cult film in certain unexpected critical circles. It is indeed remarkable in one aspect: *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* does not exact from its audience one bit of belief or suspension of disbelief, or investment in the verisimilitude of the cinematic image as grounded in some reality over and against which singular and special effects are rendered salient. It is all spectacle. And, in spite of its post-cinematic abstraction, it manages to be tremendous fun.



*City of God*. An unflinching and hypnotic tracery of decades of violence and persistence in the *favelas* of Rio, *City of God* has an almost gothic sense of the interpenetration of the terrifying and the sublime, a tension which is held together by an inescapably contemporary disparity between aesthetics and sympathy...

*Any Way the Wind Blows* (Tom Barman, 2003). Enigmatic and sweetly distracting, Tom Barman's first film unfolds in a complex pattern of subtly linked situations and parables, with some great music...

*X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer, 2003). There is something of a rush on classic comic-book (and video game) superheroes these last few years, with *Spiderman* (Sam Raimi, 2002), *Daredevil*, *Hulk*, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (Jan de Bont, 2003), and even the late-Victorian steampunk-inspired *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (Stephen Norrington, 2003) (great premise, dull, predictable film), but *X2: X-Men United* is easily the best of the lot....

*Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966). It's a re-release, but Pontecorvo's film couldn't be more timely. Transfixed between simulation and dissimulation, one can only imagine the consternation of people watching French uniforms and tanks circumscribe Abdel Kader Square two years after the Algerian war. Pontecorvo shot low-budget 16mm film with a minimal crew, no lights, at dusk, and captured the complex complicities and resistances between fiction and actuality. While Pontecorvo had enlisted many of the people who had participated in the events depicted to play themselves, he dismissed the real Ali La Point as being less than cinematic, and hired a homeless man from the streets to play that role. *Battle of Algiers* still plays every night in the city it portrays, at the cafe which appears in the film, an unsettling trace of the permeability of cinematic artefacts...

*Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002). Perhaps we thought we'd dispensed with all of the brouhaha about simulation in the late '80s, as its theoretical exfoliations slipped out of fashion, but here we are again, in a post-photographic era where the habitual faith in the camera's verisimilitude is punctured and the inversions between what simulated and what is simulated suspend, or at least defer, judgement. If something – a book, a story, a movie – is a simulation, how would one know? Only at the moment where it ceases to simulate, and what was “true” is revealed as having been so by being false. Spike Jonze plays upon these intricacies to produce a stunningly original, often hilarious, allegory of mediation...

*The Matrix Revolutions*. Why would one design a war machine and put the most important, most fragile, element into the single most vulnerable and least protected position? APUs, the large anthropomorphic robotic machines that serve as a primary line of Zion home defence in *The Matrix Revolutions* do just that. Each requires a human operator; the interface is primitive, and aside from the dual six-gun style offensive weapons, the only protection is a roll bar! The likelihood that such devices would be purposely designed and mass-produced as fighting vehicles is extremely remote. Nonetheless, these cumbersome machines are activated, coming to life in imitation Ray Harryhausen stop-frame lurches, to line up in a paired column to salute in unison, raising their prosthetic fists in the air in defiance. They then march off to take up their various “strategic” positions, as the first of the machines penetrates Zion’s dome, and then like bizarre mechanical cowboys “draw” their weapons and begin firing in rapid, constant, double-fisted volleys, at the invaders. The supposed real-world space resembles nothing so much as a video game space. Is it another level of the Matrix simulation, or another Matrix entirely? In spite of such irritations, flaws, and annoyances, *The Matrix* trilogy is still a good thing to think with – plus there are some sublime moments (such as Agent Smith in a pseudo-Armani suit flying through the rain above the city, or Neo working the frame, lost on the wrong side of the tracks).

*Lost In Translation*. There is almost nothing here, and Sofia Coppola has wrung a brilliant and touching work out of mere traces and implications. Bill Murray is brilliant, and *Lost In Translation* is one of the most unexpected films of the year...

*Decasia* (Bill Morrison, 2002). What a great idea, this palimpsest of decay and noise, projection as a metaphor of excrescence and excess, *nature morte* as *instantaufnahmen*, or is it the reverse? A rollicking good show, too...

*demonlover*. Brilliantly senseless, an inexplicably gripping corporate thriller that owes much to Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1982), the more inchoate it gets, the more proleptically intriguing it becomes, the less a satisfying culmination matters...

*The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. A truly great film. That it is cut into parts for distribution, cast as a trilogy, is a mere contingency. Peter Jackson’s interpretation of *Lord of the Rings* strikes a near perfect balance between the monumental and the incidental, and makes good on the longstanding promise of Tolkein’s masterpiece for cinema, and invents a whole new model of production in the process...

*25th Hour*. Nihilistic, plotless, post-apocalyptic, *25th Hour* is a work of uncompromising despair and implacability, and one of Spike Lee's best films...

Thomas Zummer is a scholar and writer who is currently completing a book on the early history of reference systems entitled *Intercessionary Technologies: Archive/Database/Interface*. He is also a practicing artist, and exhibits his drawings, sculptural and media works worldwide. He lectures on philosophy and the history of technology, and currently teaches in the Critical Studies Department at New York University and the Transmedia Programme at the Academy Sint Lukas in Brussels, Belgium.



**To Part 1** [[HTTP://ARCHIVE.SENSESOFCINEMA.COM/CONTENTS/04/30/FAVOURITES1.HTML](http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/04/30/favourites1.html)]

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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