
FILM-PHILOSOPHY

Based on a True Story:
New York Film Festival 2006 Report (Part Two)

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The Queen

Directed by Stephen Frears; written by Peter Morgan;
edited by Lucia Zucchetti; starring Helen Mirren, Michael Sheen,
Helen McCrory, James Cromwell and Alex Jennings
Color. 103 mins. (UK)

Falling (Fallen)

Directed and written by Barbara Albert; edited by
Karina Ressler; starring Nina Proll, Birgit Minichmayr,
Ursula Strauss, Kathrin Resetarits, and Gabriela Hegedus
Color. 85 mins. (Austria)

Little Children

Directed by Todd Field; co-writers Todd Field and Tom
Perrota; edited by Leo Trombetta; starring Kate Winslet,
Jennifer Connelly, Patrick Wilson, Jackie Earle Haley, and
Noah Emmerich. Color. 130 mins. (USA)

Triad Election 2

Directed by Johnnie To; written by Yau, Nai Hoi and Yip Tin Shing;
edited by Law Wing Cheong and Jeff Cheung; starring Louis Koo,
Simon Yam, Lam Suet, and Yau Yung. Color. 85 mins. (Hong Kong)

Insiang (1976)

Directed by Lino Brocka; written by Mario O'Hara and
Lamberto E. Antonio; edited by Augusto Salvador; starring
Hilda Koronel, Mona Lisa, Ruez Vernal, and Rez Cortez.
Color. 95 mins. (Phillipines)

In part two of my report on the New York Film Festival 2006, I begin by immediately confessing my prejudice against filmmakers who believe – or act as if they do – that using location shooting, stories ‘ripped from the headlines,’ and on site photography of real industrial practices automatically guarantees a greater reality in the movies. I tend to more readily believe the ribbon of dreams made by filmmakers who build into their films an understanding of the way our inner realities construct what we believe to be real, whether they use location shooting and newspaper stories or not. That said, a number of films at the 2006 New York Film Festival that made much of their representation of ‘real life’ or historical truths and thereby offered interesting opportunities for ruminating on the effectiveness and limits of the use in commercial feature films of what are generally considered documentary elements.

The Queen, a recounting of some of the repercussions in Great Britain of the untimely demise of Princess Diana, is a beautiful example of the problematic nature of the attempt to force documentary references into being accepted as guarantors of truth in fiction films. Touted by its publicity as a film about ‘the death that changed a nation,’ it was nevertheless described by its writer, director, and stars at their NYFF press conference as an attempt to discuss Diana’s real, notoriously fatal car crash in Paris less in terms of the event itself than in terms of the reality of how the media controlled and developed its reception by the public. A respectable goal this; yet not only did its marketing—which blatantly and grandiosely emphasised event over spin – undercut the stated intentions of the creators, but the film itself can only be understood as an analysis of media manipulation if one engages in a Herculean willing suspension of disbelief. *The Queen*, despite or possibly because of its brilliant cast, uses all its documentary elements in what is arguably the most fraudulent manner possible.

The Queen, if there is anyone left who doesn’t know, tells the story of the reaction of England’s royal family, primarily Queen Elizabeth (Helen Mirren), to the death of Princess Diana, played by herself in news footage. The focus of the film is Elizabeth’s confrontation with a modern challenge to her heritage. After proceeding in the traditional fashion of the British royal family and asserting their right of privacy in personal matters, Elizabeth finds herself forced to decide that in today’s media driven world she will need to make a public statement that provides official consolation for Britain’s grieving millions. Unfortunately, any impression that we are getting the ‘true story’ of this ‘death that changed a nation’ depends not on any new or penetrating insight, but rather on the superficial familiarity of the appearances presented. Part of the sense that we are witnessing the truth is stimulated by well-known snippets of the newsreel footage that replayed endlessly around the world when Diana met her fate in 1997. Among these is the news footage of

the speech made by Diana's brother with its barely veiled anger at the Windsors, a good if somewhat manipulative choice. The belief of the writer and director that no actor could be as convincing as the man himself is correct, but convincing of what? I still don't know. We are also encouraged to believe that what we are seeing is true because the film uses a good deal of location shooting, especially of the facades of Buckingham Palace and Downing Street. These real sites, however, create a slippage that induces the audience to believe that they are also looking at the Queen's enormous estate, Balmoral, in scenes that are supposed to take place there, when we are actually viewing other similarly grand country estates. But most of all, there is Helen Mirren as Elizabeth, who offers such a magisterial performance that it may be impossible for many a moviegoer, as it was for me, to remember that she is not Queen Elizabeth II. This is not an impersonation; it is an uncannily effective embodiment of the woman who rules England today. But the belief Mirren engenders is a smoke screen for the fact that we are learning nothing about Elizabeth's part in this incident. We are being lulled into believing the truth of what everyone assumes went on behind the scenes.

Stephen Frears has labored and brought forth a very realistic looking mouse which scurries to little effect around the British monarchy and the British media. Far from lifting the veil on media spin, it relegates its depiction of manipulation to a few sharp one-liners in the mouth of Tony Blair's publicist, who dashes fleet footedly through a few scenes that reveal how dependent Blair was on this duplicitous person. But how do these few moments tell the media story? Common sense alone dictates that to tell a tale of media construction of British reality the film would have had to place this man at its center. Simply by making the royal family the hub of the film, the writer has structurally weighted it toward Elizabeth's decision, and that is not dramatised in any depth either. This is a waste, as I see it, since the queen's evolving thought process about how much of the personal life of her family she was obligated to make public held the promise of a cinematic study of the viability of aristocratic entitlement in the 21st century. As it is, we get little more than a rather dim family melodrama which fails to come up with the necessary melodramatic adversary for Elizabeth to play against.

True, it would have been a radical violation of the true story to pit Elizabeth directly against some media mogul. But perhaps some surreal or dreamlike confrontation would have better served the purposes of truth here. As it is, the construction of the narrative doesn't even serve the conventional purposes of generic entertainment. After all, where is there drama in Elizabeth's assertion of aristocratic prerogatives against the feeble protests of a very lifelike simulacrum of Tony Blair (Michael Sheen) who is also besotted with the glamour of nobility? And his riotously

irreverent wife Cherie (Helen McCrory) – my new culture hero – is too peripheral to the story to give Elizabeth her antagonist. Thus much of what the film concerns itself with is some pedestrian and irritable domestic conversation with Prince Phillip (James Cromwell), depicted here as an arrogant prat, and the royal mother, Queen Mary (Sylvia Syms), depicted here as a bourgeois dowager straight out of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*. This ersatz Masterpiece Theatre fiction about royalty and modern England is dressed up in newsreels and a smashing Elizabethan (II) wig that only obscure the truth of the story it is based on.

By contrast, the most compelling moments in this film are utterly and avowedly fictional, as well as somewhat surreal in nature. One occurs as the film opens, and suggests a promise of reflexivity that *The Queen* never fulfills as it wanders off into its masquerade of journalistic reportage. In this opening scene, which has nothing narratively to do with the rest of the film, Elizabeth is having her portrait painted, and indulging in some tonally Shakespearean conversation with the artist about the comparative and contrasting joys of the lives of monarchs and the lives of commoners. Elizabeth wistfully, but somewhat ironically, longs for the joy of voting. The entire interchange is punctuated by a final shot in which she assumes a formal pose for the painter, and flashes a look at the camera that is almost indescribable, but might be approximately translated as a 'who the Hell are you looking at?' expression that is just not quite that shrill. This interchange beautifully opens up the issue of the reality of nobility in a modern setting through its evocation of the static posture of official iconicity, but all this wonderful cinematic energy gets lost, for the most part, in the onslaught of bogus 'reality' that follows. It is a moment oddly reminiscent of another film about a queen this year that didn't fulfill its promise either, Sophia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, which permits its protagonist a coincidentally similar direct address to the camera to inaugurate her film.

The other noteworthy moment occurs when Elizabeth has a chance encounter with a majestic stag, who appears to her as if in a vision, when she is walking on the heath of Balmoral, a scene that writer Peter Morgan told the press conference derives from a similarly uncanny incident in his personal life, not Elizabeth's. Although this almost mythic meeting is later milked for the lowest form of symbolic meaning when the stag is killed by an upstart capitalist visiting a neighboring estate, the encounter itself briefly raises the film several notches. Mirren has her chance here and she runs with it to fill the screen with 'essence of entitlement,' in her identification with and pleasure in the beauty and innate majesty of this, nevertheless, hunted creature. If only she had been given a chance to play out, through cinematic poetry of this caliber, the political complexities of the thrilling, spiritually sustaining but ultimately questionable aspects

of the culture of blood nobility. Aside from Helen McCrory's glowingly mocking bow, as Cherie Blair, to Elizabeth, this may be all that the viewer takes away of value and truth from *The Queen*.

In contrast, *Falling*, Barbara Albert's film, made on a much smaller scale, nicely succeeds in its oblique portrayal of the 'true story.' Albert achieves her goals as she seeks to speak of a generation of women who grew up in the 1980's in Austria, using location shooting, natural light, improvisational acting by non and quasi-professionals—all the goodies of neo-realism—to breathe the gust of real life into events captured on camera. Austria has no vibrant film industry to speak of; it is a country colonised by imports from other much more aggressive film cultures. Therefore, it is both more and less difficult to make a movie free of the worst excesses of genre conventions, fetishisation, and commercially mandated cowardice. There is not much money available, but then again there isn't much in the way of Austrian home grown film clichés to weigh director Barbara Albert down.

Falling is an English translation of the Austrian title that loses much of the connotative richness of the original, *Fallen*, which means both 'wandering' and 'descending' and so combines the sensation of being lost and drifting with the sense of the drop from a higher plane. Aptly titled, *Falling* is the loosely structured story of a group of women in their early 30's who meet again fourteen years after their schooldays together at the funeral of a teacher (male) who played a big part in their lives. As with most stories of this type, the characters are forced to come to grips with what they have lost of their original promise, and perhaps what they have also gained too from their wandering.

The women are a heterogeneous group. The glamorous Carmen (Kathrin Resetarits) is now an actress in Germany, or so she says; the ungainly Nicole (Gabriela Hegedus) has arrived with her daughter and puts her foot in her mouth, irritatingly every chance she gets; Alex (Ursula Strauss) is a somewhat brittle, bitter and alcoholic career woman; Nina (Nina Proll) has turned into a serene, sunny woman; Birgitte (Birgit Minichmayr) is a former hippy. The direction they have all taken is indicated by the opening images, a juxtaposition between the organic flow of energy of waving greenery which yields to an image of a highly manicured, stone bound courtyard. The action of the film restores them to a fee flow of energy, but only for a rejuvenating moment. They will have to deal with the ossified socially constructed forms of the world as it is.

Albert's project has a form similar to that of *The Big Chill* (1983); the American ur-reunion film, which depends for its structure on the chronological unfolding of linear time not the events of a plot. In *Falling*, the time period that organises the film is the forty-eight hours that follow the funeral of their deceased teacher's funeral. As in all films built on the reunion premise, secrets are

revealed or not: these women discover who slept with the 'beloved' teacher, who has a lesbian crush on whom, and who is actually able to attend the funeral only because of a temporary pass from jail, but they do not find out that Carmen's career in Germany is not as an actress, but in a much less glamorous capacity as a member of the entertainment industry (that secret is reserved for the audience alone, and I will keep it reserved for my readers.) Inhibitions are shed when the five women crash the wedding of the former lover of one of them, a wedding that turns into a bacchanalian orgy. The hungover dawn brings the predictable sober re-evaluation and some liberation.

However, there is a ring of truth to all of these moments, growing as they do spontaneously from autobiographical springs in lives of the director and the actresses alike. This is not to say that *Falling* is directly autobiographical. From what Albert said at her NYFF press conference, there is no reason to believe that any of the actresses is in her real life lesbian, an alcoholic, a woman who has been seduced and abandoned, or a prisoner on leave; but rather that through their improvisations each was able to experiment with inhabiting the lives of real women they saw around them; that is, to find the fictional extension of situations they themselves encountered in some form. The film has the delicacy and power of the post-war Italian neo-realist films, but without the sense of doom and the compulsions of destiny that shadowed those films. Indeed, the key image, near the end of the film is of possibility, as the girls migrate to the edge of a windblown cliff familiar to them from their youth and lean with all their weight into the currents of air blowing with such force that they keep the women from falling over the rocky precipice. A nervous but exhilarating moment, this carefully positioned grouping thrown literally on the winds of chance is representative of the joining of cinematic artifice with natural energy of which this film is composed.

Little Children displays another mode of creating a cinematic narrative that draws its inspiration from a true story. The film focuses on the hot current topic of sex offenders; however, if it seeks to strike a chord with the audience through association with the kind of story that might appear on the news, it is not a retelling of a specific news incident. It is the fictional account, based on Tom Perotta's novel, of the reappearance of Ronnie J. McGorvey (Jackie Earle Haley), a 'known sex offender' in the upscale and uptight suburban town where he was arrested for indecently exposing himself to some young children. Thus it is not hampered by a need to deal with audience identification of a controversial person. Rather it uses the controversial issue to probe the larger question of difference in America, not only through the sex offender plot thread, but also by means of the story of an adulterous affair between Sarah Pierce (Kate Winslet) an educated,

thoughtful stay-at-home mother suffocated by the limits of her pretty, conformist community and Brad Adamson (Patrick Wilson) the underachieving husband of a very successful wife, Kathy (Jennifer Connolly). Unable to pass the law boards – he is clearly not lawyer material – but trapped by family expectations that he must, handsome Brad is a ‘house husband’ studying for his third try at the boards. Feminised by his situation, Brad is identified by the women in the playground through the emasculating epithet of ‘prom king’ when he embarks on his affair with Sarah. He is also somewhat infantilised by demands for a certain kind of professional success made on him, which he displays in his boyish pre-occupation with the freedom and daredevil antics of a group of teenaged skate boarders. *Little Children* is not a defense of adultery or sex offenders, however, but rather a study of communal hysteria and repression and the consequences of damaging gender definitions.

Little Children is a flawed film, arguably the result of the necessity to excise for the screenplay, for the sake of contract time requirements, necessary information that was present in the novel. Of the main characters, we get inside all of them but Sarah’s husband, Richard (Gregg Edelman), which unbalances the story. While the rest of the very troubled characters are given motivation and depth; Richard is reduced to a jerk who masturbates with the help of an absurdly tacky internet porn site. This takes a toll on our understanding of the affair between Sarah and Brad as a form of release for the two of them. Brad’s maturation and male definition issues are clear, but what is Sarah, who is supposed to be a character of complexity and sensibility, doing with her poor excuse of a husband? We need to respect her issues, and believe in their plausibility, even if we don’t fully understand them, for the film to work completely. The best example of where such an audience need is successfully fulfilled in *Little Children* is the depiction of the relationship between sex offender Ronnie and his mother; a complex and bewildering bond of affection that opens up a way into thinking about cultural conflicts between maternal love and masculine sexual definition. Sarah is also given some interesting ambiguity in her relationship with her little daughter, which is troubled by her own immaturity as well as her frustrations with life. But because Richard is just a cartoon and therefore a vacuum, Sarah’s characterisation is significantly undercut.

Yet *Little Children* achieves a certain amount of truth. Winslet is a star, but unlike the way *The Queen* depends on Mirren’s stardom and her awesome reputation as a part of thespian nobility, in this film Winslet plays successfully against her image as an eccentric beauty and also against any associations with previous roles, whether as a mad teen murderer (*Heavenly Creatures*) or a miraculous survivor (*Titanic*). What reality exists in this film about provincial

communities in which injustices occur is a result of the ensemble work of the cast, which has been permitted by Todd Field to take seriously the spirit of the larger cultural context of their relationships to each other instead of sacrificing that aspect of the story to purely individual relationships, like the affair. Despite a completely misleading ad campaign which suggests that the film is dedicated to putting on display Winslet's and Wilson's nude bodies, the film is actually about something much more interesting, the dissonance between personal longings or compulsions and cultural dynamics. The flashpoint of this clash is neither Sarah nor Brad, but Larry Hedges (Noah Emerich), a former policeman who most directly reacts to the threat Ronnie poses to the community. He drags Brad into a noisy but minute vigilante group formed to keep Ronnie 'under control.' The moment when the ultimate results of Larry's vigilantism are revealed is the decisive moment for all the characters. But I can't say more about that, because the denouement is not what the audience expects for any of the major players; and there's no point in giving away what readers will want to discover for themselves.

Johnnie To's *Triad Election* is a gangster film that takes the 'based on a true story' concept in film into another arena: the affect on the Hong Kong film industry of the real political upheaval caused by the transfer of political control of the region from Great Britain to China. Johnnie To, a prolific director, who has given almost all the major film genres a more than creditable go, is, nevertheless, most famous for his gangster films. His masterpiece, by most accounts, is *The Mission* (1999), a brilliant exploration of the dynamics of Triad rules of honor and engagement, gemlike in the perfection of its visuals and resonant in its depiction of male relationships. (Triads, for those unfamiliar with Hong Kong gangster films, are gangster societies rooted deeply in the social fabric of ancient China, which were exported to Hong Kong along with the mass exodus of immigrants fleeing the new Communist regime to the then British protectorate following World War II). *Triad Election 2* updates those dynamics, seeking to illuminate the implications of Communist controlled Hong Kong for its Triad underworld.

The sequel to *Triad Election* (2005), *Triad Election 2* successfully uses the sequel format to examine the consequences of the perversion of the Triad ritual of election in the first film. Between them, these two films represent a radical change in the gangster universe of the To gangster story. In his previous gangster films, for example *The Mission* and *A Hero Never Dies* (1998), To depicts a Hong Kong in which the honour of the Triad organisation miraculously trumps the powerful capitalist profit motive in that most capitalist of cities. By contrast, in *Triad Election*, the old vigor of the Triad codes is waning, although we don't know that at first. In the competition between the two main candidates, the old division is there: Lok (Simon Yam) seems to represent old Triad

traditions of honor and his adversary, Big D (Tony Leung Ka Fai), seems to represent the corrupting power of capitalist interests. Lok's victory seems to recapitulate the power dynamics between honour and crass materialism in To's previous gangster classics. However, Lok's brutal last minute massacre of Big D and his wife reveals the victorious Lok as the worst of the two, since at least Big D is what he seems. The Triads are only hanging on to their traditions in terms of appearance. Things go further down hill in *Triad Election 2*, when the leadership position of the Triad is again to be decided by an election. This time, Lok, who once again veils his rapacious greed and ambition with a display of mildness and traditional respect for his Triad, is bested by young, personable Jimmy (Louis Koo), the new gangster breed, different in appearance and in goals from the old mob types. Clean cut Jimmy wants to go legit. And he wants his children to become doctors and lawyers and leave the Triad society altogether. However, as To tells the tale, the ascent to the chairmanship of a gangster society by a man who wants to become law abiding poses more than the obvious problems for his Triad. The complexity of this situation is the point of the film and is essential to any understanding of To's desire to bring realism to the gangster genre.

In an interview with To several years ago, I learned that he grew up in the infamous Hong Kong projects, built by the British for the influx of immigrants from China, a breeding place for Triad gangsters. He told me at that time that, although he was never part of a gang, his gangster films reflected the experience of his early years when he observed gangster culture first hand. At that time, he told me that his gangster films had brought a new reality to the genre. However, for the *Election* films, To and his collaborators did a great deal of formal research into Triad histories. In a more recent interview with him during the 2006 NYFF, he rejected his earlier gangster films as romantic and the product of genre conventions and proposed his newest films as the true story.

The difference between these two interview is interesting primarily because of the prominent role of a mainland Chinese Security Bureau agent in Jimmy's successful bid to be Triad Chairman, the first appearance of mainland China in To's gangster film universe. *Triad Election 2* postulates the potential end to the Triad network of underworld societies when, at the end of the film, the Chinese Security Bureau chief (Yau Yung), who has both forced and enticed Jimmy into becoming the new Triad Chairman, despite the fact that he is an MBA with a determination to be a legitimate businessman, then dictates changes in the politics of the Hong Kong Triads, an 'offer Jimmy cannot refuse.' Under the Chinese regime, Jimmy's triad will now be forbidden to hold elections, and his son and all his descendants will inherit the position of Triad leader in perpetual succession, a gross violation of Triad tradition. This way, says the bureau chief, China will be able

to keep a person with integrity in the leadership role and ensure law and order, even in the Hong Kong underworld.

When asked at his NYFF press conference if it were literally true that the Chinese government was directly involved with Hong Kong gangsters, To replied in the negative. What then is the source of the new reality of these films, as he sees it? First, he points with pride to his reams of historical documentation about the Triads, which he has used in his *Election* films in portraying ceremonies and rituals as they have not previously appeared onscreen. The second reality he values in these films is his portrait of China as a major player in Hong Kong. However To's positioning of China raises more questions than it answers. Does the indomitable Security Bureau Chief serve as an index of To's discomfort with the reach of the mainland government; that it extends even into the depths of the city's crime network? Is it merely a neutral reflection of Chinese intentions? Or is it some kind of attempt on To's part to placate the new powers that be by appreciating their stated intentions to assure order and prosperity for Hong Kong? Or some combination of all the above? There is some interesting ambiguity about the true story here. To told me, albeit through a translator – he spoke to me more often in English in my previous interview – that he is not unhappy that the Chinese may put an end to the independence of the Triad societies, or perhaps terminate their very existence. This addresses the criminality of the Triads in a direct and logical way, but it omits his feelings about the metaphorical uses he has made of the Triad gangster as a champion of honour in a modern world. Embedded in the film I see a reflection of those feelings. The work itself closes with an image of desperate angst. Immediately after his encounter with the mainland Security Bureau Chief, Jimmy is told by his wife, glowing with happiness, that she is pregnant. Jimmy gives her the response that she expects and wants, but when he turns toward the window, the back that he exposes to the camera seethes with a sorrow that his face has hidden. The joyous announcement of his first child is also the death knell of his dreams. His child will lock him into the clutches of a bogus Triad severed from its roots and render him a puppet of the Chinese government, world without end.

Finally, there is *Insiang*, directed by the late Lino Brocka, a film I had looked forward to because I am so rarely given a chance to see a work by a Phillipine filmmaker. I write of it, even though I never saw it and never will, and thus I close with a painful controversy, at least one that is extremely painful for me. *Insiang* forcefully made me debate within myself and with others whether there are documentary elements that ought not to be a part of the vocabulary of fiction films. I was completely unprepared for *Insiang* to foster this confrontation with self, as its press notes described it almost innocuously as the story of 'three locked in a vicious emotional and

sexual triangle,' not a particularly controversial prospect, simply a serviceable convention that I presumed that, given his reputation, Brocka would treat with a particular power and insight. Maybe he did. I'll never know because as I settled into my seat and the film began, I was assaulted with images and sounds about which I had not been warned. The film's very first shots are live, actual footage of a slaughterhouse, in which hundreds of animals hanging from hooks are being simultaneously killed; just another work day for a huge group of butchers. The screams emanating from these horribly dying beasts, sounding like a thousand massacred babies, will haunt me for some time to come. I tremble as I think of them now. On that occasion, I ran from the auditorium.

Insiang was shown in the Walter Reade Theatre of Lincoln Center. Outside the auditorium is a lobby about forty feet wide, and beyond that a reception room, more than a hundred feet wide. Even after I had crossed the lobby, I could still hear the screams of the beasts – I myself cannot say what they were because in my agitation I couldn't focus, but I have been told they were pigs – and I could still hear them when I entered the reception room. The screams were that loud and the scene was that long. In the reception room, sat the three members of the NYFF publicity team, who were immensely respectful of my reaction to the film. They thoughtfully discussed my objections to the screening of the film without any warning about the opening scene – delivered by me in an emotionally overwrought state – and they subsequently included a clear warning in large letters in the handout publicising its next screening.

I do not know why director Lino Brocka began the film with that footage; it does not seem to have had any relationship to the plot as I have been able to piece it out since that day, so I presume the scene was there because of the director's belief that these documentary images of casual, commercially motivated savagery were necessary to serving his dramatic purposes. Were they? I have no way to estimate what they added to Brocka's story of a 'vicious sexual triangle,' but I cannot find it in myself to believe that even a clear warning about the opening images goes far enough in dealing with this situation. I wish to question the limits of the 'based on a true story' impulse that presumably motivated Broca's inclusion of this scene in his melodrama. Does artistic freedom and the quest for realism justify the display, for the purpose of amping up the impact of a melodrama, closely observed footage, as it is being performed, of such slaughter? How about if it is a massacre of human beings? How about live, on the spot torture of human beings or animals? How about the actual performance of experiments on human beings or animals as they are in progress? To what extent are living creatures fair game for the poetic vision of a filmmaker? And what do we really gain because Brocka did not employ artistic means to simulate the effect he desired?

Let me say this: I was the only person to leave the theatre, and, as far as I know, the only person to seek out any of the staff of NYFF 2006 to recommend a warning for any future screenings of *Insiang*. This perhaps troubles me more than the memory of the sounds of the death agonies of the beasts, which is saying a great deal, and brings to my mind the famous experiments conducted by Stanley Milgrim between 1961 and 1962 at Yale University. For those who do not recall the details, volunteers for those experiments were told that they were taking part in an inquiry about learning. In the event that an incorrect answer was given to a question posed by an 'authority,' they were to administer electric shocks to a 'student' in a glass enclosed booth who was connected by electrodes to a power source. Both the 'student' in the booth and the 'authority' in the lab coat asking the questions knew the switch thrown by the volunteer was a dummy. There was no electric shock and the experiment was in fact not about the learning process but rather inspired by the Nuremberg rulings that causing harm on orders did not abrogate personal responsibility. Would Americans during peacetime refuse immoral orders given by duly constituted authority? The results of these experiments remain appalling today. Over 85% of the volunteers administered what they believed to be lethal doses of electricity to the 'learners' when asked to do by the authority figure, some with tears in their eyes in response to the shrieks of the actors in the booth. Only 15% told the 'authority' where he could go when they saw a display of the pain they believed themselves to be causing for no justifiable reason.

I close here respectfully asking if my readers see an analogy here. I intend this as a real, not a rhetorical question. I do not support censorship. But I also do not support the right of an artist to inflict pain and/or death on a living creature or to profit from anyone who does. And I wonder about the willingness on the part of the audience of critics, scholars, teachers, and filmmakers who saw *Insiang* when I almost saw it to accept that 'right' in the name of art. Was this a submission to the 'authority' of the artist that was analogous to the obedience of 85% of the Milgrim volunteers to a man in a lab coat? Or would curbing Brocka's freedom to show this slaughter put us on the slippery slope toward repression? I know my colleagues felt the horror of that scene. They told me so. But most saw no reason for protest of any kind. Some even questioned my insistence on the need for advance warnings. None engaged with why Brocka should not have been constrained to evoke poetically whatever he was after in his first shots. Were the members of that audience serving a greater goal or abdicating their responsibilities? This is a true story.