

by Tom McSorley

Guy Maddin's *The Heart of The World***The Heart of the World**

2000 5 min., p Jody Shapiro, d/sc/ph/co-ed Guy Maddin

While this celebrated short has been discussed in *Take One's* previous issue, I would be remiss not to review it in Short Takes. After all, the arrival of a Guy Maddin short film, even one commissioned by a film festival, is an event. While we can describe Maddin's avalanche of images in various ways – Dziga Vertov meets Dostoevsky meets Bunuel meets Ed Wood meets Eisenstein meets Makavejev – what are they saying? Just what is *The Heart of The World* about? The plot asks: Will Anna, the state scientist, save a troubled world after her ill-fated marriage to the venal industrialist Arkmatov? How can she choose between her two ardent suitors; Nikolai the mortician and Osip the actor? In Maddin's volcanic melodrama, the world itself is at stake. Is it all just clever – very clever – pastiche? No. It is more. Paradoxically, within its pulsing music, gattling-gun editing and grainy, creaky evocations of early film style, this film is also a potent denunciation of those who fetishize images and consume them passively. In such a world, suggests Maddin, avarice, phallogocentrism, corporatism and narcissism (been to a festival party lately?) are dominating the world and deforming it utterly. Can Anna's ultimate gift of pure cinema (Kino! Kino! Kino!) save the world? Of course not. Maddin's remarkable film simply calls for a rebirth of the cinema's active, subversive magic in a language at once borrowed and original, conservative and radical, old and new. ●

Atomic Sake

2000 33 min., d Louise Archambault

Ariane, Veronique and Mathilde are close friends who decide one night to "stop the bullshit" and do some real talking. Mathilde tells Ariane that she is in love with a pregnant friend; Veronique confides she's expecting a baby; Ariane tells of her many sexual exploits, one involving Veronique's husband. Interweaving their conversations and confessions with high-octane, high-velocity sequences conveying the riot of consciousness in each woman's head, *Atomic Sake* delivers a tautly constructed and engaging drama of disclosure. These disclosures prove liberating for some, devastating for others. As the night goes on, lubricated and stoked by sake, the explosive, destructive consequences of total honesty within friendships are revealed. The final morning-after tableau, rich with ambiguity and suggestion, demonstrates Archambault's intelligence and restraint as a director. It is a restraint that prevents her film from slipping into the emotionally puerile territory of television relationship dramas (*Friends* or *These Arms of Mine*). Within its accelerated emotional, social and sexual tensions, Archambault's visually arresting drama illustrates that honesty is not necessarily the best policy and that, to warp a Shakespearean phrase, discretion really is the better part of discretion. ●

Night of the Celibate

2000 26 min., d/sc Tony Asimakopoulos

Ottawa-based film and video artist Tony Asimakopoulos, mining the same darkly fecund terrain as Arthur Rimbaud, Kenneth Anger and others, offers an unsettling and obscure dramatic portrait of the extremes of a contemporary North American culture careering chaotically between indulgence and denial. Set in a lonely rooming house and bondage club, *Night of the Celibate* revolves around a celibate guru, from whom desperate men seek relief from their sexual compulsions. Meanwhile, the celibate himself is ready to rupture under the strain of the overstimulated world that heaves and moans around him. Merging experimental video aesthetics with pornography and punctuating the many overheated sequences with an austere motif of an abandoned hallway (a perfect rendering of Leonard Cohen's line: "some hallway where love's never been"), Asimakopoulos effectively renders both the withering sadness and the oddly exquisite joy of human solitude. While opaque in patches, and with a few unfortunate lines (such as, "in here there is no such thing as silly"), this is an absorbing, densely textured drama of our culture's ongoing struggle to reconcile pleasure with virtue. A brave, poetic slice from the nether regions from an impressive talent. ●

Hindsight

2000 13 min., d/sc/ed Susan Shipton

Award-winning editor Susan Shipton (whose distinguished work includes *The Adjuster*, *Exotica*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, *Felicia's Journey*, *Possible Worlds*) makes a sure-footed, but disappointing, directorial debut in what is a rather slight comedic drama about the male gaze. Warren (Tom McCamus) is a shy, sheepish office worker who is accused by his co-worker Trina (Martha Burns) of spying on her. As they eat their lunches on a bench and make small talk, Trina suddenly springs on him, brandishing her best feminist orthodoxy with fury and precision: "You stare at me and imagine me naked. I see that bulging eye undressing me, invading me. It's an obsession, a perversion, an assault." He denies the charges and explains that the "staring eye" is actually made of glass. She asks him to remove it and proceeds to examine it while Warren mumbles about how he only wanted her to look back at him. Despite being well-acted and capably directed, there is something vaguely unsatisfying about *Hindsight*. The script (based on a play by Dennis Foon and adapted by Shipton) fails to develop enough tension to make either the humour of the encounter or the sadness of its outcome have any memorable impact. Indeed, perhaps the critical moment in the narrative – I won't give it away, but let's just say it involves an encounter between the oral and the visual – loses its power in the context of Warren and Trina's stilted, faltering relationship. Not without its charm, *Hindsight* offers glimpses of workplace alienation and frustrated desire, but needs a bit more focus to be 20/20. ●