

Sight & Sound Films of 2007

Each year we ask a selection of our contributors - reviewers and critics from around the world - for their five films of the year. It's a very loosely policed subjective selection, based on films the writer has seen and enjoyed that year, and we don't deny them the choice of films that haven't yet reached the UK. And we don't give them much time to ponder, either - just about a week. So below you'll find the familiar and the obscure, the new and the old. From this we put together the top ten you see here. What distinguishes this particular list is that it's been drawn up from one of the best years for all-round quality I can remember. 2007 has seen some extraordinary films. So all of the films in the ten are must-sees and so are many more. Enjoy.

- Nick James, Editor.

- 1 **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu)
- 2 **Inland Empire** (David Lynch)
- 3 **Zodiac** (David Fincher)
- = 4 **I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes)
- The Lives of Others** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck)
- 6 **Silent Light** (Carlos Reygadas)
- = 7 **The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford** (Andrew Dominik)
- Syndromes and a Century** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul)
- No Country for Old Men** (Ethan and Joel Coen)
- Eastern Promises** (David Cronenberg)



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Gilbert Adair (Critic and author, UK)

For me virtually all current American films are junk, junk cinema as we say junk food, each one a greasy Big Mac (and the so-called 'indies' are nothing but Big Macs with a couple of limp lettuce leaves). Meanwhile, one of the most amazing if little remarked-upon phenomena of the contemporary cinema is the enduring strength, relevance and above all capacity to surprise, nearly 40 years on, of the still surviving filmmakers of the French New Wave. Which is why, of my five best films of 2007, no fewer than four were made by these extraordinary old/new directors.

1. **Private Fears in Public Places (Coeurs)** (Alain Resnais, France)
2. **Don't Touch the Axe (Ne touchez pas la hache)** (Jacques Rivette, France)
3. **Les Amours d'Astrée et de Céladon (The Romance of Astrea and Celadon)** (Eric Rohmer, France)
4. **La Fille coupée en deux** (Claude Chabrol, France)
5. **Alexandra** (Alexander Sokurov, Russia)

Kaleem Aftab (Critic, The Independent, UK)

1. **Silent Light** (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico). The opening and closing sunrise and sunset sequences can and should be looked at for hours.
2. **Apocalypto** (Mel Gibson, USA) actor Rudy Youngblood ran through the forest with the panache that his doppelganger Ronaldinho shows at the Nou Camp.
3. **Dans Paris** (Christophe Honoré, France). Romain Duris singing along to Kim Wilde's 'Cambodia', only he doesn't know the words outside the chorus and simply hums along. Genius.
4. **Tell No One** (Guillaume Canet, France). François Cluzot crossing the Périphérique (The motorway that envelopes Paris) to escape the police in. How did Canet shoot that?
5. **Death Proof** (Quentin Tarantino, USA) and **Planet Terror** (Robert Rodriguez, USA). The *Grindhouse* romance went down the box office toilet in the United States. The failure of the standalone films at the International Box Office was just deserts for The Weinstein Company not having the courage of their convictions. Is this the end of the love affair with QT?

Geoff Andrew (Critic and head of film programme, BFI Southbank, UK)

1. **Retour en Normandie (Back to Normandy)** (Nicholas Philibert, France)

Philibert's remarkably rewarding documentary voyage takes in history, murder, madness, Foucault, family bonds, farming life (and death), and the enduring value of cinema. Warm, witty, moving and properly philosophical.

2. No Country for Old Men (Joel Coen/Ethan Coen, USA)

The Coens return to form with a bloody vengeance in their first upfront and faithful literary adaptation (this time round, of Cormac McCarthy). Javier Bardem's haircut is a glorious semiological signifier of the film's scary blend of suspense and black comedy.

3. Nue propriété (Private Property) (Joachim Lafosse, Belgium)

Joachim Lafosse's film boasts a typically superb Isabelle Huppert as the divorcée mother of twins (Jéréemie and Yannick Renier) upset by her plans to lead her own life. Subtle and incisive in its psychological insights, it's a wonderfully controlled piece of work.

4. Milky Way (Tejút) (Benedek Fliegauf, Hungary/Germany)

Benedek Fliegauf's experimental but very accessible movie comprises ten long, static, Scope landscape shots of humans enacting banal but at first apparently arcane rituals. A beautiful, mysterious, droll and engagingly fresh look at life on earth today.

5. Ne touchez pas la hache (Don't Touch the Axe) (Jacques Rivette, France), **Les Amours d'Astrée et de Céladon (The Romance of Astrea and Celadon)** (Eric Rohmer, France), **Cento-chiodi (One Hundred Nails)** (Ermanno Olmi, Italy)

Three European veterans, two adaptations, one original; but three unflashily audacious and quite extraordinary films.

Michael Atkinson (Critic, US)

1. Once (John Carney, Ireland)

Whether or not the buzz of this folky orgasm lasts more than a few years and more than two viewings, it still remained the most palpably human moment at the movies all year.

2. My Winnipeg (Guy Maddin, Canada)

Guy Maddin's "docasia" about his city, his childhood, his sleepwalking, his propensity for confabulating magical melodrama, his ardor for old-school hockey. A cataract of poetic irony, starring, of all people, *Detour*'s Ann Savage as Guy's maniacal mom.

3. 12:08 East of Bucharest (Corneliu Porumboiu, Romania)

The Romanian new wave cuts its sharpest comic teeth on Corneliu Porumboiu's Television Revolution postmortem, which also pungently evokes the slovenly, wintery Hungarian and Czech new waves of yeateryear.

4. Michael Clayton (Tony Gilroy, USA)

Is it paranoia if it's all your fault? Gilroy's debut takes on issues of completely adult guilt, regret, control loss and conscience, and George Clooney exudes 40 shades of life-collapsing grey.

5. Hotel Harabati (Brice Cauvin, France)

Cauvin's inner-surrealist domestic tear-down uses its narrative ellipses as interrogatory scalpels, and Laurent Lucas cements his position as an axiom of Gallic insecurity.

Honorable Mentions: *Lars and the Real Girl*, *Brand Upon the Brain!* (recorded-sound version), *3:10 to Yuma*, *The Boss of It All*, *Zodiac*, *Lust*, *Caution*

James Bell (Assistant Editor, Sight & Sound, UK)

1. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)
2. **The Lives of Others** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)
3. **The Unpolished** (Pia Marais, Germany)
4. **I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes, USA)
5. **California Dreamin' (Endless)** (Cristian Nemescu, Romania)

Guido Bonsaver (teaches Italian literature and cinema at Oxford University, UK)

1. **The Lives of Others** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

A great German period piece of times so close and yet so distant. Ulrich Mühe in the part of the depressed Stasi officer was award-winning stuff, possibly more than the film itself.

2. **And the Spring Comes** (Chang Wei Gu, China)

A brilliantly shot journey into the quiet desperation of an artist drowning in the grey landscape of China's industrial hinterland. Warm-hearted and heart-rending in equal measure.

3. **Once** (John Carney, Ireland)

Let the low-budget/low-ambition camera work grow on you, and enjoy many moments of great music blended with a genuine story.

4. *Things We Lost in the Fire* (Susanne Bier, USA)

A beautiful widow played by Halle Berry; a charismatic drug addict played by Benicio del Toro. Can one avoid a predictable love story? Yes, one can, and with plenty of good camera work to boot.

5. *The Simpsons Movie* (David Silverman, USA)

Best animation of the year. The scene of Bart skateboarding naked through town witnessed by a little boy who concludes: "I like boys now!". Now that's a classic.

Nick Bradshaw (Critic, UK)

1. *The Bourne Ultimatum* (Paul Greengrass, USA)

A super-charged, super-salient revenge chaser for our corrupt new century.

2. *RR* (James Benning, USA)

Trainspotting James Benning-style: the great American landscape as existential journey.

3. *Syndromes and a Century* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand)

Weerasethakul's latest magical mystery, brooding on the modern fate of bodies and romance.

4. *Funny Ha Ha / Mutual Appreciation* (Andrew Bujalski, USA)

The UK finally picked up Bujalski's two shrugged-off miniatures of twentysomething vagaries.

5. *Mikio Naruse at BFI Southbank and on DVD*

A year for catching up with the slow-burning Japanese master.

Michael Brooke (Critic, DVD Producer and BFI Screenonline content developer, UK)

In alphabetical order:

1. *Control* (Anton Corbijn, UK)

The rock biopic reinvented as low-key kitchen-sink love triangle, with newcomer Sam Riley uncannily good as the tormented Ian Curtis. Less surprisingly, the lustrous black-and-white Scope cinematography made this the visual treat of the year.

2. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

The Romanian New Wave continues with its strongest entry to date: a lacerating study of the politics and practicalities of abortion in the dying days of the Ceausescu regime. The performances are almost too convincing.

3. **The Lives of Others** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

This gripping suspense thriller provided a topical examination of the minutiae of life in a surveillance state, at a time when Gordon Brown seems hell-bent on continuing where Erich Honecker left off.

4. **Terror's Advocate** (Barbet Schroeder, France)

A welcome return to non-fiction from French cinema's ancien provocateur, in which a portrait of the memorably slippery Jacques Vergès, counsel to the seemingly indefensible, becomes a timely and eloquent disquisition on terrorism in general.

5. **Taxidermia** (György Pálfi, Hungary)

The year's most revolting film by some distance, but also the most formally original and consistently startling, drawing inspired (if demented) links between three generations of individuals and their extreme attitudes towards the human body.

Ed Buscombe (Critic and author, UK)

1. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)

A complex, many-layered work and David Fincher's best film so far.

2. **Tell No One** (Guillaume Canet, France)

Terrific actions sequences combine with a Chabrolesque stare into the dark recesses of French bourgeois life.

3. **The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford** (Andrew Dominik, USA)

The best Jesse James film ever, with great acting and a wonderful evocation of a place and a time.

4. **California Dreamin' (Endless)** (Cristian Nemescu, Romania)

An assured and brilliantly structured slice of satire on the new Europe in which no one is allowed to emerge unscathed. Reminiscent of the Czech comedies of the 1960s.

5. **Black Book** (Paul Verhoeven, The Netherlands)

One of the most enjoyable films of the year, and a great return to form by Paul Verhoeven

Tom Charity (Critic, Canada)

1. **Into the Wild** (Sean Penn, USA)

A road movie for the dawning age of peak oil. Penn's achievement is to make this a joyous film as well as a tragic one. The gutsiest Hollywood pictures this year were made by actors: Penn, Eastwood and De Niro.

2. **En la ciudad de Sylvia (In Sylvia's City)** (Jose Luis Guerin, Spain)

For a little over an hour Guerin spies on a young man looking at women. What is he looking for? What do we see?

3. **Manda Bala (Send a Bullet)** (Jason Kohn, Brazil)

The best documentary I saw this year, a whip-smart and invigoratingly cinematic treatise on the ramifications of corruption in Brazil.

4. **Once** (John Carney, Ireland)

Carney's lo-fi musical has a spontaneity that refreshes the parts etcetera. Honourable mention: the dazzling Opera Jawa.

5. **Bridge to Terabithia** (Gabor Csupo, USA)

Not just the best kids' film for many a year, this lazily mis-reviewed movie has a rare and courageous creative spark.

Ian Christie (Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck, University of London, UK)

1. **Lunacy** (Jan Svankmajer, Czech Republic)

If anyone thought Svankmajer had settled down to becoming Europe's tame Surrealist, this was a devastating return to the roots of Surrealism as a challenge to everything sacred and bourgeois. Within the framework of a madhouse where the staff are even madder than the patients, Svankmajer puts De Sade's philosophy of total freedom to the test, with horrifying yet instructive results. Not since Borowczyk's first live-action features has there been such truly subversive provocation.

2. **Alexandra** (Alexander Sokurov, Russia)

As the son of an army family, Sokurov clearly feels some commitment to exploring the grim frontline consequences of Russia's border wars. But his dream-like visit to Grozny by a prim babushka (played by Russia's greatest singer, Galina Vishnevskaya) melts disbelief and creates an extraordinary sympathy for soldiers,

Chechen civilians and bewildered Russians. The absolute opposite of docudrama, but a timely and humane film.

3. **Control** (Anton Corbijn, USA)

The title says it all. Corbijn's first feature could have been maudlin, overblown or just embarrassing. Instead, it's a tender evocation of an era when English indie music remained close to its roots, while casting a wide cultural spell. And Corbijn's decision to use black and white is triumphantly justified in one of the coolest, most heartrending films ever about a tortured genius.

4. **The Illusionist** (Neil Burger, USA)

After the genuinely impressive pyrotechnics of *The Prestige*, Burger's exploration of magical ambiguity faced a hard test. But this elegant romantic tale of star-crossed lovers set in mittel-europa is exactly what Hollywood did superbly for decades, and Burger has managed to infuse it with real poetry and magic. Thanks to Dick Pope's cinematography, Edward Norton's conjuring of spirits is eerily effective. Great popular cinema reinvented.

5. **Systems of Nature** (Chris Welsby, UK)

Two recent installations by veteran English landscape filmmaker, Welsby (now based in Canada), showed how digital images can realise the ambitions once once vested in 16mm to near-sublime perfection. *Lost Lake #2* (2005) shows a shimmering virtual lake and the four-screen *At Sea* plays with our sense of the 'unchanging sea' by subtly shifting markers as the waves roll in.

Roger Clarke (Critic, UK)

1. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

2. **Syndromes and a Century** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand)

3. **I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes, USA)

4. **I Just Didn't Do it** (Suo Masayuki, Japan)

5. **Night Train (Ye Che)** (Yinan Diao, China)

Kieron Corless (Deputy Editor, Sight & Sound, UK)

1. **Bellavista** (Peter Schreiner, Austria)

2. **The Lighthouse (Mayak)** (Mariya Saakyan, Armenia)

3. **I Don't Want to Sleep Alone** (Tsai Ming-Liang, France/Taiwan)

4. **Alexandra** (Alexander Sokurov, Russia)

5. *Yella* (Christian Petzold, Germany)

Mark Cousins (Critic, author and film-maker, UK)

Sunshine was hot and haunting until it tried to be haunted in the last twenty minutes. *Daywatch*'s first hour seemed to wrench the centre of gravity of entertainment cinema halfway around the globe. *Michael Clayton*'s last scene had me trembling - much of what's good in masculine American cinema seems to have George Clooney's name on it. The most emotionally articulate performance of the year was James McAvoy's in *Atonement*. Michael Moore's *Sicko* was audacious even for him. Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven* was about that most difficult thing to get right - human goodness.

All of these deserve to be on a list of top five films of the year, but none quite make mine because 2007 was an outstanding year for cinema. Great movies came from all over the spectrum, so my top five are:

1. ***Inland Empire*** (David Lynch, USA)

David Lynch's perversely lo-tech film, whose plumbing, half-way through, I smugly thought I'd mapped in my head. Then Lynch bolted on more and more parallel universes until this moebius strip of a film began to rewire my brain.

2. ***The Lives of Others*** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

I looked in vain for the names of Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond on *The Lives of Others*, which I saw later than most critics, but could not find them. They must have, modestly and posthumously, refused the credit. Could any living filmmaker have written a scene of such dramatic and ironic complexity as the one in which Christa-Maria goes into a bar and is approached by her fan and secret observer? Surely not. Surely those precise skills are gone.

3. ***Les Chansons d'amour*** (Christophe Honoré, France)

The editor of this magazine told me that I loved *Les Chansons d'amour* so much because my life is like it, which means he needs his head examined. But not since I was a boy watching Cyd Charisse in *Singin' in the Rain* has a musical made me feel so happy.

4. ***Hyenas*** (Djibril Diop Mambety, Senegal, 1992)

Though it's 15 years old, seeing Djibril Diop Mambety's film recently on the big screen, dripping with vitriol and disdain for consumerism, made it seem like the freshest film of 2007.

5. ***Alexandra*** (Alexander Sokurov, Russia)

And, conversely, Alexander Sokurov's *Alexandra* looked and felt as if it was made by Evgenii Bauer or Protazanov in the 1910s. Or Murnau, or Dreyer. Or all four, after

having been to war. For years I've thought that *Come and See* is the greatest war film ever made, but now I'm not so sure.

Maria Delgado (Professor of Drama and Theatre Arts, Queen Mary's, University of London, UK)

1. ***La Influenza*** (Pedro Aguilera, Spain/Mexico)

First seen at the Director's Fortnight in Cannes, Aguilera crafts a taut, devastating and brilliantly unsentimental portrait of a single mother's depression and its consequences on her two young children. Produced by Reygadas (and the influence is palpable), the film also evokes Bresson and Tarkovsky - the non-professional actors give beautifully unmannered performances and the visual style evokes Russian religious icons - and it's all brought together in a cinematic language that Aguilera makes all his own.

2. ***4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

Grim, compelling study of the greyness and fear of life in 1980s Romania as seen through the course of a single terrible night in the lives of two university friends, Otilia and Găbita, with the former assisting the latter in securing an illegal abortion for a pregnancy - as the title suggests -- now well into its fourth month. Cristian Mungiu's extended takes and the production's cold objectivity allow us to observe the preparations with an unrelenting, trenchant intensity that plunges the viewer into the hell of the women's experiences for 113 gruelling minutes.

Favourite UK release

3. ***Night of the Sunflowers*** (Jorge Sánchez-Cabezudo, Spain/France/Portugal)

At a time when Guillermo del Toro and Pedro Almodóvar turn to rural Spain in mapping the malaise hidden behind the rural idyll, Sánchez-Cabezudo's debut feature is a similarly accomplished study of the terror that visitors from the city bring with them to a sleepy village in Castille. The noirish plot is expertly structured into six chapters, each realized from the point of view of one of the film's multiple protagonists and elegantly intercut to create an ominous sense of suspense. Terrific performances from a cast led by early Medem regular Carmelo Gómez create a compelling reflection on violence, vengeance and the moral choices we execute in times of crisis.

Funniest film of the year

4. ***The Friends of Jesús*** (Antonio Muñoz de Mesa, Spain)

Made in Spain for less than 30,000 euros this little gem offers a very funny take on the familiar tale of men behaving badly as Jesús (Spanish TV star Muñoz de Mesa) is whisked to New York by his devoted friends-cum-disciples determined to cheer him

up following an unceremonious dumping by his girlfriend. Wry, clever, imaginative and gloriously silly, the film gives hope that genuine indie cinema is still alive and thriving.

Fifth choice - most important

Hard to pick one good film out in another really strong year for Mexican cinema. Admired the poetic pacing and unaffected performances of Israel Cárdenas and Laura Guzmán's *Cochochi* (seen at Venice's New Horizons) and a product of the Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna stable *Canana*. Simón Bross's *Bad Habits* (Guadalajara, Cannes, LFF) was a stylish contemplation of the consequences of eating disorders in a world divided into those who are starving and those who are dieting. Fellow first time director Aarón Fernández Lesur offers a neo-realistic take on the border crossing story in *Used Parts* (Guadalajara) and Uruguayan Rodrigo Plá's tense Mexican-set social thriller *La zona* (Venice) points to the dangers of social segregation. And then there's:

5. **Silent Night** (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico)

Carlos Reygadas's uncompromising, contemplative, elegant film pushes at the very boundaries of what we understand as cinema.

Lucy Dylan (Critic, UK)

1. **Jindabyne** (Ray Lawrence, Australia)

Ray Lawrence's first film since *Lantana* shares its brooding menace and sense of family dynamics, working equally well as psychological thriller or wider meditation on race and collective responsibility.

2. **The Lives of Others** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

A deserving Oscar winner, this throwback to the serious, politically engaged work of Volker Schlöndorff rebukes the trend for Ostalgie in favour of an altogether more muted, thoughtful and claustrophobic thriller bolstered by superb performances and a sure grasp of era.

3. **Control** (Anton Corbijn, UK)

Overlong, but otherwise a brave and successful biopic about a short and frequently misunderstood life and death. The form is monochrome, the content anything but.

4. **Taxi to the Dark Side** (Alex Gibney, USA)

After Enron, Alex Gibney tightens the screws on the moral bankruptcy of the Bush years. In a crowded field, he has marshalled archive and interview to craft the most lucid, straightforward and damning examination yet of the War on Terror.

5. **Ghosts** (Nick Broomfield, UK)

Broomfield's foray into docudrama is a work of sincerity and power, bringing all the on-the-hoof stylings of past work to bear on his most acutely relevant subjectmatter so far, boding well for next year's *Battle For Haditha*.

Mark Fisher (Critic, UK)

1. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

Convoluting and involuted: Lynch's rabbit warren anarchitecture of trauma is difficult, unsettling and endlessly, weirdly fascinating.

2. **Bug** (William Friedkin, USA)

Friedkin's examination of paranoid schizophrenia and domestic is stagy but gripping: like a low-tech take on Philip K Dick.

3. **The Killing of John Lennon** (Andrew Piddington, UK)

Not a great piece of film-making, but a fascinating study of the cinematic psychopathology of the assassin of an era.

4. **Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer** (Tim Story, USA)

Exuberant and enjoyable, capturing the verve, wit and existential angst of Lee and Kirby's classic comics.

5. **Eastern Promises** (David Cronenberg, USA)

By no means Cronenberg's best, and encumbered with a dreadful script, but with some arresting images and a fine performance by Viggo Mortensen.

Jean-Michel Frodon (Editor, Cahiers du cinema, France)

Three very young French directors and two great American non-Hollywoodian directors:

1. **All is forgiven** (*Tout est pardonné*) (Mia Hansen-Love)

2. **Charly** (*Isild Le Besco*, France)

3. **Les Amours d'Astrée et de Céladon** (*The Romance of Astrea and Celadon*) (Eric Rohmer, France)

4. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

5. **Paranoid Park** (Gus Van Sant, USA)

Graham Fuller (Critic, US)

A History of Violence clearly started something. Three remarkable anti-thrillers released in 2007 - Cronenberg's follow-up *Eastern Promises*, the Coens' *No Country for Old Men* and David Fincher's audaciously frontloaded *Zodiac* all reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, on the experience of watching movies about killing. Not the least of their accomplishments is that they fail to satisfy traditional audience expectations, rich though they are in dread and suspense. Still, there's room on my list for several flights into lyricism.

1. *No Country for Old Men* (Joel Coen/Ethan Coen, USA)

A rawboned masterpiece about violence, fate, nostalgia for a code that exists only in the mind of Tommy Lee Jones's Sheriff Bell — and about Jones himself, the sorrowful last hard man on the Texan border. Bell's visit with his crippled uncle (Barry Corbin) is one of the finest scenes of the decade.

2. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Andrew Dominik, USA)

Malick-like in its metaphysical approach to landscape, this wintry psychological Western meditates on the tragic consequences of fame on idol and worshipper. How strange that Warner Bros. should dump the film containing Brad Pitt's finest performance, as well as Casey Affleck's Oscar-worthy turn as Jesse's paranoid acolyte.

3. *The Flight of the Red Balloon* (Hou Hsiao-Hsien, France/Taiwan)

Both dreamy homage to the Paris of Albert Lamorisse's 1956 classic and celebration of film as a repository of memories, it's brought down to earth by Juliette Binoche's puppeteer — a frazzled single mother solaced by her art.

4. *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

The late Ulrich Mühe left an indelible impression as the sad-eyed apparatchik who ultimately refuses the role of Stasi vulture. His sentimental change of heart scarcely impairs the film's chilling evocation of totalitarian evil.

5. *Lady Chatterley* (Pascale Ferran, France)

Pascale Ferran's bucolic idyll brought cinematic dignity to D.H. Lawrence's much maligned adulterers. The scene in which Connie and the deceptively dour gamekeeper decorate each other's natural undergrowth with tiny flowers is too tender for words. Given that *Black Book*'s Jewish chanteuse dyes herself blonde all over to escape detection by her German lover, it was a banner year for pubic hair.

Charles Gant (Critic, Heat, UK)

1. *The Savages* (Tamara Jenkins, USA)

Now that's what I call a marketing challenge: two unmarried 40-ish siblings with issues put their impoverished dad into an old people's home. But I don't think I've

seen better performances this year than Laura Linney's and Philip Seymour Hoffman's.

2. **Juno** (Jason Reitman, USA)

Just when you worry that Diablo Cody's witty, acerbic script is nothing more than that, the film plunges into the choppy waters of vulnerable human emotion, and surfaces stronger and deeper. Perfect casting.

3. **Control** (Anton Corbijn, UK)

With that music on the soundtrack, I'd have probably loved this in any case. But you don't need my extreme partiality to fall for Corbijn's heartbreaking debut.

4. **Superbad** (Greg Mottola, USA)

The funniest film of 2007.

5. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

The Romanian renaissance story is a bit over-hyped (*12:08 East Of Bucharest* was nothing special), but this one is every bit as good as everyone says.

Leonardo García Tsao (Critic, La Jornada, Mexico)

1. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

For once, the Cannes jury gave the Palme d'Or to the best film all around, Romanian Mungiu's stark, rigorous portrayal of the extreme decisions the individual has to take under an oppressive regime.

2. **Before the Devil Knows You're Dead** (Sidney Lumet, USA)

In his best film in decades, Sidney Lumet shows all the Tarantinoid upstarts how to do the old heist-gone-wrong standard, and elevate its noir drama to Greek tragedy proportions.

3. **No Country for Old Men** (Joel Coen/Ethan Coen, USA)

The Coen brothers have given their usual smart-ass misanthropy a rest with this disturbing, dark - and, yes, droll - genre mix, imbued by a moral gravitas that was only hinted at in their previous best work.

4. **Secret Sunshine** (Lee Chang-Dong, South Korea)

5. **Los ladrones viejos** (Everardo González, Mexico)

Charlotte Garson (Critic, Cahiers du cinema, France)

1. **Les Amours d'Astrée et de Céladon (The Romance of Astrea and Celadon)** (Eric Rohmer, France)

The freshest, greenest French film of 2007 was made by a cinéaste born in 1920. This 17th Century tale of love, loss and cross-dressing offers Rohmer a flamboyant opportunity to revisit his own work and underscore its eroticism. In the beautiful final line, "Live, Céladon!" (which doesn't feature in the original text), Rohmer reasserts the power of fiction and film as resurrecting forces.

2. **Longing** (Valeska Grisebach, Germany)

Grisebach's striking first feature escapes rural naturalism to elevate her German countryside love triangle to Greek tragedy. Her use of long takes, non-professional actors and pop music is simply perfect.

3. **Climates** (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Turkey)

Something I had never seen before: Antonioni through the prism of HD video.

4. **Still Life** (Jia Zhangke, China)

At the Festival du reel in Paris in 2005, when head of the jury Jia awarded Yanmo, a Chinese documentary on the Three Gorges Dam, one knew the mind-bending landscape of the Yangtze River was almost the logical following to *The World*. Jia's melodramatic canvas finds its natural allegory in Fengjie's rubbles and scrap metal piles.

5. **Don't Touch the Axe** (*Ne touchez pas la hache*) (Jacques Rivette, France)

For the ones (like me) who did not think much of *The Story of Marie and Julien*, this 'adaptation' from Balzac sealed a true reconciliation with Rivette: in a series of dark and deliberately still tableaux, *Don't Touch* offers two of the best actors of their generation (Jeanne Balibar and Guillaume Depardieu) the best parts of their lives, while proving again that Rivette remains the most profound theorist of cinematic time since his doc *Jean Renoir le patron* (1966).

Ryan Gilbey (Critic, New Statesman, UK)

1. **Letters from Iwo Jima** (Clint Eastwood, USA)

Flags of Our Fathers is massively outclassed by this, its sister film. I love the ashen photography and the mournful score. The cast is understated - especially Ken Watanabe and Kazunari Ninomiya - and the final scenes are desperately moving. Eastwood can be a bullying director but here he is tenderness personified.

2. **There Will Be Blood** (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA)

As much as Coppola or Kubrick, Anderson is a film-maker obsessed with scale. Scale has been the subject of his last three pictures, and here the tension between the intimate and the epic pays its most handsome dividends. It's a frightening and beautiful film, pregnant with dread. Daniel Day-Lewis and Paul Dano (a revelation) contribute muscular, reckless performances.

3. **Climates** (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Turkey)

This anti-date movie skates perilously close to art-house self-parody, but redeems itself with its unforced poetry. It also has a wicked, earthy sense of humour and irony, and a killer ending.

4. **Ratatouille** (Brad Bird, USA)

High time we recognised Brad Bird as an emerging auteur of US cinema. *Ratatouille*, which he took over from Jan Pinkava, fits neatly alongside Bird's *The Iron Giant* and *The Incredibles* as a celebration of talent and uniqueness in the face of mediocrity and cliché; this is implicit on every level, from script to vocal delivery, playful score to sensuous animation. Bird always gives us, the audience, his best, and makes us feel we deserve it.

5. **The Fall** (Tarsem Singh, India)

An adult fairy tale characterised by feverish spectacle, ripe Eiko Eshioka costumes and an undercurrent of sadness and loss; it makes you remember what you loved about fairy tales as a child, but somehow finds a mature equivalent for those feelings. Catinca Utaru, as a child supplying a hospitalised stuntman with morphine in exchange for stories, recalls Linda Manz in *Days of Heaven*. (There's a *Days of Heaven* ending too.) The film is a case of style not at the expense of substance, but augmenting it.

Garmen Gray (Critic, UK)

1. **Curse of the Golden Flower** (Zhang Yimou, China)

Zhang Yimou being my favourite filmmaker for his highly kinetic and aesthetically sublime style, this was my most anticipated film of the year, and while not his greatest it still delivered, with passion and poisoning plots to boot.

2. **Hotel Chevalier** (Wes Anderson, USA)

Everything I wanted from *Paris Je T'Aime* which it failed to deliver, Wes Anderson's witty pre-cursor to *The Darjeeling Limited* about an encounter with an ex in a hotel room in the French capital shows how full and textured a short can be. And it wasn't scared to fawn over the view.

3. **The Lives of Others** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

A dramatically taut and masterfully complex study of human nature, this politically significant portrait of life under communist surveillance was most interesting not for its insight into what drives citizens to become dissidents, but what drives them to become informers.

4. **Ghosts of Cité Soleil** (Asger Leth, Denmark)

For the sheer access this doco achieves to the state-armed gangsters in the Haitian slums, and for its admirably non-didactic approach. Also intriguing for the questions raised by the affair between French aid worker Lele and gang chief 2pac, blurring the lines between genuine human connection and colonial exoticisation.

5. **Eastern Promises** (David Cronenberg, USA)

For Viggo Mortensen's brilliant performance. And for Cronenberg's characteristically agile and clever mindplay with sex and violence, under a slickly digestible and deceptively Hollywood-style veneer.

Peter Hames (Critic and academic, UK)

1. **Tricks** (Andrzej Jakimowski, Poland)

A sunny and evocative tale of a 6-year-old boy's games with chance and search for his lost father. Beautifully made, it reveals a director who genuinely 'thinks' in film, making films that evoke what he describes as "a cinema that has disappeared".

2. **The Lighthouse** (Maria Saakyan, Armenia)

Filmed in Armenia and set alongside an unspecified war, Saakyan's debut is a poetic reverie on memory and homeland, with a hypnotic combination of image and music (by Finnish composer Kimmo Pohjonen).

3. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu)

Mungiu's story of the search for an illegal abortion in 1980s Romania is classical filmmaking of a high order and brilliantly evokes a world unknown to viewers in the West.

4. **Don't Touch the Axe (Ne touchez pas la hache)** (Jacques Rivette, France)

Elegant and stylish adaptation of Balzac's novel about the Duchesse de Langeais. Creates a Laclos-like world of letters, carriages, and secret assignations with convincing performances, especially by the extraordinary Jeanne Balibar.

5. **It's Gonna Get Worse...** (Petr Nikolaev, Czech Republic)

Gritty 16mm evocation of 70s Czechoslovakia under Russian occupation. Based on a cult underground novel, it's a remarkable projection of a world of disaffected youngsters and their never ending battle with the police. Music by the legendary rock groups DG307 and The Plastic People of the Universe, who had their leaders imprisoned in 1976 for 'decadence' and 'antisocialism'.

Wendy Ide (Critic, *The Times*, UK)

1. **4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

Because it is a near perfect piece of cinema

2. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)

Flawed and baggy, but defiantly unconventional and hugely ambitious. The soundtrack choices are brilliant.

3. **Reprise** (Joachim Trier, Norway)

An irreverent, punky little Norwegian film about the creative process which deserved a bigger audience than it got.

4. **The Golden Door (Nuovomondo)** (Emanuele Crialesi, Italy)

Magical realism without the usual cloying sentimentality that is associated with the genre. I loved the playful symbolism and the earthy, unpolished performances.

5. **The Savages** (Tamara Jenkins, USA)

Bleakly funny, devastatingly sad, beautifully observed. Two of the great actors of our time, Laura Linney and Philip Seymour Hoffman, are as impressive together as you would hope.

Ali Jaafar (Critic, *Variety*, UK)

1. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)

2. **The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford** (Andrew Dominik, USA)

3. **Caramel** (Nadine Labaki, Lebanon/France)

4. **The Band's Visit** (Eran Kolirin, Israel)

5. **The Kingdom** (Peter Berg, USA)

A serial killer film where the villain gets away with it, a western with no cowboys or Indians, and two Middle Eastern films that left politics alone and focused instead joyously on shared humanity. This was the year for confounding expectations and gloriously flawed humanity. Plus *The Kingdom*, for all the debate over whether it was with us or against us, delivered with its opening title credits alone, doing in 90 seconds what *Syriana* spent two hours and half attempting to do. Plus its ending was the knockout blow of the year, piercing straight to the heart of where we find ourselves, teetering over the abyss.

Nick James (Editor, *Sight and Sound*, UK)

1. **The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford** (Andrew Dominik, USA)

It was America's year and Dominik's wistful, fear-flecked epic of the wintering west made unnerving poetry of hair-trigger psychosis and easy-living tailoring.

2. **Lady Chatterley** (Pascale Ferran, France)

So achingly fixed on traditional impressionist nature worship was this perfect pitch reading of Lawrence's less pompous draft of the novel that the almost-fey sexuality of the piece became a roar of idealist longing.

3. **There Will Be Blood** (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA)

Daniel Day Lewis gives us the best example of total body acting seen since *Raging Bull* in Paul Thomas Anderson's demonology of pioneer asset-strippers and parasitic evangelicals.

4. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

Simply the most inspiringly plotless cinema experience of 2007, an inconsequential but haunting meditation on women and acting that you can't take your eyes off for a second.

5. **Silent Light** (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico)

Almost painfully slow and tender, this paen to illicit love among terribly sincere Mennonite farmer types is platitude-rendingly distinctive despite its flyblown Ordet tribute coda.

Kent Jones (Critic and Programmer, Film Comment, US)

1. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)

Of the films I saw in 2007, the one that left the deepest impression on me, by far, was *Zodiac*. I saw it late in its run, on a Saturday afternoon, and went back to see it again the next day, then again a week later. It hit me in a number of ways. If someone were to ask me what it was like to grow up in the United States during the late 60s, I would direct them to this film. The sense of the quotidian is very haunting. Because this is a film about time, specifically an investigation happening over a long span of time, during which people become exhausted, lose their nerve or their enthusiasm. So all the action is pitched at a level of dailiness, the ordinary - the emphasis feels exactly right to me. And the visions - the 4th of July, San Francisco from above a moving taxi, the flock of geese after the first murder, the fast-motion building of the Trans-America Building - arrive suddenly, disappear quickly, and leave a strong impression because they're so fleeting. And Mark Ruffalo, Anthony Edwards, Elias Koteas and John Carroll Lynch give the finest performances of the year. Again, a haunting film, and a moving one.

2. **Black Book** (Paul Verhoeven, The Netherlands)

I was also bowled over by probably Verhoeven's most forceful film - again, as in *Starship Troopers*, he gives us something that no one else is interested in giving us: the exhilaration of fascism.

3. **There Will Be Blood** (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA)

An astonishing film - a tour de force by Daniel Day Lewis, but also from Anderson, who - along with Lewis, Jack Fisk, Robert Elswit and Johnny Greenwood - gives us as ferocious a vision of American fanaticism as I've seen in movies.

4. **No Country For Old Men** (Joel Coen/Ethan Coen, USA)

It seems to me to be one of the Coens' best films - they do good things for Cormac McCarthy, he does good things for them.

5. ***The Darjeeling Limited*** (Wes Anderson, USA)

I was not at all surprised that I loved *The Darjeeling Limited*, the latest film by one of the most misunderstood artists around today.

Nasreen Munni Kabir (Critic and author, UK)

1. ***The Lives of Others*** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

A film that reminds one of the power of cinema. It's not only moving and intelligent in characterization and story-telling. but also in trusting the intelligence of the audience. A rare film.

2. ***The Kite Runner*** (Marc Forster, USA)

Fine direction and excellent performances make this special. It is great to see a story set in the 'East' without the slightest hint of making the setting or the characters exotic or fake.

3. ***The Bourne Ultimatum*** (Paul Greengrass, USA)

This film belongs to Matt Damon and the editor. It's brilliantly cut and Damon's unsmiling seriousness is riveting. Greengrass is clearly redefining the action thriller/spy movie.

4. ***The Diving Bell and The Butterfly*** (Julian Schnabel, USA)

An impossible book to bring alive on the screen. Yet it manages to always connect you to the character rather than highlight the tragic physical state he finds himself in.

5. ***Om Shanti Om*** (Farah Khan, India)

It's the big Bollywood movie of the year and director Khan doesn't disappoint. Parodying clichés, stereotypes, real life movies and stars, this is a mad story of reincarnation and the films of the 1970s.

Philip Kemp (Critic, UK)

1. ***A Prairie Home Companion*** (Robert Altman, USA)

Altman bows out with a playful, benign ensemble piece, warm with the sheer pleasure of movie-making

2. ***Lust, Caution*** (Ang Lee, China)

Stunningly realised, visually and emotionally intense drama of espionage and fatal attraction in wartime China. Ang Lee's finest yet.

3. **Half Moon** (Bahman Ghobadi, Iran)

The latest from idiosyncratic Iranian-Kurdish director Ghobadi: part picaresque road movie, part mythic celebration.

4. **Hallam Foe** (David Mackenzie, UK)

Mackenzie and Jamie Bell make a necrophiliac voyeur into an engaging character - with help from the Edinburgh skyline

5. **The Counterfeiters** (Stefan Ruzowitzky, Germany/Austria)

How Jewish forgers were pressed into serving the Nazi cause, featuring a bleak, masterly lead performance from Karl Markovics

Rediscovery of the year: **A Throw of Dice** (Karl Osten, 1929). A luminous, long-lost gem of Indian silent cinema.

Mark Le Fanu (Academic and critic, Denmark)

The big films can look after themselves. These are my gems of the year.

1. **Heimatklänge** (Stefan Schwietert, Switzerland/Germany)

Yes, a film about yodeling. But my God, how passionate!

2. **Comrade Petersen** (Hans Petter Moland, Norway)

Norwegian film that pitilessly anatomises the political madness of the sixties. Stunning central performance by Ane Dahl Torp.

Film-making in ex-Communist eastern Europe is alive and prospering...

3. **Saviour's Square** (Joanna Kos & Krzysztof Krauze, Poland)

4. **Christmas Tree Upside Down** (Ivan Cherkelov & Vassil Zhivkov, Bulgaria)

5. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

Matthew Leyland (Critic, Total Film, UK)

1. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)

2. **This Is England** (Shane Meadows, UK)

3. **Ratatouille** (Brad Bird, USA)

4. **The Darjeeling Limited** (Wes Anderson, USA)

5. **Superbad** (Greg Mottola, USA)

Tim Lucas (Editor, Video Watchdog, US)

1. ***I'm Not There*** (Todd Haynes, USA)

I like Haynes' films but usually find something broken about them in the casting, which is too often stuck between whoever's available and the best interested star. His new film has the same fault in my view (Charlotte Gainsbourg seems better cast as the Sara analogy than faux Dylans Christian Bale or Heath Ledger, and Cate Blanchett's somewhat overrated performance is more of a Queen in the deck than an Ace), but that doesn't prevent this Bobby doll movie from being the most exciting film of the year. Its smooth surreal assurance, its mastery of cinematic styles from the 1960s and '70s, its humor and entrancing fluidity, its defiantly anti-linear stance, its aching longing for a lost America and a lost cinema, and the meticulous taste with which it draws from and remakes Dylan's musical catalogue... 'Blind Willie McTell' even more devastatingly employed than the uncanny title track. Many have compared it to a poem or essay, but it could also pass for a song. Likewise, many have said it's about Bob Dylan, but it's more vitally a nostalgic film about the need for art to continually redefine itself and never look back; in other words, a brazen stare into the gorgon's face that succeeds because it simultaneously moves cinema forward.

2. ***Eastern Promises*** (David Cronenberg, UK/Canada)

David Cronenberg has been in upward mobility mode since *Dead Ringers*, which has meant that he's voluntarily sacrificed all things 'Cronenbergian' for the right to become, more often than not, a shade of Neil Jordan. Though much of this personal odyssey rewards viewing, at least in part, this is the first of his post-horror efforts to really feel like New Flesh, building impressive new wings, with sunken rooms and raised ceilings, into the manse of the Gangster Film. Viggo Mortensen, armored with tattoos, is formidable, used to much greater effect than in *A History Of Violence*; Naomi Watts is the best she's been since *21 Grams*, and the balance of the film (Armin Mueller-Stahl, Jerzy Skolimowski, Vincent Cassell, Sinead Cusack) is all the proof one could ask that Cronenberg knows and loves actors and will cast the best rather than the best-known any time. And yes, the steam bath scene will hold pride of place in any future montage of the director's work.

3. ***Death Proof*** (Quentin Tarantino, USA)

I enjoyed the Grindhouse theatrical experience well enough (though it felt strange to see indoors), but something about the structure of Tarantino's portion - which basically tells the same story twice, albeit with different endings - made the double feature feel more like a triple feature, and I began to squirm. I would never have believed that what such a garrulous and simple story needed was more footage and more dialogue, but the stand-alone version of *Death Proof* is a straightforward film buff's tickle-fest, including its end titles. Minor Tarantino, nevertheless, but Zoë Bell's Ship's Mast ride is one of only two film images I saw this year to transcend mastery and vault into the iconic.

4. ***Planet Terror*** (Robert Rodriguez, USA)

The year's other great iconic image, trumping Tarantino's, is Rose McGowan cutting loose with her machine-gun prosthetic leg, which deserves to become an Aurora model kit. This portion of the Grindhouse diptych aims somewhat lower than *Death*

Proof - John Carpenter by way of Umberto Lenzi - but once again (as in *Sin City*), Robert Rodriguez demonstrates a flair for tactile filmmaking that invigorates his pulp subjects and occasionally transcends them. The way he applies phony projection scars and welts to his celluloid, making it look like this movie was fried on the screen of every tobacco shed theatre in the Philippines prior to opening day, is as dystopian a stroke as anything in *Blade Runner*. And the way his camera dances appreciatively around McGowan as she bumps and grinds atop his sax-heavy score, leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that this guy must be a fireball in bed.

Geoffrey Macnab (Critic, UK)

1. **Lust, Caution** (Ang Lee, China)

Ang Lee's intense, brilliantly crafted epic plays like a mix of Oshima and David Lean.

2. **Before The Devil Knows You're Dead** (Sidney Lumet, USA)

The year's darkest and most embroiled family drama.

3. **No Country For Old Men** (Joel Coen/Ethan Coen, USA)

The Coens back on song, mixing humour, metaphysics and violence.

4. **3:10 to Yuma** (James Mangold, USA)

A solidly hewn western which worked largely because of its old-fashioned sensibility.

5. **Encounters at the End of the World** (Werner Herzog, Canada)

Herzog enters penguin territory and shuffles in Shackleton's footsteps in this dryly humorous and beautifully shot feature-doc set in deepest Antarctica.

Derek Malcolm (Critic, *Evening Standard*, UK)

1. **4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

Mungiu's Cannes winner may sound like something best avoided as terminally depressing, since it is about a young girl seeking an illegal abortion during the last years of the Romanian dictatorship. But it proves that social realism still has a strong part to play in cinema when it's this accomplished. Astonishingly good acting only partly explains its power. A very precise and vivid sense of time and place and subtle direction help too. Nothing as good as this could be a wholly downbeat experience.

2. **Silent Light** (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico)

Reygadas may not be to everybody's taste, but this slow but haunting homage to Dreyer, and possibly Bergman, can legitimately be called as much poetry as prose. The control is masterly as a strict Mennonite community and, in particular, a father who has broken the rules by committing adultery, suffer the conflicts of the

damned. The director's six-minute time lapse shot with which the film opens is particularly stunning.

3. ***I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*** (Tsai Ming-Liang, France/Taiwan)

I saw Tsai Ming-Liang's film at Venice, directly after a particularly awful competition movie from America. Peace descended instantly, though I am aware that Tsai's first film in his native Malaysia, specifically Kuala Lumpur, is slow enough to send some scurrying for the exits. Yet this minimalist study of Asian migrant workers, largely set in a half-flooded building site has an acutely humanist tone that offsets its slightly weird erotic episodes. It is resonant enough to remain in the memory as much as the classic *Goodbye Dragon Inn*.

4. ***The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le mulet)*** (Abdel Kechiche, France)

Kechiche's long comedy-drama, set in a North African shipyard dockside community, and about a dockside worker in his sixties trying to open a floating restaurant, is an exceptional portrait of a culture few of us know much about. In other hands, it could have become sentimental dross. But Kechiche takes considerable risks to avoid the familiar and, in so doing, has made a film of moving simplicity and artful audacity.

5. ***You, the Living*** (Roy Andersson, Sweden)

If you believe that comedy isn't funny unless there's something serious about it, Roy Andersson's absurdist vision of the perils of everyday relationships marks him out once again as a highly distinctive and cherishable director. This series of tragic-comic vignettes could only come from a Nordic film-maker but manages to seem totally universal. This is even better than *Songs from the Second Floor* and was one of the most memorable films shown at Cannes in 2007.

Adrian Martin (Critic, *The Age*, Australia)

1. ***Don't Touch The Axe (Ne touchez pas la hache)*** (Jacques Rivette, France)

If *mise en scène* is a dance of love and death, few directors can fashion a choreography as romantic and tortuous as Rivette, in this dazzling two-hander costume melodrama.

2. ***Syndromes And A Century*** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand)

Mysterious, elegant, eccentric, cosmic... a superb exploration of the grey zones of human intimacy from one of the truly visionary filmmakers of our time.

3. ***Capitalism: Child Labor*** (Ken Jacobs, USA)

In a few spellbinding minutes of digital treatment on two archival photographs of factory work, avant-garde maestro Jacobs takes us across, inside, outside and behind the sinister reality of twentieth-century industry.

4. ***Forbidden Lie\$*** (Anna Broinowski, Australia)

In the tradition of Welles' *F For Fake* comes this giddy Australian documentary expose of 'true life' writer Norma Khouri, who seizes the opportunity on camera to spin an even more incredible web of stories than those revealed to be a hoax in her bestseller *Forbidden Love*.

5. **Blades Of Glory** (Will Speck, USA)

Because serious critics never appreciate the inspired lunacy of Will Ferrell comedies on their first appearance, but only come around to privately enjoying them five years later.

Demetrios Matheou (Critic, UK)

1. **I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes, USA)

His 'biopic' of Karen Carpenter featured Barbie dolls instead of actors, so it's no surprise that Todd Haynes' film about the mercurial Bob Dylan is, to say the least, unconventional. Six personae, six actors, a structure that is non-linear, elliptical, poetic, Dylan coming in and out of view like a mirage. It doesn't always work, but for unabashed experimentalism near the mainstream, it's gold dust. And Cate Blanchett as the London-androgynous-electric rebel Dylan is, simply, awesome.

2. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

Mungiu's tale of a woman helping her friend get an illegal abortion during the Ceausescu regime brings one of those guilty admissions that only a great film could elicit: as shocking and terrible as the very real story is, you can't wait to see it again. And again. This is a marvel of imaginative yet economical filmmaking: every camera placement, every element of set design, every nuance from the actors, perfect. Strangely, I never felt the need to return to *Vera Drake*.

3. **No Country for Old Men** (Joel Coen/Ethan Coen, USA)

It plays like an-edge-of-your-seat chase thriller, lean, mean and very tense. Unlike most thrillers, though, it just won't go away, the pessimism and despondency - epitomised by Tommy Lee Jones' mournful monologues - linger long in the mind. So bleak it hurts, this is a wicked throwback to the Coens' origins in *Blood Simple*.

4. **Control** (Anton Corbijn, UK)

It may have been made by a Dutchman, but this is British to its core - a terrific celebration of British music (Joy Division) and British film tradition (kitchen sink). OK, the sink tends to be grimy and singer Ian Curtis, the subject of the film, killed himself. But the crisp black and white photography cuts through the gloom, the electric frisson whenever the band comes on stage is like a drug.

5. **2 Days in Paris** (Julie Delpy, France)

You've gotta laugh. And the one film this year that made me laugh, non-stop, was this delicious, take-no-prisoners comedy of culture clash and romantic mismatch. As writer, director and actress, Delpy has borrowed the milieu of her *Before*

Sunrise/Sunset outings with Richard Linklater and sent it up mercilessly, courtesy of a neurotic sensibility more bonkers, even, than Woody Allen's. Smart femme.

Peter Matthews (Critic and academic, UK)

1. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

After ten minutes of more or less consecutive narrative, you're pretty much free-falling. David Lynch's three-hour surrealist odyssey vanquishes the conscious ego and heads straight for the id. A mind-warping masterpiece.

2. **Cargo 200** (Alexei Balabanov, Russia)

The title refers to the code name for military corpses sent back from Afghanistan during the twilight years of Soviet communism. Alexei Balabanov's grotesque black comedy pictures your worst nightmares and then exceeds them.

3. **Silent Light** (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico)

Reygadas' homage to Carl Dreyer's *Ordet* is a triumph of measured, contemplative cinema.

4. **Yella** (Christian Petzold, Germany)

Petzold's small, precise fable of contemporary depersonalisation reworks Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls* and single-handedly revives the German Autorenfilm.

5. **Hairspray** (Adam Shankman, USA)

Shankman's joyous, energetic musical remake can stand right next to the 1988 John Waters original in one's affections. And Travolta playing Divine in an elephantine body suit is something to behold

Tom Mes (Critic, UK)

1. **Eastern Promises** (David Cronenberg, UK/Canada)

A *History of Violence*'s twin brother, in more ways than just the presence of the immense Viggo.

2. **Correspondences** (Victor Erice / Abbas Kiarostami, Spain/Iran)

Not a film as such, but Kiarostami and Erice's ongoing exchange of video letters/essays, currently on display at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, was the most invigorating cinema experience of the past year.

3. **Strawberry Shortcakes** (Yazaki Hitoshi, Japan)

Japanese cinema in the 21st century truly excels at these thoroughly contemporary portraits of young women advancing into adulthood one step at a time, shedding the crushing weight of expectation. So why are Western distributors only interested

in horror and violence? There is a huge untapped audience for Japanese films out there.

4. ***I'm Not There*** (Todd Haynes, USA)

If a director sets out to make a movie about Bob Dylan and comes up with this, he's a great man in my book.

5. ***Ex Drummer*** (Koen Mortier, Belgium)

Belgium would be in a much better state if it recognised how much it needs gleeful transgressors like Mortier.

Henry Miller (Critic, UK)

1. 'Made in America' ('The Sopranos' final episode) (David Chase, USA)

2. ***Zodiac*** (David Fincher, USA)

3. ***Superbad*** (Greg Mottola, USA)

4. ***Knocked Up*** (Judd Apatow, USA)

5. ***The Bourne Ultimatum*** (Paul Greengrass, USA)

Olaf Möller and Christoph Huber (joint contribution)

The Ferroni Brigade Central Committee's High Five 2007

1. ***Profit Motive And The Whispering Wind*** (John Gianvito, USA)

The mother of all monumentdocuments: Gianvito retraced Howard Zinn's 'People's History of the United States' across his country and through the years with a Bolex, then arranged his shots of gravestones, inscriptions, memorials and historical markers of massacred Indians, killed unionists and many other dead defiant fighters for peace, justice, equality, freedom chronologically, yet in a stirring rhythm, punctuated by shots of nature in the wind (often rustling in the trees, as if this were the sound of the whisper of knowledge, of revolution and revelation spreading), brief, striking animation and a few trailing songs. In hardly an hour it encompasses an entire capitalist history of violence, but also another one of solidaric utopia, at the same time ultramaterialist yet also deeply spiritual in its invocation of a moving past as inspiration for a torn present and its refreshingly firm belief in a collective future (learning from history - in the end it recalls what Fuller taught). 2007 was another annus mirabilis chock-full of orgasmic cinematic experiences, but in the end this is clearly the Ferronian film of the year.

2. ***En La Ciudad De Sylvia*** (Jose Luis Guerin, Spain)

A wondrously sensual essay on memory-seeing-reality-reflection-creation, enchantingly pathos-prone in ways ancient and holy, radiating beauty and wisdom. And also: *Unas Fotos En La Ciudad De Sylvia*. The secret twin (and parent) of Guerin's

film-jewel *En La Ciudad De Sylvia*, refashioning the other's genesis as an expanded essay meditation on its themes - as black-and-white video told in still photos and intertitles. Again its poetry is pure Guerin, but true to its Chris-Marker-like train-of-image-thought, when one shot finally moves in the end, you realise one of the many masterpieces inside UNAS FOTOS is about born.

3. *Nur Kein Mitleid* (Peter Kern, Austria)

Another, more ambiguous, fleshy realpolitically calibrated take on memory, its discontents cum comforts, featuring: a therapy dog named Hedda, demented elderly in time-transcending ecstasy, and a blind fascist with visions of the apocalypse - all Swiss-made, through and through. Proletarian master Peter Kern at his best: at once sardonic in his condemnation and generous in his common - now so uncommon - compassion. And: *Die Toten Körper Der Lebenden* A king of independent filmmaking in every sense, Peter Kern delivered a no-budget knock-out one-two punch in 2007: This astonishing, darkly comic melodrama brings together Genet's *Chant D'amour* prisoners and an elderly actrice (the singular Traute Furthner), prone to Leni-like pronouncements as well as wistful longing for the time when they could spell Hans Maser's name, with disastrous, repeatedly very funny, but ultimately heartbreaking results. Its magnificent musical interludes include a miraculous seaman's ballad (a gift to master Kern by Ingrid Caven) and the (actor-)director himself - appearing in a garbage can - warbling "Each man kills the thing he loves".

4. *Visitors* (Giulio Questi, Italy)

Signor auteur gets a visit from the souls of the Fascists he killed as a partisan in the ugly little civil war fought between '43 and '45, and in certain places even a little longer: a spaceship will come next week and take them to eternity - but only if nobody is still alive who remembers them. Questi does some serious thinking while staring at his old gun... 21' of sheer mastery, cobbled together by Questi alone in his apartment, playing all the parts himself, piling up layers and layer of poetics and ideas, subtexts and textures, while letting his pop-surrealist-genre-instincts run wild.

5. *Sing Gung Jok Jeh Sup Yaht* (Taam Herman Yau Lai-To)

Ten Nights and days with the workers of Hong Kong's red-light world. Kind, caring, pointed, syndaca-progressive, analytical and ever-stylish realist filmmaking at its best by the busiest while still far to little appreciated master of contemporary HK movie glory. And: *Hak Bak Do* Mostly, just a very fine year for genre films from the rulers, from Stuart Gordon to the prolific Asia-auteurs Miike Takashi and Johnnie To Kei-Fung (with the indispensable Wai Ka-Fai) to criminally underseen works of Cheang Pou-soi and Nagasaki Shun'ichi, but the understated brilliance of Yau's sinister riff on the *Infernal Affairs* dilemma stands out, coasting termite-style past Scorsese's bloated reimagination. The film's pointed, clear spareness, characteristic anger and political concern - also for a city now on the edge between two worlds for a decade - show an auteur at the top of his game. Also, as a bonus you get the greatest of Wongs (Anthony Chau Sang).

Kim Newman (Critic and author, UK)

1. *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, USA)

David Lynch, still stretching the medium; Laura Dern, going further into the dark and the light.

2. **The Lives of Others** (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany)

Revisionism apart, for its real 'what would you do in this situation' insight into the spy and the spied-upon.

3. **The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford** (Andrew Dominik, USA)

For a new light on an oft-told tale, its Western haze and outstanding performances.

4. **Black Book** (Paul Verhoeven, The Netherlands)

For the scene in which chocolate and stage-diving save the heroine's life.

5. **Hot Fuzz** (Edgar Wright, UK)

Just for the laughs.

Hannah Patterson (Critic, UK)

1. **I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes, USA)

For being unashamedly adventurous, ambitious, intellectual, playful and literate.

2. **The Good Shepherd** (Robert De Niro, USA)

For its intelligent, engrossing treatment of the early years of the CIA and another standout performance, filled with ambiguity, from Matt Damon.

3. **The Painted Veil** (John Curran, USA)

For its spare script, subtle direction, poignant performances and exceptional music by Alexandre Desplat, by turns sweeping and intimate.

4. **Sicko** (Michael Moore, USA), **Manufacturing Dissent: Uncovering Michael Moore** (Debbie Melnyk, Canada)

The former for drawing attention and large audiences to an important, unsexy topic, the latter for making us question where the line should be drawn in documentary, and when manipulation becomes deception.

5. **Once** (John Carney, Ireland)

For mixing music, real life and romance more charmingly and convincingly than any big-budget, romantic comedy.

James Quandt (Critic and programmer, Cinematheque Ontario,

Canada)

1. ***These Encounters Of Theirs*** (Jean-Marie Straub, Daniele Huillet, Italy/France)

Straub and Huillet's final feature, a declamatory pastoral in the tradition of *Operai*, *Contandini*, makes Huillet's recent death all the more grievous.

4. ***Still Life*** and ***Useless*** (Jia Zhangke, China)

Jia Zhangke assures his position as the bard of the new China with these, the first a melancholy portrait of two people searching for a past that has been literally washed away, the latter a documentary ostensibly about fashion design but really about expendable humanity.

3. ***Syndromes And A Century*** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand)

The title of Weerasethakul's serene enigma combines the somatic and the temporal, the director's twin preoccupations.

4. ***Tarahi V*** (Haris Epaminonda, Cyprus)

Epaminonda's eerie kitsch collages from Cypriot television, scored with Scriabin and suggestive of Hitchcock's *Marnie*, proved one of the most memorable works at this year's Venice Biennale.

5. ***Les Amours d'Astrée et de Celadon (The Romance of Astrea and Celadon)*** (Eric Rohmer, France)

Rohmer's fifth-century fête champêtre may appear to be barmy divertissement, but is in its way as devout as Bresson's *Lancelot du lac*.

Naman Ramachandran (Critic, UK)

1. ***The Bourne Ultimatum*** (Paul Greengrass, USA)

Reinvents the action genre - eat your heart out Bond!

2. ***The Trap (Klopka)*** (Srdjan Golubovic, Serbia)

Crime and Punishment gets a tense, gripping makeover

3. ***Time (Shi Gan)*** (Kim Ki-Duk, South Korea)

Scathing indictment of South Korea's obsession with the face, cuts, literally, deeper.

4. ***Lust, Caution*** (Ang Lee, China)

One of those films that just refuses to leave your mind.

5. ***Sivaji*** (S. Shankar, India)

Propagates the cult of superstar Rajnikant and proves that larger than life can be a virtue.

Tony Rayns (Critic, film-maker and programmer, UK)

Alphabetical Order:

1. **Dead Time (Kala)** (Joko Anwar, Indonesia)

Wonderfully unexpected that the best political thriller since the heyday of Alan Pakula should come from Indonesia. Anwar's movie (it's only his second, and he already looks like one of the smartest directors in South-East Asia) mixes and matches genre elements in much the way that Hong Kong movies once did, but its heart is neo-noir and its anger at political corruption and lousy government is palpably real.

2. **Flight of the Red Balloon (Le Voyage du ballon rouge)** (Hou Hsiao-Hsien, France)

Hou's distinctive aesthetic translates into French surprisingly well. He follows his usual practice by focusing on a woman in trouble, and using her struggle to get her life in order as a touchstone for the overall state of the culture. As usual, too, his style is completely non-assertive; viewers are provided with the evidence they need and left to draw whatever conclusions they want. Juliette Binoche is knockout.

3. **Mid-Afternoon Barks (Xiawu Gou Jiao)** (Zhang Yuedong, China)

With its carefully weighed dialogue (like vintage Pinter, but minus most of the menace) and the heightened 'realism' of its images, this debut feature by a youngish Chinese indie film-maker builds something unique in contemporary cinema. Unique, that is, in tone, style and method. Watching it is a rapturous experience, and assessing the implications of all the undercurrents could keep you busy for weeks.

4. **Secret Sunshine (Miryang)** (Lee Chang-Dong, South Korea)

Another knockout performance by a woman (this time Jeon Do-Yeon, never remotely distinguished in earlier films for other directors) lights up a blazing attack on the hypocrisies of organised religion. Watching this was the most emotionally wrenching experience of the year in movies.

5. **The Sun Also Rises (Yaiyang Zhao Chang Shengqi)** (Jiang Wen, China)

Jiang Wen strikes me as being one of the finest film actors ever (if he weren't Chinese, he'd be in everyone's pantheon), and it's beginning to look as if he's an exceptionally good director too. This sprawling, operatic rhapsody is almost impossible to follow on first viewing, thanks in part to its jumps back and forth through time and its elements of wild fantasy, but it's never less than emotionally and stylistically persuasive. No doubt further viewings will reveal more.

Kong Rithdee (Critic, *The Bangkok Post*, Thailand)

1. **Paranoid Park** (Gus Van Sant, USA)

Gus rocks. Not just the spacey soundtracks that warp the film's skateboarding character - and us - in and out of his benumbed memory of the crime he might have inadvertently committed, but the looping narrative and Chris Doyle's liquescent cinematography also combine to create a disturbingly wonderful visual diary in which physical reality is so tenuous, so heartbreakingly fragile that it threatens to slip through our fingers or fly off into the abstract realm.

2. **The Mourning Forest** (Naomi Kawase, Japan/France)

The Cannes critics weren't wowed, though for me, this is one of the year's most luminous films. Kawase's movie has the absorbed femininity and Japanese delicacy that inspire a touch of cosmic sadness in the story of two people, joined by the soul-sinking weight of grief, who get lost in a damp forest where their redemptions - probably their rebirths - are as philosophical as it is humanistic.

3. **Secret Sunshine** (Lee Chang-Dong, South Korea)

Lee Chang-Dong's film raises tough questions and gives us a hint on how to find the simplest answer.

4. **Ploy** (Pen-ek Ratanaruang, Thailand)

A marital drama complete with a seductive waif, suspicion-fuelled squabbling, and two pairs of erect nipples, the Thai auteur's sixth feature sees an urban couple trading wounding jibes that remind nobody but themselves of the dying embers of their early passion. This is a finely tuned, mature piece of filmmaking that discusses adult themes with honesty and amused attention to the tiny details that define the shifting phases of courtship, loveship, hateship and of course, marriage.

5. **Love of Siam** (Chukiat Sakweerakul, Thailand)

It's about time we scan our radar for the "second-wave" Siamese filmmakers, and this 26-year-old guy from northern Thailand is the embodiment of hope. After two smarter-than-average thrillers made as much with guts as with cinematic exactitude, writer-director Chukiat shows his range by taking a look at the growing pains of Thai high-schoolers - a rare subject these days among local directors - and rendering a sketch of young Thais grounded in contemporary reality. It's easy to dismiss the film as being "commercial" (since when is that a crime?), but this is a distinct guarantee that we truly have a new talent to watch.

Tim Robey (Critic, *The Telegraph*, UK)

1. **There Will Be Blood** (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA)

All we could have hoped for, and more: mad, scalding, masterly.

2. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

A confounding and truly nightmarish quest for lost marbles.

3. **I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes, USA)

Haynes's hypnotic anti-biopic, a joyous experience even for a Dylan-sceptic.

4. **The Fall** (Tarsem Singh, India)

The undiscovered marvel of the year, and the film *Pan's Labyrinth* should have been.

5. **Lady Chatterley** (Pascale Ferran, France)

A model of serenely intelligent literary adaptation.

Nick Roddick (Critic, UK)

1. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

I keep coming back to this film with a sense of awe at how it manages not to put a foot wrong (and yes, I do believe it was necessary to show the foetus), from the bravura opening with the continuous shot in the college dorm via the extraordinary birthday party dinner through to the brilliant and totally unexpected final scene in the hotel restaurant. A masterpiece.

2. **Into the Wild** (Sean Penn, USA)

I know, I know - it should have been a recipe for a disaster: Sean Penn filming a book about a cocky young survivalist. But the result is both fascinating and quietly uplifting - a reinvention of the road movie that never drags (I found myself at one stage thinking I could watch it all day) and pulls off almost all its gambles.

3. **Juno** (Jason Reitman, USA)

If I was pitching this to a studio exec I would say *Little Miss Sunshine* meets *Knocked Up*: Jason Reitman's film combines the anarchic wit of the former with the irreverence of the latter and comes up with something even better: a riotously funny but also touching (and unexpected) take on teenage pregnancy. And 19-year-old Ellen Page gives the performance of the year in the title role.

4. **Beyond the Forest** (Gerald Igor Hauzenberger, Austria)

Gerald Igor Hauzenberger's documentary deserves to be seen in this country: a measured, formally beautiful but quite devastating portrait of the last of the *Siebenbürger Sachsen* - the tiny German-speaking community dying out in Transylvania (or 'beyond the forest'). One old lady has already had her name put on the gravestone ready for her death, while her elderly male neighbour wants to be left out for the animals to pick over his bones.

5. **George A. Romero's Diary of the Dead** (George A. Romero, USA)

Having taken the franchise as far as he could with *Land of the Dead*, Romero has simply reinvented it with this low-budget, cheekily ironic gore fest: a group of students are making a film in the woods when those ol' TV reports ("The dead... are coming back to life!") start coming in. It's all there, right down to the obligatory bit of bad improvised acting. Marvellous!

Jonathan Romney (Critic, *The Independent on Sunday*, UK)

1. **Silent Light** (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico)

Reygadas is a film-maker who manages to pack an element of surprise into every shot - just as much in this contemplative, subtly troubling film as in his confrontational *Battle in Heaven*. This film combines a sublime simplicity of image with a remarkable complexity of feeling and signification.

2. **Syndromes and a Century** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand)

First seen last year, and I've found myself returning to it with equal fascination on repeated viewings. Delicate, suggestive, infinitely mysterious and in some oblique ways, also very funny. I'm still not sure what it's about or quite how it works, but in its muted fashion, it's also one of the most joyously celebratory films of recent time. And contains the most fascinating and enigmatic shot of the year, that strange funnel sucking up smoke - an image that packed more sheer mystery and eeriness than the entirety of David Lynch's Paris art show.

3. **Don't Touch the Axe (*Ne touchez pas la hache*)** (Jacques Rivette, France)

Poised and incandescent, this one was of the year's great acting films, with Jeanne Balibar staking her place as one of the great screen performers of the moment. It's an object lesson in how a director can modestly, almost with an invisible touch, excavate a classic literary text - Balzac's *La Duchesse de Langeais* - and find an infinitely complexity in it without taking the route of the obviously cinematic. A film that's entirely classic, yet entirely new and, more importantly, alive.

4. **I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes, USA)

I don't know how posterity, or repeated viewings, will treat this intensely strange film. But Haynes's radical scrambling of the biopic genre not only refashions its chosen form, but does what it surely sets out to in making you reassess the Bob Dylan legacy, placing overlooked songs at the centre of the canon, and making connections with Haynes's enduring themes of self-invention, fluid identity and pop cultural as a socio-political looking glass. Don't write off the much-maligned Richard Gere section: go back to *The Basement Tapes* and it all makes sense. Possibly the year's most audacious project.

5. **Yella** (Christian Petzold, Germany)

Possibly not one for the ages, but halfway through a somnolent Berlin, it woke me up like a blast of icy water. A chilly, detached essay in the 'steel and glass' genre of modernist alienation, it finds a fascinating new spin on the Antonioni tradition, feeding in American-style boardroom intrigue - complete with overt nods to John Grisham - and even a hint of M. Night Shyamalan. Proof that the uncanny can still thrive in the 21st-century business-park world.

Other films of the year:

The Singer - Xavier Giannoli, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* - Cristian Mungiu, *Control* - Anton Corbijn, *The Assassination of Jesse James...* - Andrew Dominik, *Lady Chatterley* - Pascale Ferran, *The Walker* - Paul Schrader, *Zodiac* - David Fincher.

Surprise of the year:

Gone Baby Gone - Ben Affleck - I mean, who knew? Not only that, the director's brother Casey Affleck turned out one of the actors of the year, in this and in *Jesse James*. Beyond similarities to the McCann case (the reason for its withdrawal in the UK), GBG is a harsh, grim, uncomfortable, question-raising thriller like they used to make in the 70s.

Year's most underrated/misunderstood:

The Romance of Astrea and Celadon - Eric Rohmer/ *Angel* - François Ozon/ *Une Vieille Maitresse* - Catherine Breillat - all French, all historical, draw your own conclusions.

Soundtrack of the year:

The Darjeeling Limited - Wes Anderson

Gesture of the year:

Asia Argento's in *Une Vieille Maitresse*, flicking her hand at a discarded husband, with a muted "Adios!"

Under-the-radar discoveries of the year (distributors please note):

Unrelated - Joanna Hogg - A low-budget British film about upper-middle-class bores in Tuscany - but nothing like you're thinking. A terse, psychologically astute piece with echoes of Michael Haneke's chilly rigour. And: *I Always Wanted to Be a Gangster* - Samuel Benchetrit - Quietly goofy French comedy about a bunch of misfits converging on a motorway cafeteria: a *Pulp Fiction* structure, a hangdog mood à la Kaurismäki and Jarmusch, and lovely self-parodying turns from two haggard Euro-chanteurs (Arno and Alain Bashung) in a self-enclosed *Coffee and Cigarettes* vignette.

Most deserving of reappraisal in 2008:

Import/Export - Ulrich Seidl - A film people somehow shrugged out of their consciousnesses in Cannes, partly because it was no-one's idea of a pleasant experience. But this grim story of the new relations between East and West is without a doubt recent European cinema's toughest, most audacious investigation of the post-Soviet universe: this time next year, we may be wondering why we wrote it off.

Jonathan Rosenbaum (Critic, Chicago Reader, US)

1. *Casa de Lava* (Pedro Costa, Portugal, 1994)

Yes, I know this was released in 1994. But like many others, I've been very slow in catching up with Costa's work, which is currently having its first Chicago retrospective, and this Cape Verdean color remake of *I Walked with a Zombie* remains for me the biggest revelation among his features, though *Where Lies Your Hidden Smile?* and *Colossal Youth* aren't far behind. Too bad that the ghastly English title, *Down to Earth*, is so inappropriate and off-putting.

2. **The Silence Before Bach** (Pere Portabella, Spain)

Still less known than Costa is Catalan filmmaker Portabella, one of the Spanish producers of *Viridiana*, whose awesome sixth feature premiered to Venice and then happily surfaced (along with Portabella himself) in New York and Chicago a month later, I've been a fan ever since discovering *Vampir-Cuadecuc* in Cannes in 1971, and his last two features, as polyphonic and as they are lushly suggestive about the future of the European Union, are setting still more dazzling precedents. A DVD box set is finally in the works in Spain, and one of the best-kept secrets in contemporary cinema is finally about to become public.

3. **Still Life** (Jia Zhangke, China)

No contemporary filmmaker has more to say about the ravages of capitalism than Jia, and possibly no Chinese film since Tian Zhuangzhuang's shamefully overlooked *Delamu* has done as much with landscape as this quirky epic about the development of Three Gorges.

4. **Honeydripper** (John Sayles, USA)

I've never been much of a Sayles fan. But the extraordinary cast he assembled for this celebration of black community in rural Alabama in the early 1950s makes this for me the most memorable thing he's done since *The Brother from Another Planet*. Danny Glover alone seems as rock-solid as Spencer Tracy in his prime.

5. **Man of Cinema: Pierre Rissient** (Todd McCarthy, USA)

A memorable and insightful documentary about one of the most singular, innovative, multifaceted, and influential of all cinephiles.

Jamie Russell (Critic, UK)

1. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)

The serial killer movie's answer to *All The President's Men* and proof that Fincher's restless talent may yet make him the Kubrick of his generation. Even at 157 minutes this obsessive film about obsession still feels too short.

2. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

Easily the year's most frustrating film yet one that seems determined to plague my nightmares. Lynch's debt to the Surrealists has often gone unacknowledged (especially by the filmmaker himself) and his dreamlike aesthetic seems to have been revitalised by the freedom of DV.

3. Into The Wild (Sean Penn, USA)

Who needs Walter Salles's impending adaptation of *On The Road*? Penn's beatnik odyssey about amateur adventurer Christopher McCandless resurrects the myth of American self-reliance with asides on Thoreau and Jack London. Too many reviews spoiled its emotional punch by giving a potted history of its subject's life.

4. This Is England (Shane Meadows, UK)

Meadows may be one of Britain's most underrated directors. His semi-autobiographical take on '80s skinheads won him a wider audience and reminded us that skinhead culture wasn't always synonymous with bullyboy fascism.

5. No Country For Old Men (Joel Coen/Ethan Coen, USA)

The Coen Brothers' terrific return to form. It's a masterpiece of cinematic storytelling and a gripping crime thriller to boot; what really astounds, though, is the way it successfully marries the Coens' grotesque black humour with McCarthy's apocalyptic vision of moral collapse.

S. F. Said (Critic and author, UK)

1. The Lighthouse (Maria Saakyan, Armenia)**2. Days Of Glory** (Rachid Bouchareb, France)**3. Eastern Promises** (David Cronenberg, UK/Canada)**4. Syndromes And A Century** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand)**5. I'm Not There** (Todd Haynes, USA)

Five films set my world alight this year. All of them subverted or expanded established cinematic forms. *Days Of Glory* invested the classic war movie with ferocious political irony; *Eastern Promises* saw Cronenberg shake the gangster film upside down. *I'm Not There* was Todd Haynes's most complex take yet on the biopic, while *Syndromes And A Century* displayed further refinements to the Apichatpong Weerasethakul project, whatever that may be. Perhaps most exciting of the bunch, though, was *The Lighthouse*: an incendiary mix of war film, memoir and musical explosion, it was hands-down the debut of the year, standout of the London Film Festival, and richly deserves theatrical distribution in 2008.

Sukhdev Sandhu

1. Import/Export (Ulrich Seidl, Austria)

By some distance the most startling and bold film in competition at Cannes, this discomfiting hybrid of realist fiction and borderline-exploitation reportage chronicles two different migrations - a Ukrainian mother to Vienna, and two gumball-machine dispensers from Vienna to Slovakia. A terrifying and blackly funny travelogue of contemporary Europe - ghosted, hideously unequal,

imaginatively fortified - it features extraordinarily potent performances from its cast, some of them untrained, and is also lit up by tiny shards of numinous beauty.

2. ***Sipping On The Sweet Nectar*** (Marcus Söderlund, Sweden)

There were lots of terrific music films this year. None delighted me more than lusciously romantic short, the equivalent of floating to heaven atop a disco mirror-ball, in which Swedish crooner Jens Lekman recollects his first kiss while piloting a jet with which he skywrites his name across a blue horizon.

3. ***Otolith II*** (The Otolith Group, UK)

A compelling cine-essay in which UK-based art-psychonauts Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar float through Chandigarh and contemporary Mumbai, all the while engaging in Marker-esque reflections on the dreamspaces of supermodernity, the relationship between history and memory, and the potential role of the archive to offer radical visions that might upset the custodians of Capital.

4. ***Profit motive and the whispering wind*** (John Gianvito, US)

This is - what? Landscape art? A leftist tone poem? An anti-Fukuyama meditation on how history has not ended, but is still there to be fought and reshaped? Utilizing the long-take photographic strategies of James Benning, and putting them in the service of a politics explicitly shaped by radical historian Howard Zinn, the film ranges silently and attractively across America, its camera pointed at plaques, memorials and cemetery headstones commemorating the refuseniks, suffragettes, union organizers and Civil Rights leaders who shared collective, non-isolationist visions of the country.

5. ***Q2P*** (Paromita Vohra, India)

2007 was a good year for (diasporic) Indian documentaries, among them Nitin K's *Black Pamphlets* and Sandhya Suri's *I for India*, but I especially enjoyed *Q2P*, a witty and supremely insightful investigation into why there are so few public toilets for women in today's Mumbai. It's sure to be of interest to international curators looking for innovative works of urban poetics.

Anna Smith (Critic, UK)

1. ***Notes on a Scandal*** (Richard Eyre, UK)

One of the most confident dramas of the year, with a dream line-up and an instantly involving narrative. Judi Dench's acerbic narration proved unforgettable.

2. ***Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of Diane Arbus*** (Steven Shainberg, USA)

While this didn't impress everyone, I found it absolutely bewitching. A sensitive, atmospheric tribute to different lifestyles and longings, with beautiful cinematography, set design and performances.

3. ***Knocked Up*** (Judd Apatow, USA)

In a market drenched with mediocre or worse comedies, *Knocked Up* stood out like a shining star, loaded with sharp witty dialogue and mixing edgy humour with a more mainstream love story. *Superbad* for girls maybe, but who's complaining?

4. ***Away From Her*** (Sarah Polley, USA)

Actress-turned-director Sarah Polley really proved herself with this mature tear-jerker musing on love in times of strife.

5. ***Venus*** (Roger Michell, UK)

This fabulous character piece proved what a great year 2007 was for British film, blending pathos, wit and social comment with seemingly effortless expertise.

Fernanda Solórzano (Critic, Mexico)

1. ***Zodiac*** (David Fincher, USA)

By playing on the frustration of the main characters and the institutional inefficiency surrounding a never solved serial-killing case, *Zodiac* bravely defies Hollywood's taste for certainties, logic, and undisputed truths.

2. ***Inland Empire*** (David Lynch, USA)

Regarded by many as annoyingly self-indulgent, Lynch's most Lynchian work falls in the category of the miraculous. It grabs viewers' attention by denying them a reason to hold on. A follow up to Lynch's critique of the entertainment industry double standards, this film coherently refuses to cater to your basic needs.

3. ***4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

Mungiu's no-nonsense directing style, supported by Anamaria Marinca amazing performance, reminds viewers that timing and constraint outdo exploitation as effective techniques when approaching the controversial.

4. ***Paranoid Park*** (Gus Van Sant, USA)

The mostly aesthetic narrative style already tested in *Elephant*, becomes in *Paranoid Park* less experimental and more expressive of the alienation experienced by its teenager character. As far as cinematic approaches to psychological ailments go, this could be the best extant film to depict a depersonalized state.

5. ***Atonement*** (Joe Wright, UK)

Manages to be faithful to the literary essence of McEwan's acclaimed vindication of the written word, not by mere representation of plot but through a clever use of cinemas' own genre clichés. In terms of book adaptations for the screen, a witty and refreshing exception to the rule.

Kate Stables (Critic, UK)

1. **Letters from Iwo Jima** (Clint Eastwood, USA)

Beneath the horrific battle and hari-kiri scenes, an astonishingly restrained, adult and dignified film, which both burnished and outdid *Flags of Our Fathers*.

2. **La Vie en Rose** (Olivier Dahan, France)

As gloriously melodramatic as its subject, it shimmered with confident novelty (that dual narrative, those barely-real sets) then topped it off with the performance of the year from Marion Cotillard. Et ca me fait quelque chose.

3. **Golden Door (Nuovomondo)** (Emanuele Crialesi, Italy)

Crialesi's drama of turn-of-the-century Sicilian immigrants gave the poor, tired, and huddled viewer sheer visual poetry, redolent with yearning, decorated with delightful eruptions of magic realism, and full of milky goodness.

4. **The Diving Bell and the Butterfly** (Julian Schnabel, France)

Schnabel and his leading man Mathieu Amalric pulled off the extraordinary feat of making the viewer feel that one inhabited Jean Dominique Bauby's paralysed yet wide-ranging world. A genuine 'tour de force'.

5. **The Bourne Ultimatum** (Paul Greengrass, USA)

Yes, the Bourne franchise re-tooled the action-thriller several episodes ago, and this year's mix of kinetic set-pieces and tight-lipped paranoia added little new to the recipe. But it was still the most visceral, exciting 116 minutes of the year in film. I lost my peripheral vision and my popcorn, and didn't give a damn.

Brad Stevens (Critic, UK)

1. **Stanley's Girlfriend** (Monte Hellman, USA)

Hellman's contribution to the portmanteau film *Trapped Ashes* is truly the work of a master. Difficult to imagine a more perfect 27 minutes.

2. **A Prairie Home Companion** (Robert Altman, USA)

Altman may have been uneven, but he went out on an undeniable high. A sublime meditation on mortality and cinema; two sides of the same coin?

3. **Woman on the Beach** (Hong Sang-soo, South Korea)

The latest masterpiece from a director who makes nothing but masterpieces.

4. **The Unpolished** (Pia Marais, Germany)

A stunningly assured debut; Marais is clearly a filmmaker to watch.

5. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

Lynch's abandonment of postmodern irony has resulted in what may be his finest achievement to date. A remarkable interrogation of the ways in which images of women are mediated by narrative codes, and the liberating potential of rejecting those codes. An artistic dead end, perhaps - but then again, that's Lynch's point.

Amy Taubin (Critic, US)

1. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)
2. **Paranoid Park** (Gus Van Sant, USA)
3. **Eastern Promises** (David Cronenberg, UK/Canada)
4. **Southland Tales** (Richard Kelly, USA)
5. **No End in Sight** (Charles Ferguson, USA)

Since it was a year of many very good films, I limited myself to North America. Though vastly differing in scale, the first two are near perfect movies; the next two have their flaws but I value them both for their ideas, for the intensity and strange tenderness that infuses the filmmaking, and for extraordinary set pieces that mix rapture with dread; the last is the most intelligently organized, make-your-blood-boil documentary about everything that went wrong in Iraq, at least through 2006. I hope Ferguson is working on the sequel; the pity is it's necessary.

David Thompson (Critic and film-maker, BBC, UK)

1. **Inland Empire** (David Lynch, USA)

Lynch proves that rampant experimentalism can be immensely seductive

2. **Lady Chatterley** (Pascale Ferran, France)

Ferran proves that DH Lawrence through a French filter can hit the spot

3. **This Is England** (Shane Meadows, UK)

Meadows proves that he is now a major contemporary British director

4. **Syndromes And A Century** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand)

Weerasethakul proves that you can reinvent the rules of cinema

5. **The Assassination Of Jesse James By The Coward Robert Ford** (Andrew Dominik, USA)

Dominik proves that there remain ways to reboot old Western myths

Alexis A. Tioseco (Critic, Philippines)

1. ***Profit motive and the whispering wind*** (John Gianvito, USA)
2. ***Who Killed Cock Robin? (Redux)*** (Travis Wilkerson, USA)
3. ***Bamako*** (Abderrahmane Sissako, Mali)
4. ***Autohystoria*** (Raya Martin, Philippines)
5. ***Huling Balyan ng Buhi, Ang (The Woven Stories of the Other)*** (Sherad Anthony Sanchez, Philippines)

These are five films whose roots are deeply planted in specific places (be it Butte, Mali, Mindanao, Manila, or America itself), that engage intensely with notions of memory (of working class struggle, colonialism, internal-violence), and are extremely timely. They are films connected as well by their powerful use of song (a connection a bit more subtle that it requires expounding): union-martyr anthem "Joe Hill" in both Profit Motive and Cock Robin, Bamako's stirring unsubtitled rhetoric and moving songstress, Huling Balyan's Babalyan (or priestess) singing at/to the river, and music heard over a blank screen that begins both Autohystoria and Profit Motive.

Jean-Marie Straub said: "I don't think a film should impose at all the ideas of the director. He should propose ideas that people can accept or refuse. He shouldn't impose them, no matter what they are. Even if he wants people to participate in his ideas, he must present them in radically different ways than in commercial films. If he used those same selling methods to sell his so-called beautiful and good ideas, it's an absurd contradiction, because those methods only hit you on the head, and even if you are hit on the head with the best intentions, it still hurts.

"If I show you an audio-visual object which deafens you or blinds you under the pretext of convincing you of a beautiful and good idea, I can't even convey the idea to you because it must be perceived by the senses I have just diminished. So, I will succeed only in making you more unconscious."

These are fine example of a committed cinema. A cinema that I think Straub would approve of.

Kenneth Turan (Critic, LA Times, US)

1. ***Lady Chatterley*** (Pascale Ferran, France)

Distinctly modern as well as classical, even old-fashioned, this French version of the once-scandalous D.H. Lawrence novel is the most frankly sensual movie in memory.

2. ***Lars and the Real Girl*** (Craig Gillespie, USA)

A Frank Capra-style tribute to the joys of friendship and community constructed around one of the truly salacious items modern culture provides.

3. Michael Clayton (Tony Gilroy, USA)

This smart and suspenseful legal thriller pulls you through its story, no stragglers allowed. This is the kind of movie Hollywood should be making all the time instead of once a year.

4. Once (John Carney, Ireland)

An unpretentious slice of musical and romantic charm that's the first film in a while to mix music and story in a way reminiscent of Richard Lester's much faster-paced Beatles classics.

5. Terror's Advocate (Barbet Schroeder, France)

Schroeder's documentary is as smart and unexpected as its subject, French attorney Jacques Vergès, known for defending the indefensible. His story turns out to be the spellbinding half-secret, half-forgotten history of revolutionary terrorism in the twentieth century.

Noel Vera (Critic, Critic After Dark, Philippines)

The five I came up with, frankly, I'm not exactly happy with. I'm limited to what's available at my local art house and the multiplexes - not exactly conducive to a varied and esoteric diet. Still, one does one's best - I think I can be proud of the two Filipino films I managed to snag (by hook or by crook) and enjoyed, and the American entries aren't too bad - one of them, I think, actually comes within shouting distance of being great. To whit:

1. Death in the Land of Encantos (Lav Diaz, Philippines)

Like Lav Diaz's other works it's indescribably long (at nine hours it's roughly the length of his previous film *Heremias*, part 1), and like much of what's coming out of the Philippines' exciting digital filmmaking industry, totally uncategorizable (think Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* with a smaller budget, infinitely vaster attention span, and more poetic sensibility (and even then you'd at most have come up with a rough approximation)). Set in the Bicol region, against the devastation wreaked by Typhoon "Reming," Diaz gives us images of desolation so bleak they're surreal, and fills that desolation with an inimitable mix of absolute loneliness and percolating madness.

2. Eastern Promises (David Cronenberg, UK/Canada)

Cronenberg's latest collaboration with Viggo Mortensen is perhaps more sentimental (The script is from Steven Knight, who wrote the problematical *Dirty Pretty Things*), but no less assured in its visual storytelling. Cronenberg's camera once turned an unblinking eye towards some of the most horrific images in all of cinema; here he demonstrates a similar impassivity towards more familiar horrors - a goaded Mortensen mounting a prostitute from behind, a slashed and bleeding Mortensen fighting for his life inside a steam bath (critics have compared the battle to a similar one in Orson Welles' *Othello* - I ultimately prefer Welles', but Cronenberg's is no mere romp in the rain). Mortensen is essential to this picture - without him, we would never buy the script's improbable mix of cruelty and compassion, suffering and sacrifice; with him we are capable of buying anything.

3. **Foster Child** (Brillante Mendoza, Philippines)

Mendoza's docudrama borrows its matter-of-factness from Herzog and its occasional use of handheld tracking shots (on tricycles, on jeepneys (uniquely Filipino forms of public transportation) from Kiarostami, but the subject matter is pure Filipino - poor slum families who eke out a meager existence acting as foster homes to adoptable children. Call it promotional material for the agency that does the hiring and farming out, but Mendoza knows how to undercut the material, inject a sense of unease into the ostensibly smooth workings of the adoption process, give the foster mother (an awesome performance by Cherry Pie Picache) her moment - perfectly timed and paced - in the sun.

4. **We Own the Night** (James Gray, USA)

Invites comparison with Coppola's gangster epic and, in my opinion, exceeds the latter. Gray (*Little Odessa*, *The Yards*) knows how to combine the old-fashioned virtues of deft characterization, a gift for handling actors, and a many-layered script with a visual style that is chillier, more fluent, more nuanced than its Italian - American predecessor. The story, a flipped-over version of *The Godfather* - instead of the Mafia we have a police chief's family, and his wayward son's slow path to redemption - should be a tired cliché, only Gray shows us in slow and excruciating detail the terrible price paid for said redemption. Easily one of the finest American films in recent years.

5. **Zodiac** (David Fincher, USA)

I'd long since dismissed David Fincher as a fitfully interesting stylist in dire need of good material; with this film - based on Robert Graysmith's books about the Zodiac Killer - he finds material good enough for a masterpiece. The film is almost a repudiation of Fincher's previous music-video style; instead of shaky handhelds, fast cutting, and fabulist production design it's massive, deliberate, totally immersed in '70s paraphernalia - the perfect visual complement for its true subject, not the pursuit and capture of a serial killer (the criminal is never brought to justice), but the precise delineation of an all-consuming obsession.

Catherine Wheatley (Critic and researcher, University of Southampton, UK)

1. **Ten Canoes** (Rolf de Heer/Peter Djigirr, Australia)

This gentle film's aesthetic seemed perfectly harmonised with its subject matter, which it portrays with affection and a real sense of timelessness. A breath of fresh air.

2. **Import/Export** (Ulrich Seidl, Austria)

Cinema at its most raw and disturbing. This sent me scurrying off to see Seidl's back catalogue, and he has been the discovery of the year for me.

3. **Into Great Silence** (Philip Gröning, Germany)

A meditation on faith, I'd call it more of an experience than a film.

4. **Longing** (Valeska Grisebach, Germany)

This film contains two scenes in particular which left me reeling, and the coda throws a new light on all that has gone before.

5. **Control** (Anton Corbijn, UK)

The cinematography was flawless.

Jason Wood (Critic, UK)

1. **Silent Light** (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico)

The most accomplished feature to date from Carlos Reygadas, this is an intensely spiritual work that also impresses on a purely technical level.

2. **The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford** (Andrew Dominik, USA)

Attentive to period detail and endlessly fascinating in its look at mythology, Andrew Dominik's finely crafted western is all the more remarkable given reports of studio adversity.

3. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (Cristian Mungiu, Romania)

Anchored by first-rate performances this harrowing but utterly compelling look at suffering and misfortune offers rich evidence of the current strength of Romanian cinema.

4. **There Will Be Blood** (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA)

Already touted as *Giant* meets *Citizen Kane*, add a touch of Nicolas Roeg's *Eureka* and you just about have the measure of Paul Thomas Anderson's return to filmmaking. Uncompromising and audacious, Jonny Greenwood's throbbing score adds the finishing touch.

5. **You, The Living** (Roy Andersson, Sweden)

A tough call between this and Christian Petzold's generally underrated *Yella*, Roy Andersson ultimately won out for providing some much needed hilarity.