

*Gerry*, and Cinematic Boredom

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One could imagine through the pleasuring of a sadistic dream conjuring, how enjoyable it could be to trek through the hot desert. There are lots of things to do and see: sand... rocks... maybe an animal; you could make sand angels. Sounds great right? And things that sound great get made into movies. How else does one explain Gus Van Sant's decision to make his film *Gerry*, which takes place entirely in a desert with only two characters interacting within their environment? And by interacting I mean blank stares and climbing boulders, because that's all the action the audience gets for two hours.

From the beginning, narrative cinema has designed itself on delighting its audience and providing escapes. Van Sant offers the escape, but perhaps not quite to where one would hope to go. Instead of an action packed adventure to the Bahamas with half clothed A-list Hollywood celebrities, we get a vacant desert walkabout with tattered clothed Matt Damon and Casey Affleck.

*Gerry* is a film engaged with itself and its own devices. Lacking in story, dramatic archs, dialogue, and cuts, the film functions adversely to contemporary popular and conventional

cinema. This at first can seem frustrating and even "boring," but it is through its counter-structure that dissention is allowed. And through dissention a new cinematic experience is achieved.

Gus Van Sant does not allow the cinematic apparatus to conform to a mere means of providing entertainment. Instead the apparatus creates an environment where what is being experienced by the character onscreen could be paralleled by the spectator. Wandering a desert in real life would seem long, unpleasant, mundane, and autonomous. These are all things that the spectator may experience while watching *Gerry*.

Van Sant's alternate cinematic experience requires a different sort of viewing. Instead of keeping up with characters and connecting plot points, *Gerry* busies itself in atmosphere, utilizing painterly shots of landscapes while making allusions to deeper psychological dramas hidden beneath the superficial surfaces of the characters. *Gerry* beckons the audience to explore its textures and brushstrokes, to question the primal nature of human beings and their capacity to survive. To some

degree, a Darwinist approach to looking at life.

Although undervalued for a culture trained to assess a film's worth in relation to plot and spectacle, *Gerry* allows the focus to shift to other elements of the cinematic experience. And while heavily influenced by Hungarian director Bela Tarr, Gus Van Sant's long takes allow for reflection, and offer encouragement to push past story, and to explore the intricacies of construction.