

MADFILM

Newsletter of the Madison Film Forum

Fall 1999

Volume 4, Number 1

New Opportunities for the Madison Film Community

by James Kreul

As the Madison Film Forum approaches its fifth birthday in the Spring of 2000, I've had a chance to look over some of my previous MADFILM surveys of developments in Madison's film scene. We've come a long way, especially with the UW-Cinematheque becoming a permanent and respected fixture in the film landscape. Each semester, I've had a chance to remind people of the progress of the film community and suggest new possibilities. But this year seems to offer many unique opportunities. Downtown commercial and university film venues have started to talk and work together in ways that were hard to imagine when we started the Madison Film Forum in 1995.

The first of many positive developments since the last issue of MADFILM was Henry Doane's purchase of the Orpheum Theatre, saving the theater's historic interior from almost certain IMAX "square-box" doom. I don't think people realize how lucky we were dodging the IMAX-Orpheum bullet; if it weren't for the improbability of financial success (and the inability of the IMAX proponents to secure financial backers), the Orpheum would have been another victim of the broader downtown Disney-fication project which seems to want to eliminate anything and everything unique about Madison to make sure that visiting conventioners and suburbanites feel comfortable. The Madison Film Forum is interested in all types of film, including IMAX, but clearly the IMAX-Orpheum was a bad idea for the downtown community. Interestingly, another proposed IMAX in the Madison area has also been nixed for financial reasons (good thing we figured this out downtown before destroying a historic building.)

Joe Lusson's courageous "Preserve the Orpheum" campaign did more than just raise awareness of the importance of the Orpheum, it also got people in the Madison film community talking to each other. We are only just starting to see the positive consequences of this, which will only grow as Madison's independent

exhibitors begin to work together on the common goal of getting people into theaters and seeing films as they were meant to be seen -- on the big screen. A big, independently owned first-run theater downtown provides an option for people who either cannot or prefer not to travel to the chain theaters on either side of town. Additionally, the plan to show smaller foreign and independent films in the second theater shows that the Orpheum will fill the gap left by the temporary closing of the Majestic.

But what is most encouraging about Henry Doane's plans for the Orpheum is that in Doane we have a businessman with a strong sense of history,

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Campus Film & Video Groups

Indep. Film and Video Collaborative

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adalward@students.wisc.edu
<http://www.sit.wisc.edu/~ifvc/menu/html>

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WUD Film Hotline: 262-6333
<http://rso.union.wisc.edu/wud/web/film/film.html>

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Cinematheque

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New Opportunities, continued...

aesthetics and community. In addition to serving the film community, the Orpheum will also play an exciting new role in Madison's music scene (the first concert there sold out quickly).

The other big news item since the last MADFILM was the success of the first Wisconsin Film Festival. Campus film programmers like Wendi Weger from the Wisconsin Union Directorate and myself had the opportunity to lay the groundwork for a new tradition in alternative film programming in Madison. We had a positive response to our varied programs, which ranged from restored classics to recent independent films. The best thing about the Festival's success was that it pointed the way to a second festival in 2000, as this year's festival ended with a roundtable discussion with representatives from each of Madison's downtown independent exhibitors. I hope to be able to tell you about the exciting plans for the next Festival in the next MADFILM.

Clearly, the Wisconsin Film Festival was the most successful and most publicized film event in Madison in recent years. The positive press coverage of the Festival

has helped maintain momentum for coverage of the regular campus film events. Communication between downtown independent venues has continued to grow, as each of us have helped cross-promote each other's events and have added links to each other's websites.

Many people ask: How can we help make sure that the progress made over the last five years continues? The answer is easy: Support your downtown independent venues. Join us for an exciting lineup of diverse films at the UW-Cinematheque for free. Support local film and video artists at the Open Shows sponsored by the Independent Film and Video Collaborative. Enjoy a wide variety of programming at the Memorial Union and Union South provided by our friends at the Wisconsin Union Directorate Film Committee. Walk up State Street to the Orpheum and enjoy first run films and new music (and grab a bite to eat when the restaurant opens). And look out for special film and video events at the Madison Art Center, including the Wisconsin Triennial Film/Video Screening on October 23.

The continued growth of Madison's film community will depend on the support for the resources that exist now. We've come a long way, but there's much more to do.

Sophisticated Comedy: Revisiting the Roaring Twenties

Following last semester's successful screwball comedy program, the Cinematheque is proud to present a series devoted to the sophisticated comedies of the twenties. In general, it is more difficult to locate film prints from the 1920s than from the 1900s, and for this reason alone, the series is a must-see for fans of Hollywood comedy.

When one hears the phrase "silent comedy," the work of the great slapstick clowns of the Teens and Twenties comes immediately to mind. Although the films of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd are probably more familiar to the contemporary movie fan, sophisticated comedies were arguably more significant for the development of popular culture in the "jazz age." In particular, these films reflect changing assumptions about gender roles and sexual mores; because of their daring subject matter, they frequently encountered opposition from civic groups the popular press.

No series of sophisticated comedies would be complete without a contribution from Ernst Lubitsch, the master of the genre. The Cinematheque will present two of his silent films: *So This Is Paris* (1926), a marital farce set in the city of love, and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925), Lubitsch's adaptation of the Oscar Wilde play.

This series also offers a rare opportunity to see the work of some of the great film comedienesses of the decade,

including Marie Dressler and Constance Talmadge in the 1927 feature *Breakfast at Sunrise* on September 25, and Gloria Swanson showing off her slapstick skills in *Manhandled* (1924) on October 2.

All screenings begin at 7:30 p.m. in 4070 Vilas and feature live piano accompaniment by R. Cameron Monschein. For a complete schedule of films see the MADFILM calendar or visit the Cinematheque's website at www.wisc.edu/commarts/cinema.htm.

MADFILM is the biannual newsletter of the Madison Film Forum. Send comments, suggestions, or event information to:

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Riding the Wave: Hollywood's Response to the Art Cinema

by Paul B. Ramaeker

When art films from Europe and Japan exploded onto the postwar film scene, their impact on American film culture was immediate. Theaters devoted to showing foreign fare sprang up in cities and college towns across the country. Critics embraced films like Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, Fellini's *La Strada*, and Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. By 1959, the international art cinema was in full flower. Film festivals had grown to support and promote such fare, and countries across Europe were nurturing film movements, most notably France's "New Wave."

Hollywood, however, was slow to respond to these developments. It was not until 1964 that an established director would make a film that engaged with the innovations introduced by the art cinema, and even then that film, Arthur Penn's *Mickey One*, was produced independently. Only a few directors, like Sidney Lumet (*The Pawnbroker*, 1965) and John Frankenheimer (*Seconds*, 1966), followed Penn's lead, while softening the techniques they borrowed from Europe.

In the end, it took a whole new generation of filmmakers to truly craft an American art cinema. When Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969) became a huge, unexpected hit, Hollywood studios attempted to capitalize on its success by producing art cinema-influenced films by younger, more experimentally-minded directors like Francis Ford Coppola (*The Rain People*, 1969), Bob Rafelson (*Five Easy Pieces*, 1970), and Monte Hellman (*Two-Lane Blacktop*, 1971).

The commercial failure of films like *Two-Lane Blacktop* and George Lucas' *THX 1138* (1971) rang the death knell for this all-too-brief explosion. Simultaneously, the success of Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) heralded Hollywood's return to big-budget, genre-based filmmaking. But while you can take the director out of the art cinema, it proved harder to take the art cinema out of the director. Rafelson, buoyed by the success of *Five Easy Pieces*, persisted with *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972). Throughout the 1970s, others, including Coppola, Robert Altman, and Martin Scorsese, saw a way to integrate their art cinema influences with classical Hollywood genre conventions. Altman, for example, continued to draw on the French New Wave as he interrogated and deconstructed Hollywood genres like the war film (*M*A*S*H*, 1970), the western (*Mc Cabe and Mrs. Miller*, 1971), and the detective film (*The Long Goodbye*, 1973).

By the late-'70s/early '80s, a more conservative era had begun for the studios, and the commercial failure of films like Scorsese's *New York, New York* (1977) proved the death knell for overtly art cinema-influenced Hollywood films. A widespread reassessment of the period is well underway, however, and *Riding the Wave* allows us to see the development and variety of this rich period in American film history.

For a complete schedule of films in this series, please see the MADFILM calendar.

Stuart Gordon Re-Animates Arts at UW

by Christopher Sieving



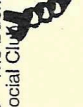

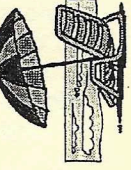
Next Spring, UW arts students will enjoy the privilege of taking courses under the tutelage of stage director and filmmaker Stuart Gordon. Gordon attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the late 1960s. During his undergraduate career at the UW, Gordon gained national notoriety for staging a part-nudie version of *Peter Pan* and founded the Organic Theater. This avant-garde theatrical troupe emigrated from Madison to Chicago in 1969, and Gordon served as artistic director of the Organic until 1985.

Gordon is perhaps best known as a director of inventive, low-budget horror films. His debut film *Re-Animator* (1985), based on a series of stories by H.P. Lovecraft, drew rave reviews for its innovative mixture of outlandish gore and ribald comedy; winner of a Critic's Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, its reputation as a

modern horror classic has intensified over the years. Gordon has returned to the horror genre throughout his career, yet his most recent output reflects the eclecticism of his Organic years. His latest film, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* (1999), a Ray Bradbury-scripted fantasy set in the barrios of East L.A., is perhaps his most striking cinematic departure to date.

Gordon visited the UW campus for a week last Spring as a Brittingham scholar; in Spring 2000 he will return for an extended residency. He will teach two interdisciplinary courses: one will train drama students in acting for the screen; the other is an advanced film workshop in which Gordon will supervise work -- from the script stage to post-production -- on three short student-produced films.

Sep 26 - Oct 30, 1999

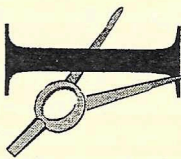
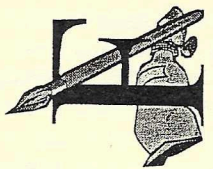
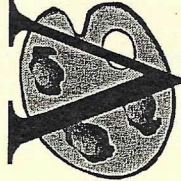
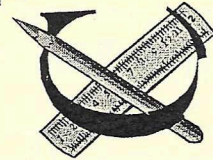
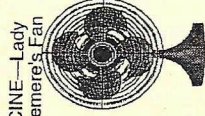
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26 2:00p IC—Egg 7:30p MU—The Dreamlife of Angels 9:45p MU—The Dreamlife of Angels	27 8:00p LC—Seconds	28	29	9:00p SC—Vertical Features Remake, Anamorphosis + The Comb 9:00p SC—Divine Horseman... Peyote Queen, Mirror Animations	1 7:30p CINE—Two-Lane Blacktop Vista Social Club 7:30p MU—The Buena Vista Social Club 9:30p MU—The Buena Vista Social Club 	2 5:30p MU—The Buena Vista Social Club 7:30p CINE—Marhandled Vista Social Club 9:30p MU—The Buena Vista Social Club 
3 2:00p IC—All Screwed Up 7:30p MU—The Buena Vista Social Club 9:30p MU—The Buena Vista Social Club 	4 8:00p LC—The General	5	6	9:00p SC—Divine Horseman... Peyote Queen, Mirror Animations	8 7:30p CINE—Recent Experimental Cinema 7:30p MU—eXistenZ 9:30p MU—eXistenZ	9 5:30p MU—eXistenZ 7:30p CINE—Man, Woman, and Sin 7:30p MU—eXistenZ 9:30p MU—eXistenZ
10 2:00p IC—Brink of Life 7:30p MU—eXistenZ 9:30p MU—eXistenZ	11 8:00p LC—Rebel Without a Cause	12	13	9:00p SC—The Deadman, Nocturne, Where Did Our Love Go? 	15 7:30p CINE—Twilight of the Ice Nymphs 7:30p MU—Run Lola Run 9:30p MU—Run Lola Run	16 5:30p MU—Run Lola Run 7:30p CINE—Tarot (Goethe Anniversary Screening) 7:30p MU—Run Lola Run 9:30p CINE—Clavigo (Goethe Anniversary Screening) 9:30p MU—Run Lola Run
17 2:00p IC—Delicatessen 7:30p MU—Run Lola Run 9:30p MU—Run Lola Run	18 8:00p LC—Streets of Fire	19	20	9:00p SC—Fugs, What's Happening, New York Eye & Ear Control, Senseless	22 7:00p MU—Summer of Sam 7:30p CINE—Violent Cop 7:30p BU—The Red and the White 9:45p MU—Summer of Sam	23 4:15p MU—Summer of Sam 7:00p MAC—Wisconsin Triennial 7:00p MU—Summer of Sam 7:30p CINE—Wrong Move (Goethe Anniversary Screening) 9:30p CINE—Faust (Goethe Anniversary Screening)
24 2:00p IC—Mr. Hulot's Holiday 7:00p MU—Summer of Sam 9:45p MU—Summer of Sam	25 	26	27	28	29 7:30p CINE—Boiling Point	30 7:30p CINE—So This is Paris

☐ MU=Memorial Union Movies, Fredric
 March Play Circle, \$4 + \$3.50
☐ EC=Event Cinema, Union Theater (W.
 Wing of 1st Floor), \$4 + \$3
☐ LC=Lakeside Cinema, Memorial Union
 Sittskeller, FREE
☐ SC=Starlight Cinema, Fredric March Play
 Circle (Union), FREE
☐ BU=Blowup Cinema, Elvehjem Museum
 of Art (opposite Vilas), FREE
☐ IC=International Cinema, Room 109
 Union South, FREE
☐ CINE=Cinemathèque Film Series, 4070
 Vilas Hall, FREE
☐ MAC=Madison Art Center, 211 State
 Street, FREE

Oct 31 - Dec 4, 1999

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7:30p CINE—Open Film Show (Independent Film and Video Collaborative)	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	1	2	3	4

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- ☐ EC=Event Cinema, Union Theater (W. Wing of 1st Floor), \$4 + \$3
- ☐ LC=Lakeside Cinema, Memorial Union Stifftskeller, FREE
- ☐ SC=Starlight Cinema, Fredric March Play Circle (Union), FREE
- ☐ BU=Blowup Cinema, Elvehjem Museum of Art (opposite Vilas), FREE
- ☐ IC=International Cinema, Room 109 Union South, FREE
- ☐ CINE=Cinemathèque Film Series, 4070 Vilas Hall, FREE
- ☐ MAC=Madison Art Center, 211 State Street, FREE



Recent Independent Films

Jonathan Walley

The Madison Film Forum's efforts to bring independent film to Madison this semester are not limited to the "Riding the Wave" series. The Forum has organized three other events which highlight more recent work in independent and experimental cinema: an evening of contemporary avant-garde film, a new 35mm work by experimental narrative filmmaker Guy Maddin, and a double-feature of innovative music documentaries.

The Film Forum's ongoing commitment to avant-garde film continues in The Recent Experimental Cinema program of October 8. This show consists of seven celebrated new avant-garde films, all showing in Madison for the first time. Nathaniel Dorsky's *Variations* is a silent meditation on nature, urban landscapes, and other taken-for-granted spaces. The film invites the eye to wander, and to discover newness in unexpected places. *Variations* was recently featured at the New York Film Festival. Martin Arnold's *Alone: Life Wastes Andy Hardy* was another New York Film Festival entry, and reworks footage from Mickey Rooney's Andy Hardy films, drawing new thematic associations and revealing covert narratives. Julie Murray's *If you stand with your back to the slowing of the speed of light in water*, also a found-footage film, draws from travel, industrial, and other educational documentary films to create startling illustrations of almost metaphysical ideas. In Martha Colburn's animated collage film *Evil of Dracula*, characters from advertisements are all given hand-drawn vampire fangs.

Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin combines experimental and narrative techniques in his surrealist-inspired work. *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* is a dreamlike story of unrequited love which takes place in the mystical land of Mandragora, where the sun never sets. The inhabitants of Maddin's world include Shelley Duvall, Frank Gorshin (the Riddler from TV's "Batman"), Alice Krige (the Borg Queen from "Star Trek: First Contact") and lots and lots of ostriches. Like Maddin's other work, *Twilight* reflects the filmmaker's fascination with art cinemas of the past, including European surrealism and German expressionism. At the same time, the film represents a turn toward a more accessible narrative style, perhaps a result of Maddin's increasing notoriety within the film world. His early film *Tales From the Gimli Hospital* was a longstanding cult hit in New York, and was followed by *Archangel*, which won the U.S. National Society of Film Critics prize for Best Experimental Film. In 1995, Maddin became the youngest person ever to win the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Telluride Film Festival.

The Forum wraps up its season with a double feature of music documentaries. Grant Gee's *Meeting People Is Easy* follows the band Radiohead on their "OK Computer" tour. The film has been compared to *Gimme Shelter* for the way it captures both the music and the moment. Gee forsakes more traditional rock-doc conventions and plunges the viewer directly into Radiohead's grueling tour experience, using a handheld home movie camera and experimental techniques to create an overwhelming visual record of a fascinating band. Similarly, *Instrument*, a five-year collaboration between D.C.-based punk band Fugazi and filmmaker Jem Cohen, combines live performances and Super-8 collage in a frenetic filmic account of the band's twelve-year career. Cohen is an acclaimed film and video maker best known for his work on R.E.M. videos and *Tourfilm*, the popular (and more conventional) R.E.M. concert film.

All films are shown in Room 4070 Vilas Hall, and are free and open to the public. See the MADFILM calendar for dates and times.

Goethe Anniversary Film Series

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of Europe's major Romantic thinkers and poets. To commemorate this occasion, the Department of German, in conjunction with the Program in Jewish Studies, is sponsoring an international symposium on "Goethe in German-Jewish Culture." The symposium will examine the impact of Goethe's works on his Jewish audience in Germany and the contribution of Jewish writers and scholars to Goethe's fame in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In anticipation of the symposium, the Cinematheque will showcase four recent short films and four feature-length adaptations of Goethe's literary texts. These screenings will take place on October 16 and 23 in 4070 Vilas Hall. Each Saturday will feature two programs, at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m., and each program will include a short and a feature-length film. For a complete list of film titles see the MADFILM calendar.

As with all Cinematheque programs, admission is free for the Goethe Anniversary series. For more information about the films, or about the upcoming symposium, contact Professor Marc Silberman at mnsilber@facstaff.wisc.edu.

The "Japaneseness" of Takeshi Kitano

by Jim Udden

Asian film scholar Tony Rayns commented in the mid-80's that Japanese Cinema of the present generation was of less interest to Westerners because it seems less distinctively "Japanese" than the older masterworks of Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujiro Ozu. Rayns claims that is to be expected since the newer generation has been more thoroughly westernized than any previous to this and therefore cannot be expected to retain the cultural distinction of their forefathers. Instead what is important about them is how much they rebel against their own culture, not how "Japanese" they can appear.

But in the nineties there are some directors who do display distinctively Japanese traits in their films, provided we look hard enough for them. Masayuki Sudo's comedy *Sumo Do, Sumo Don't* shows graphic matching of characters in the frame that echo Ozu; Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Mabarosi* features long takes and a play with visibility that reminds one of Mizoguchi and Mikio Naruse. Yet neither of these directors has made as much recent impact as Takeshi Kitano, whose most recent films, *Sonatine* and *Fireworks*, had a measure of success in the United States.

Kitano at first glance appears to be a rebel: he is Japan's bad boy who night after night had appeared on Japanese television with his highly provocative and irreverent humor. Kitano plays himself as a breaker of Japanese taboos, dealing most directly with the issue of death.

Yet there is one striking aspect of his films that belies a truly Japanese streak in him. In Sumo wrestling, the actual action is over often in span of a few seconds; often what precedes the actual fight is a long moment of repose of heightened static tension. One can see this in many Japanese sword play films, and one can see this in Kitano. In Kitano's recent films, there are often prolonged states of perfect stillness as rivals stare at each other before a sudden burst of gunfire. This, along with his tendency to dedramatize the action, show that Kitano is more Japanese than he may appear.

On October 22 and 29 you will have a rare chance to see Kitano's first two features, *Violent Cop* (1989) and *Boiling Point* (1990). Japanese or not, these films already show Kitano as a unique filmmaker to be reckoned with.

Frank Tashlin's *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*

by Ethan de Seife

Long admired by French film scholars and unjustly overlooked by mainstream American critics, Frank Tashlin made some of Hollywood's most visually striking films of the 1950s. Tashlin's visual and comedic expertise are on full view on Friday, September 24, when we will proudly show his most acclaimed picture, 1957's *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*

Part satire of the advertising industry, part live-action cartoon, and part showcase for the comic gifts of stars Tony Randall and Jayne Mansfield (an underappreciated comedic actress), *Rock Hunter's* pleasures are many. A former animator for Warner Brothers in the 1930s and '40s, Tashlin was one of the very few Hollywood directors to make the leap from directing cartoons to directing live action. But the two were never so separate for Tashlin; like his eight films with Jerry Lewis, *Rock Hunter* is full of physical impossibilities, sight gags, fast-paced humor, and many other items plucked from the Looney Tunes bag of tricks. Moreover, the bubbly Jayne Mansfield embodies cartoony curvaceousness like no actress before or since, with the possible exception of Jessica Rabbit.

Made in the late 1950s, when Hollywood saw television's sudden ubiquity as a deeply troubling threat, *Rock Hunter* both pokes fun at the new medium (as in the famous opening credits sequence) and cleverly cuts it down to size. For along with the television program came the television commercial, an insidious new form of consumer manipulation that, for Tashlin, is synonymous with television itself. Tashlin's scorn for the televised, advertised consumer culture is one of the film's principal currents; the other is the love for the visual pleasure that can only be achieved through cinema. Tashlin's strength is his ability to combine these two themes into a joyous, hilarious, and truly gorgeous motion picture. All that and an uncredited Groucho Marx cameo, to boot. Don't miss your chance to see this one-of-a-kind film.

Before the feature, we will screen two of Tashlin's funniest Warner Brothers cartoons, *I Got Plenty of Mutton* and *Plane Daffy*, both from 1944.

Contemporary Scandinavian Cinema

Riding the crest of "Dogme '95," a call to arms that may be little more than a commercial stunt for a corps of international filmmakers whose chief propagandists reside in Denmark, a handful of recent films from the Scandinavian countries have drifted into this country. The Cinematheque, the Scandinavian department and the Nordic council are proud to present a sampling of these films. The screenings will take place at 7:30 p.m. in 4070 Vilas on Friday, November 19, through Sunday, November 21.

The Celebration (Festen)

Denmark

The Celebration was one of the first films produced under the Dogme banner. Shot completely with a handheld Sony PC-7 video camera under natural lighting, the film tracks the perverse turns of events at a family get-together on the occasion of the patriarch's birthday. Robust, silly, and filled with a vigorous sense of establishment-mocking, the film was a hit on the festival scene, where, despite the Dogme dictum Thou Shalt Not Know Who Directed the Film, a tall, handsome man calling himself Thomas Vinterberg kept showing up and claiming it was he. (Vinterberg also pops into the film in a cameo as a taxi driver.)

-Ray Privett

Only Clouds Move the Stars (Bare Skyer Beveger Stjernene)

Norway

Only Clouds is a poignant tale of an 11-year-old girl, Maria, who must come to grips with the death of her younger brother. As Maria's parents deal with the loss, she is sent to live with her grandparents, where she meets Jakob, a wise and sensitive boy who helps soothe Maria's trauma. This is a well-executed portrayal of children, who are often forgotten during moments of crisis, and the two child stars are excellent.

-Alex Scudder, *American Dreamer*

Show Me Love (Fucking Amal!)

Sweden

Show Me Love is at heart the story of Elin and Agnes, two adolescent Swedish girls exploring their sexuality. Both have a love/hate relationship with their family members and confront peer pressure, boredom, and cruelty in various school settings. They yearn to get far away to the excitement of Stockholm and the adult world that seems eons away. Even with cell phones, *Scream* posters, and raves, their town of Amal seems to them distantly removed from what's really happening.

-Larry Fletcher, *American Dreamer*

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