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## Day 4: The 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival

Published Sunday, April 15, 2007 by Jeff | [E-mail this post](#)

**Madeinusa** (Peru, 2006) \* \* \*

D: Claudia Llosa



Almost (though not quite) a work of magical realism, *Madeinusa* is a film that's bound to win over more admiration than outright love, if only because it intentionally distances the viewers from its characters. Set in a fictional village in the mountains of Peru, and told equally through the eyes of the mayor's virginal

daughter, *Madeinusa*, and the drifter Salvador who wanders into town, it divides its time--and its heart--between the insider and the outsider. *Madeinusa* is taking part in a village ritual called the "Holy Time," when, according to their beliefs, God is "dead" and they may sin freely (one local handily--and sleeplessly--keeps track of the Holy Time, minute by minute, by running a manually-operated clock in the village square). As part of this ritual, a virgin (in this case, *Madeinusa*) is to be handed over to the mayor for deflowering. No one questions that it's her own father--not even her sister, Chale, who only fights for her father's attention. Salvador is perplexed by the customs of the town, but is too curiously indifferent to act as a surrogate for the audience; he does want to help *Madeinusa* escape, but out of pity more than anything else. Meanwhile, after packing an effigy of Jesus away, the village indulges in wanton, sometimes reckless behavior, and the mayor focuses his resentment and jealousy upon

Salvador. Director Claudia Llosa dwells on the casual cruelty of those who behave for purely selfish reasons. Everyone acts out of a desire to possess--even innocent Madeinusa, who prizes her earrings above all else. What you end up with is a fable laced with a bit of rat poison. It's potent, disturbing, and fascinating.

**Red Road** (U.K., 2006) \* \* \* 1/2

D: Andrea Arnold



By turns unsettling, tense, and moving, Andrea Arnold's thriller Red Road sets up a Rear Window scenario: a security guard (Kate Dickie) each day sits at a terminal surrounded by monitors, operating the security cameras, zooming in on pixilated faces and scanning for anything that could be reported to the police; by chance, one day, she sees a

familiar face, and with a little bit of research discovers that he is indeed a convict who's been recently paroled. She begins to take an intense interest in the ex-con, going so far as to follow him around on foot, and even invite herself into one of his parties. The impetus behind her obsessive behavior isn't clear until late in the film. We do know she's looking for dirt that might get him thrown back into prison, but as she becomes drawn into her life, his sexual attraction to her is strangely reciprocated. When the connections become clear, and the behavior understood, everything you've seen up to this point takes on a completely different meaning. Arnold lights her film with glowing red hues, and maintains the color motif from the ex-con's red hair to the foxes that offer up howls in the night that sound like imperiled screams. (The motif reaches its critical mass during the film's graphic sex scene, when all the colors seem to merge and the screen seems to radiate in red.) Although the convict seems to be the fox on the prowl, it's actually the woman who stalks him, rarely breaking her penetrating stare, and following her hunt to extreme lengths. I can only see so many of the films at the festival, but I'd imagine this is one of the best, building Hitchcockian suspense without ever breaking its gritty realism or modest moments of humanity.