

Sight and Sound
(incorporating Monthly
Film Bulletin)

Volume 7 Issue 4 (NS)
Editorial office:
21 Stephen Street
London W1P 1PL
Telephone 0171 255 1444
Facsimile 0171 436 2327
Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk
Subscription office:
01858 435328

Editorial

Editor
Philip Dodd
Acting editor
Nick James
Acting deputy editor
Leslie Felperin
Assistant editor
Colette O'Reilly
Credits research
Julian Grainger
Research assistant
Lucy Brown
Contributing editors
J. Hoberman, Pervaiz Khan,
John Powers, Mike O'Pray, Tony
Rayns, Jane Root, Amy Taubin

Sub-editors
Mark Sinker
Vicky Wilson
Picture editor
Millie Simpson
Design and art direction
Esterson Lackersteen
Origination
Precise Litho
Printer
St Ives plc

Advertising sales
William Neil
Telephone 0171 957 8916
Facsimile 0171 436 2327

Business
Publishing director
Caroline Moore
Publishing assistant
Nichola Bath
Managing director
BFI publishing
Colin MacCabe
Newsstand distribution
USM, Telephone 0171 396 8000
Bookshop distribution
Central Books
Telephone 0181 986 4854
US distribution
Periodicals postage paid at
Rahway, NJ, and at additional
mailing offices. Postmaster:
send address corrections to
Sight and Sound, c/o Mercury
Airfreight International Ltd Inc.,
2323 Randolph Avenue,
Avenel, NJ 07001
Subscription price is \$67.00
Newsstand distribution by:
Eastern News Distributors Inc.

Annual subscription rates
UK £31.50
Europe £38.50
US/Canada airspeed £38.50
Overseas surface mail £38.50
Overseas airmail £66.00
Special rates apply to BFI
members

Subscription queries
For subscription queries and sales
of back issues and binders contact
Subscription Department,
Sight and Sound
Tower House, Sovereign Park
Market Harborough
Leicestershire LE16 9EF
Telephone 01858 435328
Facsimile 01858 434958

The British Film Institute exists
to encourage the development
of film, television and video in the
United Kingdom, and to promote
knowledge, understanding and
enjoyment of the culture of the
moving image. Its activities
include the National Film and
Television Archive; the National
Film Theatre; the Museum of the
Moving Image; the London Film
Festival; the production and
distribution of film and video;
funding and support for regional
activities; Library and Information
Services; Stills, Posters and
Designs; Research; Publishing
and Education; and the monthly
Sight and Sound magazine



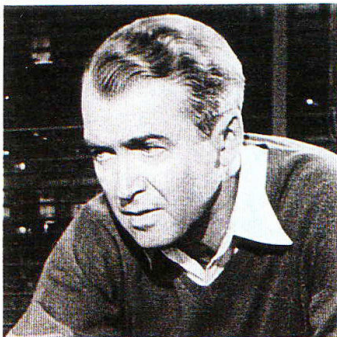
Published monthly by the
British Film Institute
ISSN 0037-4806

Sight and Sound

April 1997



'Leila': 10



'Vertigo': 14



'Everyone Says I Love You': 20, 40

Features

DEALING WITH THE NOW
Abel Ferrara's new *The Addiction*
and *The Funeral* are raw and driven.
Gavin Smith talks to the director
about faith, devils and his next
film, *The Blackout* **6**

TALKING TOO MUCH WITH MEN
Angels, martyrs and bureaucrats
haunt the the Fajr film festival
in Tehran. Hadani Ditmars
reports on the contradictions
of film-making in Iran **10**

COMPULSION
Does *Vertigo*, Hitchcock's most
personal and perverse thriller,
show him as a Surrealist?
By Peter Wollen **14**

THE JEWELLER'S EYE
Pat Kirkham on Saul Bass'
extraordinary credits sequence
for *Vertigo* **18**

SWEET UNISON
Is Woody Allen's *Everyone Says*
I Love You a new musical or should
they be filming *Sondheim*?
By David Thomson **20**

MONSIEUR MEMORY
A Self-Made Hero is a Resistance
yarn with a twist. Chris Darke
talks to its director Jacques
Audiard about French war guilt
and faking the past **24**

K FOR KINO
Russian and Soviet cinema
from Eisenstein's epic
The Battleship Potemkin to the
Oscar-winning *Burnt by the Sun*.
By Julian Graffy **28**

Regulars

EDITORIAL Third force **3**

BUSINESS Uncivil unrest on *The*
Devil's Own set; Euro-movies;
moguls on the make **4**

THE BOX Tooth-and-claw soap;
Channel 5 sneak preview;
transatlantic *Cracker* **32**

LETTERS Effects debate; Polanski;
gay snobs **64**

COVER Abel Ferrara photographed
by Imke Lass/Outline/Katz

Film Reviews

Addiction, The	34
Basquiat	35
Bits and Pieces/ Il cielo è sempre più blu	36
Boy from Mercury, The	37
cielo è sempre più blu, Il/ Bits and Pieces	36
Dante's Peak	38
Driftwood	39
Everyone Says I Love You	40
Fever Pitch	41
Funeral, The	42
héros très discret, Un/ A Self-Made Hero	47
Laererinden/Love Lessons/ Lust och fägring stor	44
Larger than Life	43
Love Lessons/Laererinden/ Lust och fägring stor	44
Lust och fägring stor/ Laererinden/Love Lessons	44
Mandela	45
Near Room, The	46
No Way Home	46
Self-Made Hero, A/ Un héros très discret	47
Space Jam	48
Star Wars Episode IV A New Hope	50
Tokyo Fist	51
Total Eclipse	52
Trojan Eddie	53
Twin Town	53
William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet	54

Video Reviews

Tom Tunney and Geoffrey Macnab
on this month's video releases **58**

PRIVATE VIEW D. A. Pennebaker on
Robert Flaherty, Michael Powell
and Jean-Luc Godard **61**

Next issue on sale
22 April



'Star Wars
Episode IV
A New Hope': 50

TALKING TOO MUCH WITH MEN

From angels in Paris to martyrs in Tehran, Hadani Ditmars on Iranian directors and the Fajr film festival

● Held over ten days in February, the Fajr film festival is a showcase for recent work by Iranian film-makers. On the London-Zurich leg of my flight to Tehran to attend this year's event, I sat next to a woman who had organised the Tehran film festival before the 1979 Revolution. Deeply nostalgic for her homeland and very negative about aspects of its politics, she was nevertheless extremely curious about current cinematic goings-on. On the Zurich-Tehran leg, I sat next to an Iranian film-maker who had lived in exile in Germany and was returning for the first time in a decade, his joy at the prospect of being reunited with friends was shot through with anxiety. Half an hour before landing, the lights came on abruptly, all the women covered their heads – and he moved to a safer seat, away from me.

My journey to Tehran began perhaps two years ago when I interviewed film-maker Mohsen Makhmalbaf in Paris about his obsession with Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*. Drinking milkshakes, we talked about angels – in Islam ("like KGB agents," said Makhmalbaf) and in Wenders' film ("like man's best friend"). In late 1995 I met Abolfazl Jalili (whose films are mostly banned in Iran) at the Nantes festival, where we discussed his lyrical yet cynical film *Det Yani Dokhtar*. Last October I met Makhmalbaf again, at the film festival in Vancouver – the city to which my Lebanese grandparents had emigrated at the early part of the century and where I was born and raised – where I interviewed him about his new film *Gabbeh*.

Vancouver boasts over 30,000 Iranian immigrants and here and at university in Toronto I had become interested in Iranian film-making and the translation of the Persian poetic code into cinema. I decided to attend the next Fajr festival to experience Iranian culture for myself and called Makhmalbaf's agent in Paris, who advised me that I shouldn't apply as a journalist: last year Gérard Depardieu had declined an invitation when two of his friends – from *Le Monde* and *Libération* – were denied access. Others warned me that an election year in Iran would not be media-friendly. Apply, they said, as a researcher. But when I spoke to a festival organiser at Farabi (the state cinema foundation), she immediately asked me if I was the same Hadani Ditmars who had interviewed Makhmalbaf in *Sight and Sound* – she had apparently translated the entire article into Farsi. (However, when my official invitation was eventually faxed to me, it read "Mr Hadani".)

Drugs, trainers and Michael Jackson

Once off the plane, everyone seemed to assume I was Iranian and to find my faltering command of the language puzzling. There were portraits of Rafsanjani and Khomeini everywhere, and men with signs in English reading, "Welcome to the such-and-such university delegation" – but nothing saying "cinema", "festival" or "Farabi". I got through customs with relatively little difficulty and was driven to my hotel – the Azadi (formerly the Hyatt), headquarters of the festival – by a kindly Tanzanian businessman and his Iranian associate, just as the morning call to prayer began. The 26-storey hotel, in the northern part of Tehran, has a view of nearby

snow-capped mountain peaks and overlooks one of the biggest jails for political prisoners in the country. Azadi means "freedom" in Farsi.

Next day I was awoken by a call from the festival office. I made a groggy attempt at proper Islamic attire (baggy black clothes, black beret, long scarf) and went to the lobby. It was the fifth day of a ten-day event: I had missed the trip to Imam Khomeini's mausoleum and the 'National Day' ceremony – a celebration of the Revolution – but in terms of screenings, only a lot of mediocre war films. En route to Ershad, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, I caught sight of an ad for *Gabbeh*, which puzzled me, as Makhmalbaf had said it was banned in Iran. When was the ban lifted? The man from the festival driving me smiled: "Oh, a few months ago. Maybe after your interview was published."

At the ministry we were ushered into a small room. I sat between a Turkoman producer and a Japanese festival director. The minister, a slight, wiry man, spoke for an hour about the need for Islamic content in cinema and the upholding of Islamic morals on screen. It was the first of many such speeches and a warning of things to come.

At a dinner that evening organised by the festival director I met briefly with Abbas Kiarostami and Darius Merjui (who was frantically trying to finish his new film, *Leila*, before the close of the festival). My initial reflex – to shake hands and kiss people on the cheek – had to be subdued. Even so, I was mildly chastised for "talking too much with men".

On my second day the 20-odd foreign guests were bussed to a downtown cinema; cocooned from the festival masses but exposed to the stifling Tehran pollution, we watched private screenings. *The Fifth Season*, by the young British/Iranian film-maker Rafi Pitts, is a well-intentioned but slightly dull remake of a screenplay by Bahram Beyzaei about the resolving of a tribal feud. *Ebrahim* tells the story of an underconfident boy who befriends a young amputee/refugee – part of a current trend in popular Iranian cinema for revisiting the 1980-88 Iran/Iraq conflict, in which tens of thousands of young Iranians lost their lives or their limbs. Many films in competition this year dealt with the war, though few went beyond B-movie clichés.

That evening the festival was covered on the television news, with the small group of foreign guests displayed like trophies. A few of us were invited to the home of a young film-maker currently frustrated by lack of official approval for her screenplays. I learned why there was so little worth seeing at this year's festival: first, many well-known directors – including Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi and Roxana Bani-Etemad – were currently making new films, so had nothing to show; second, recent bureaucratic reshuffling at Farabi, with relatively liberal-minded staff replaced by more conservative counterparts, had caused serious delays in script approval. Others blamed the imminent elections. It is difficult in Tehran to distinguish between what results from specific political agendas and what from chaos.

On my third day we watched Merjui's ▶

◀ eagerly awaited *Leila*, the fourth in a series of films about women (*Banoo*, 1992; *Sara*, 1994; *Pari*, 1995). A clever if flawed subversion of the Iranian melodrama, it provides a barbed commentary on Iran's emerging post-Revolutionary *nouveau riche* and a glimpse into the angst of Tehran's upper-middle class. When a 'yuppie' wife, Leila, finds that she can't have children, her pushy mother-in-law forces her son to take a second wife. Though Leila's surroundings – a suburban bungalow with all the mod cons – are thoroughly modern, she is powerless to resist the force of tradition. Most Iranians I spoke to were offended by the film, claiming it wasn't realistic. I thought it surreal in parts, and wondered how western audiences would react.

Then came *Cardboard Hotel* by Sirus Alvand, a melodrama about a man returning to his estranged family who finds his son corrupted by evil 'western values' – drugs, trainers, Michael Jackson posters. The father sets the errant son straight, of course.

Unveiling the martyrs

The following evening I took part in a roundtable discussion on Iranian cinema and the problems for Iranian directors of making films that will appeal to both domestic and foreign audiences. With me on the platform were the critic from *Film Comment*, Houshang Golmakani of the Tehran-based *Film International* and Phillipe Jallideau, director of the Nantes festival. There's a vast distance between what the Iranian public likes to watch and what European art festivals screen (last year's most popular movie in Tehran's cinemas was a melodramatic remake of *The Parent Trap* called *Strange Sisters*). Such directors as Kiarostami and Jalili enjoy more success abroad than at home, and only Makhmalbaf seems popular with both Iranian and foreign audiences. Certain less well-known Iranian film-makers in the audience complained that the directors famous in the west pander to European tastes and don't show authentic Iranian reality. But how does one define Iranian reality, which is so much less monolithic than either American political propagandists or Islamic Revolutionary apologists pretend? To call it complex and full of bizarre contradictions is an understatement.

The awards ceremony that marked the close of the festival was nothing short of depressing. It began with the unveiling of a 70s-style mural depicting young 'martyrs' from the Iran/Iraq war, all bearing an uncanny resemblance to Che Guevara. A presenter/announcer spoke *ad nauseam* of their sacrifices, their place in heaven and Islamic Revolutionary ideals. Was this a film festival? Even the most pious squirmed in their (gender-segregated) seats.

Many war films won awards. No women directors were nominated but there were awards for actresses. One actress got up and recited a memorised speech extolling the virtues of post-Revolutionary cinema and its celebration of women. "Before the Revolution," she began, "women were just like dolls, mere sex objects. Now they are mothers, sisters, wives and daughters." "She faltered. "I can't go on."

Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven*, about children trying to navigate through the adult world

"We are like trapeze artists swinging back and forth without a net"

the blatant propaganda than by how many educated, intelligent people – actors, directors, Farabi staff – either bought into the party line or pretended to. It seemed a long way from my interview with Makhmalbaf in a would-be McDonald's in Paris.

That night I sang Aznavour songs with a French producer. I was soon politely told by a festival organiser that women shouldn't sing in public. Another organiser advised me to be "faithful" to my "roots". "You are Lebanese," he said, "you are from the East. You should remember where you come from." The head of cinema affairs at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance told me about a seminar on women in cinema organised by the Iranian Women's Solidarity Association, headed by Fatmeh Hashemi, Rafsanjani's daughter, that was happening in a few days' time. "You should attend," he said. "You can just surf from one festival into another." I took him at his word.

Woman is a beautiful flower

The seminar was obviously an exercise in official propaganda but was nevertheless interesting. Several foreign women film-makers had been invited – in *chador*ed sisterhood we endured a painful number of official speeches, including one mullah's which claimed, among other idiocies, that "Woman is a beautiful flower but even when she dries up she is useful; dried flowers are decorative." The head of the UN Committee to End Discrimination Against Women had also been invited, but when she insisted on reading parts of her speech about violations of UN human rights charters she was "questioned" by "official reporters".

In the evening we attended a women-only dinner where we could take off our *hijabs* and enjoy an all-girl *tar* and *santur* band. Unveiled, the Iranian women were extremely chic: European *couture*, painted talons. Which was the uniform, which the casual wear?

The following evening I accompanied Canadian director Louise Carre to a dinner in her honour at the Canadian embassy. Also present were several Iranian women film-makers. "Why weren't you at the seminar?" I asked. "They didn't consult us," said one. Another was more critical: "It's just a big show," she said. "Why should we go? They don't help us when we need them."

Bahman Farmanara, a pre-Revolutionary film-maker now teaching film at Tehran University, was also at the party. I asked him about his experience of being a film-maker in Iran. He

(by now an Iranian cinematic cliché) won Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay and Best Supporting Actor. Rather than accept the award himself, Majidi – whose previous film *The Father* was a success at some European festivals – offered it to the father of a martyr, conveniently positioned in the front row.

I was surprised less by

replied with a story of the film he produced in the late 70s, *The Scarecrow*. Because a scarecrow is burned in it, it was banned by the Shah, who suspected it might be an allusion to himself. Later, after the Revolution, the film was banned again by the Khomeini regime – because it might allude to the mullahs. Farmanara's defence – that it was made long before the Revolution – made no difference. He no longer makes films – but he does show his students the work of western directors, including Almodóvar, and holds open discussions with them.

Kiarostami had been unavailable during the festival as he was working on his new film. Apparently a lab accident had destroyed crucial footage, setting things back several months. He agreed to meet me to screen part of the unfinished film and to talk about one of his current favourites – Emir Kusturica's *Underground*. "I'm sick of my style," he told me. "I want to do something different this time." After several failed attempts at organising the screening, however, we had to concede that the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance would not allow it and abandoned both the screening and the interview.

I did manage to catch Darius Merjui at his north Tehran studio to discuss *Leila*. As we talked, Merjui's producer rang to say that a well-known film journalist had dedicated three newspaper pages to trashing *Leila* on "moral" grounds. Merjui feared this long-term project – fraught with bureaucratic difficulties, which he had rushed to finish in time for the festival – might now be banned. "The problem with a lot of critics here," he said, "is that they confuse aesthetics with morality. There is no sense of context. We Iranian film-makers are like trapeze artists swinging back and forth without a net." He told me that Kiarostami had recently suffered untold problems following the misquotation in an Iranian newspaper of something he had said to an Italian journalist, which insinuated that he condoned alcohol.

On my last night in Tehran I met up with Makhmalbaf. He thanked me for my article: "It helped lift the ban on *Gabbeh*." He told me that they are even considering releasing his earlier film, *A Moment of Innocence*. Apparently the recent run of dismal films may be a factor in the lifting of the ban: "If they run out of good films," Makhmalbaf explained, "then eventually they have to release some of the banned ones." Although happy that *Gabbeh* is now publicly available, he admitted that things were getting more difficult for film-makers in Iran. He himself will shoot his next film in India.

Makhmalbaf expressed his dismay at the popularisation among "those in the West" of the notion that restrictions placed on film-makers somehow contribute to the quality of films. "This is nonsense. You can't create in such a restrictive, controlled environment." He argues that the best Iranian films came from the 1985-90 period, when censorship was at a low ebb. "Every time there is a bureaucratic shake-up, a whole new set of technocrats come in. At the beginning they cause a lot of problems. But after a few years, things get better. They come to love cinema. Because good cinema makes people more human."