



## Bag Lady Musings: Film Festival Edition 2011

October 2011

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### Introduction

When I left the office on September the 8<sup>th</sup> for my first film of the 36<sup>th</sup> annual Toronto International Film Festival the TSX had closed at 12,683. I came back 10 days and 39 films later to find the stock market had dropped close to 4% and continued to drop another 5% by the end of my first week back.

It made me wish that I could reopen those theatre doors to experience the solace – as brief as it may be – of being bathed in the glow of the big screen!

Pauline Kael, the long-time film critic for The New Yorker, used to suggest that movies are an art form with a crucial place in our society:

**“People go to the movies ... as a means of avoiding and postponing the pressures we feel. This latter function of art – generally referred to disparagingly as escapism – may also be considered as refreshment and in terms of the stress of big city life and small town boredom, it may be a major factor in keeping us sane.”**

As I reflected on TIFF and the movies I wanted to share with everyone it became apparent what resonated with me this year were movies that lifted my spirits, left me feeling good about life and provided insight into the mystery of belief and its transforming power.

I hadn't realized just how much I needed a change of state. Let's face it the financial world of late has not been a lot of fun – Greece, unemployment woes, political squabbles can grind on you and wear you down. Although when I reflect back on my years in the financial industry I realized most of the significant stock market up moves came after what seemed insurmountable problems (but were in fact resolvable!). I have no doubt a European banking collapse will be averted. And in the USA I believe the diversity of the economy and the industriousness of its people will result in a new optimism. We have said a number of times before, the US stock markets are entering a significant period of outperformance relative to other global indices.

Let us not forget:

- Consumers and corporations have significantly deleveraged since 2008;
- S&P 500 non financial companies hold approximately \$1.2 trillion in cash;
- and interest rates are at record lows.

All that's missing is a more optimistic view of our economic future and before you know it spending is increased and unemployment is down. Therefore wise investors should be taking advantage of the current opportunities to increase their exposure to US corporations. Our preferred method is via ETFs

(Exchange Traded Funds on the Dow Jones Industrials or the S&P500). But enough of investment strategies lets talk movies!

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Toronto International Film Festival

### **Salmon Fishing In Yemen**

If you aren't familiar with the book of the same title, you might believe it sounds a bit odd – what is it? The world's most confused documentary? What it turned out to be was one of the Toronto Film Festival's biggest crowd pleasers.

The duo of Ewan McGregor and Emily Blunt are appealing in a wonderfully wonky, off-kilter way that most romantic comedies can only dream about. It concerns a sheik's desire to export salmon to the highlands of his homeland in the hope that being able to fish will raise the spirits of the local inhabitants.

By the time the film is done it's hard not to feel there is hope – for romance, the possibility of peace and even a little patience for politics.

### **The Artist**

Pauline Kael once said her favourite film was *Menilmontant*, a silent film from 1924. So I am in good company when I say my favourite film of TIFF this year was *THE ARTIST*. Infinitely charming as well as a clever homage to the Golden Age of silent film, this movie is as light as a feather. A silent film shot in black and white; it's old time entertainment. A tale about a young actress whose career takes off in sound pictures just as that of a veteran male star declines. Director Michael Hazanavicius and his lead actor Jean Dujardin are well known for their affectionate James Bond spoofs in France. The actors are charged with convincing the audience using only facial expressions and movements, which must take some learning for stars used to freely expressing their emotions through dialogue, and their successes must be judged specifically in that context, making them all the more astounding. Dujardin in particular is a master of expression, both on-screen in his films within the film, and off, when he must find a different, and slightly less exaggerated repertoire to convince and convey the tone of the action. The man is a genius. *THE ARTIST* is a film about cinema that also has a heart.

### **A Simple Life**

It's a bittersweet, heartfelt look at the ties between people who aren't blood relations but who have in effect a mother/son bond. This is a low-key masterpiece.

After an elderly maid for a Hong Kong film producer has a stroke, he finds a nursing home for her to move into – based on the real life story of producer Roger Lee and his actual family's amah – one of an honoured breed of Chinese domestic helpers known for their life long service to a single family.

A simple ode to the elderly. *A Simple Life* tackles a challenge that everyone faces: growing older.

### **Footnote**

A black comedy of middle age and disappointed ambitions. *Footnote* tells the story of a father-son pair of scholars who both specialize in the arcane specialty of Talmudic studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Here's the crisis in a nutshell: Eliezer has devoted his entire life to a stubbornly precise, methodical, microscopic study of the subject with few accolades to show for it. His son Uriel approaches the subject from a broader, more anecdotal and interpretive point of view and he's got a shelf of awards. Then one day, Eliezer is named for a big important prize! The whole movie is, in its way, a Talmudic lesson.

### **Into The Abyss**

This documentary by Werner Herzog takes a look at a capital murder case in Texas from 2001 in which

three people were killed, one man was executed and another faces 40 years in prison. "This is not an issue film; it's not an activist film against capital punishment, because the film has only partially to do with someone on death row," the German-born, Los Angeles-based Herzog said in an interview after the film's standing-ovation public screening on the first night of TIFF. "It's very much about the whole environment. Families of victims of violent crime are equally important."

You have to make up your own mind. But what I find fascinating is that absolutely no matter how many people were killed or executed or in prison, there seemed to be something independent, what Herzog often referred to as "the urgency of life."

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Heard in line

An essential part of the film festival is the standing in line for your movie – usually for at least an hour! As the week progresses this is where you get to hear the buzz about films people loved but weren't able to personally see:

Honorable mentions:

### **L'Havre**

No other contemporary filmmaker manages to blend deadpan, ironic humour with social commentary in quite the same manner as Finnish master Aki Kaurismäki. In L'Havre, the moody, retro ambiance of the film's titular Norman port city enhances a tidy plot that blends the noir-ish elements of a Jean-Pierre Melville film with the gentle humanism of Jean Renoir. Atmospheric, quiet and completely assured, Kaurismäki employs these diverse elements to tell a highly contemporary story about illegal refugees, a subject of immediate relevance in today's Europe.

### **Elles**

Juliette Binoche stars as a journalist researching an article on student prostitution for the French edition of ELLE magazine finds herself drawn to two young women. The stories these seemingly well-adjusted girls share force the middle-aged writer to examine her own life and family. Szumowska places female sexuality, in all its complexity, under a microscope, turning Elles into a must-see film from a director whose talent has finally flourished in full bloom.

### **Pina**

German master filmmaker Wim Wenders shoots in 3D to capture the brilliantly inventive dance world of Pina Bausch and her company Tanztheater Wuppertal. Excerpts from many of her most famous pieces are shot outside in the streets and parks of Wuppertal capturing the drama and power of her repertoire.

This film almost didn't happen. Shortly before shooting was scheduled to begin in 2009 its subject, choreographer and artistic genius Pina Bausch, died suddenly, just days after being diagnosed with cancer. Wenders, a virtuoso in his own way and one of Germany's most illustrious postwar filmmakers almost abandoned the project but when Bausch's superb dance troupe decided to continue on, so did he with this magnificent 3D tribute to her.

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Diversions — In a clutch

In keeping with our movie theme my "bag diversion" this time is a collection of vintage –style acrylic clutches – the brand Edie Parker was recently launched in 2010. Inspired by the original handbags favored by showgirls and socialites during the 1950s and 1960s, these chic, wearable sculptures are objects of delight with retro soul. Edie Parker's sleek lines, creamy surfaces and gem-flaked textures glide timelessly onto today's fashion landscape. Like their mid-century predecessors each bag is meticulously handcrafted in America.

Visit [edie-parker.com/about.html](http://edie-parker.com/about.html)

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