

Aesthetica Short Film Festival 2014: Round-up of Day 1

Braving the pelting rain, George Wood and Kate Barlow bring you the highlights of the first day of the Aesthetica Short Film Festival

By [Kate Barlow](#) and [George Wood](#)

Saturday 8 November 2014



1331 venue, Swinegate

Tired, dazed but utterly entertained is probably the best way to sum up how I feel after the first full-length day of the 2014 Aesthetica Short Film Festival. With such an expansive schedule of films playing all across York I was spoilt for choice, but the typically British rainfall meant I mostly kept myself in the warm confines of City Screen.

Thankfully then, City Screen was playing host to some top-notch films. The morning round of comedy was really cream of the crop, ranging from a board game-inspired black comedy ("Scrabble") to some Tim McInnerny (of *Blackadder* fame) narration in *A Day In The Life Of A Bathroom Mirror*.

It was difficult to pick out a standout – almost every film elicited laughs and played on an interesting concept. *The Boy With A Camera For A Face* was as outlandish as the title suggests, and a kind of darkly surreal crossover between *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and *The Truman Show*, but with Dr Suess-esque narration and a dystopian edge. It had a Charlie Brooker *Black Mirror* vibe, one which continued in the French Ikea dystopia that was *The Man Who Knew A Lot*.

My particular favourite, however, was *The Funeral*. Paul Kaye and Tracy-Ann Oberman helped bring this Jewish family comedy some gravitas, but its excellent writing is what shone throughout. In the space of 10 minutes, some brilliant jokes were set up, along with a dark humour balanced out by powerful drama. This kind of tone is what made me fall in love with classic sitcoms like *The Royle Family* and *One Foot in the Grave*, so it's great to see it on show here.

Unsurprisingly, the rest of the day didn't live up to the fantastic start. Nevertheless, I had plenty of scares and tense moments in one of thriller reels, which benefitted from the larger cinematic experience at City Screen. *The Stomach* literally played under the skin as it followed a spirit medium with a grotesque way of channelling the dead, but in the context of a crime thriller.

Later in the day I nipped across town to watch the Japanese special screening at the fabulous venue of 1331 (complete with reclining leather armchairs for seats). The relatively slow and measured pace of

each of the films were harder to adjust to compared to the more instant gratification that I had just got from watching Western comedies and thrillers. The animated war / mystery film *Hashi No Mukuo* stood out for its eccentric storytelling, catchy art style and one deviously dark twist at the end.

I finished off my day back in City Screen with some more comedy, this time in the overcrowded Basement. The levelling of the room made it difficult to read the subtitles for the foreign language film, but I still had plenty of fun with the *Amelie*-styled *Family For Sale*, which was about a boy growing up in a family-run sex shop. My favourite out of the bunch was *Bad Day At The Office*, another short film to deliver Dr Suess-esque narration, explaining why a kick in the balls to start the day might indeed be quite a good thing.

GW

My first day at Aesthetica began in the warm ridiculously comfy and intimate confines of 1331 for a Drama screening. First up was *Geezer*, a tense and heart-breaking film following a young boy who assists an ageing reclusive neighbour by walking his beloved dog. Darker themes are unveiled as the recluse is forced to involve himself in the family's drama. Set in the luscious natural beauty of rural England, the film was one of the highlights of the day, revealing the tragic close proximity of violence and innocence. *Cigano*, or *Gypsy*, a Portugese production, was another strong and slow-burning drama but which ultimately left the audience slightly unsatisfied with an inconclusive ending.



Crazy Like Me (2013)

My favourite of the day was *Crazy Like Me*. Centred around her trips to a councillor's office, the story follows Audrey, a depressed young woman who feels unable to connect with the world around her. Stylish, funny, and original, one watches the film with a sense of painful recognition as it brings up the awkward truths and annoyances of life – from two people at a restaurant communicating only on their phones to Audrey's inability to be truly present, even when having sex with her immature older boyfriend. When she is referred to a psychiatrist, the question that immediately comes to mind is: but isn't she the sane one?

Arriving damp and cold, I next arrived at York Theatre Royal for a masterclass about camera operation from speakers including Philip Sindall, Peter Taylor and Peter Robertson. While you may not have heard of them, you'll certainly have heard of their films, bringing us the visuals from cinema greats: *Gravity*, *Skyfall*, *Gladiator*, *Harry Potter*, *Elizabeth* and *Atonement*, to name but a few. An anecdote about working on *Gravity* revealed how it was the camera operators who had to be continuously moving to give the impression of zero gravity, not the actors: essentially meaning that they had to be strapped upside down while operating. A later tale of the making of *Anna Karenina* revealed the coordination that goes into Joe Wright's signature long steady cam takes: a 5 minute scene of the film, which was taken in one shot, had to go through 15 takes due to the complexity of the shoot. Peter Robertson also discussed the famous Dunkirk beach scene in *Atonement*, one of the longest steady cam takes in history, for which Robertson won a Lifetime Achievement Award. The difficulties of coordinating 1300 extras, on a beach, and having only 2 days to conduct the shoot is easy to imagine. It was hard to go ten minutes without a famous name being dropped (Tom Cruise, for example, does actually do all of his own stunts, while Bruce Willis never does), making it quickly clear just how experienced these guys are. The masterclass was a fascinating and entertaining insight into the complexities of filmmaking, showing us that while we while we sit back and enjoy the stunning visuals in the films we know and love it is easy to forget just how much work as gone into each and every shot.

I finished the day in the stunningly medieval King's Manor for a series of documentaries. My first and favourite was *Caillech*, the tale of an elderly woman who has lived her entire simple and rustic life in the same house in a remote area of the Scottish Western Isles. The film beautifully gives a detailed insight into her isolated existence, which is centred around looking after sheep, and her take on growing old. *Gli Immacolati* was another captivating short. While perhaps let down by its visuals, the film was carried by its absorbing narration of an allegation of rape.

With a huge array of films, genres and classes available, Aesthetica is certainly worth braving York's appalling weather for.

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