



DISCOMFORT MOVIES

Requiem for a Dream

Requiem for a Dream

Director: Darren Aronofsky

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Presented by: Artisan Entertainment,
Thousand Words

Production Companies: Sibling Entertainment,
Protozoa Pictures

In association with: Industry Entertainment,
Bandeira Entertainment

Developed with assistance of: Sundance Institute

Executive Producers: Nick Wechsler, Beau Flynn,
Stefan Simchowitz

Co-executive Producer: Ben Barenholtz

Producers: Eric Watson, Palmer West

Co-producers: Randy Simon, Jonah Smith,
Scott Vogel, Scott Franklin

Unit Production Manager: Lori Keith Douglas

Production Co-ordinator: Chris Collins

Location Manager: Michael Nickodem

Post-production Supervisor: Douglas Wilkinson

1st Assistant Director: Timothy Bird

2nd Assistant Director: Chip Signore

Script Supervisor: Jennifer Getzinger

Casting Associates: Freddy Luis,
Jennifer Lindesmith

Screenplay: Hubert Selby Jr, Darren Aronofsky

Based on the novel by: Hubert Selby Jr

Director of Photography: Matthew Libatique

Camera Operator: Richard Rutowski

B Camera Operators: Dana Altomare, Michael Dana

Steadicam Operators: Will Arnot, Sandy Hays

Digital Effects: Amoeba Proteus

Visual Effects Designer/Supervisors:

Jeremy Dawson, Dan Schrecker

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Drew Jiritano

Editor: Jay Rabinowitz

Associate Editor: Matt Mayer

Production Designer: James Chinlund

Art Director: Judy Rhee

Set Decorator: Ondine Karady

Designer Consultant: Eliza Jimenez

Costume Designer: Laura Jean Shannon

Red Dresses Designed by: Carolyn Griffell

Wardrobe Supervisors: Donna Maloney,
Pamela Kezal

Key Make-up: Judy Chin

Special Make-up/Prosthetic Effects:

Vincent J. Guastini

Key Hair: Quentin Harris

Title/Credit Design: Amoeba Proteus

Music: Clint Mansell

Music Performed by: The Kronos Quartet

Sound Design: Brian Emrich

Sound Mixer: Ken Ishii

Re-recording Mixers: Tom Johnson, Tony Sereno

Supervising Sound Editor: Nelson Ferreira

Sound Effects Design/Editing: Craig Henighan

Stunt Co-ordinator: Pete Bucossi

Cast:

Ellen Burstyn (*Sara Goldfarb*)

Jared Leto (*Harry Goldfarb*)

Jennifer Connelly (*Marion Silver*)

Marlon Wayans (*Tyrone C. Love*)

Christopher McDonald (*Tappy Tibbons*)

Louise Lasser (*Ada*)

Marcia Jean Kurtz (*Rae*)

Janet Sarno (*Mrs Pearlman*)

Suzanne Shepherd (*Mrs Scarlini*)

Joanne Gordon (*Mrs Ovardia*)

Charlotte Aronofsky (*Mrs Miles*)

Mark Margolis (*Mr Rabinowitz*)

Mike Kaycheck (*donut cop*)

Jack O'Connell (*corn dog stand boss*)

Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* is as bravura a display of filmmaking as you're likely to see; an exhibition of poised expressionist swagger beside which the pyrotechnics of David Fincher seem positively bromidic. In print its visual flourishes may sound ostentatious: split screens, acceleration then deceleration, fades to white, title cards, demonic fridges and Coney Island dreamscapes. Even that old John Frankenheimer favourite the fish-eye lens takes a bow 60 minutes in.

But it works. And it keeps on working, pounding and whirring into hard proof of a singular *cinematic* talent unafraid to experiment yet prepared to borrow from past iconoclasts. Which, when the comically pompous opening shot of Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité* can be referred to as a pivotal image in contemporary film, couldn't be better timed.

Of course, the usual term for such aesthetic grandstanding is MTV filmmaking, a put-down routinely applied to anyone under 40 who does more than point the camera at the actors. In this context it's a criticism rendered obsolete by the sheer breadth of Aronofsky's direction with its brave juxtaposition of visual audacity and the horrific (but essentially everyday) descent of its subjects. Yet there is a certain precision musicality to Aronofsky's film, a rhythmic pulse which echoes his protagonists' relentless decline. In a recurrent motif he strips down the mechanics of drug use to their fundamentals: a needle is filled; a bank note rolled; a television switched on. Blood vessels expand, pupils dilate. Cut, after cut, after cut, after cut. On one level it's an inspired technical fancy, the scratch and rewind of rap translated to celluloid. On another it's a stark insight into the blank lab-rat cycle of addiction.

In other words, Aronofsky's razzle-dazzle serves to articulate his themes. Except this articulacy isn't confined to his box of tricks; there's as much loaded eloquence in scenes as gracefully minimal as a weary Jennifer Connelly standing before a mirror until a cocaine rush (bill rolled, line chopped, eyes wide) literally elevates her, her arms high above her head like a ballerina. It should go without saying that, given the egregiously talkative nature of the modern American indie movie, such fluency is a godsend.

It's also a hugely significant evolution in Aronofsky's filmmaking after the monochrome zeal of his feature debut *Pi*. There, potent though the end result was, the image was the *raison d'être*, the point the shock of the new as seen through the eyes of a migraine-suffering genius-obsessive (exemplified by a brain quivering on a dank subway platform). Here, the visual authority is as likely to come from the director's increasingly vivid eye for the mundane details that punctuate even the most hellish of trajectories: a paper plane floating to earth, a conversation between hospital porters, a phone number scrawled on the back of a photograph, a tear welling above a bulwark of mascara.

Of course, one important practical distinction between Aronofsky's debut and his follow-up is that whereas the narrative coherence of *Pi* was often at the mercy of its visual sensibilities, *Requiem* is founded on a concrete storyline (adapted from Hubert Selby Jr's 1978 novel), a classic three-act morality tale right down to its title cards. Much of the credit for that belongs to Selby, but it's Aronofsky's refusal to marginalise Ellen Burstyn's lonely Coney Island mom Sara Goldfarb in favour of the more overtly romantic trio of her son Harry (Jared

Chas Mastin (*Lyle Russel*)
 Ajay Naidu (*mailman*)
 Sean Gullette (*Arnold the shrink*)
 Samia Shoaib (*Nurse Mall*)
 Peter Maloney (*Dr Pill*)
 Abraham Abraham (*King Neptune*)
 Aliya Campbell (*Alice*)
 Te'ron A. O'Neal (*young Tyrone*)
 Denise Dowse (*Tyrone's mother*)
 Bryan Chattoo (*Brody*)
 Eddie De Harp (*Brody's henchman Victor*)
 Scott Franklin (*voice of jailer*)
 Peter Howard (*Sal the Geep*)
 Brian Costello (*first AD*)
 Abraham Aronofsky (*newspaper man on train*)
 James Chinlund (*space oddity*)
 Olga Merediz (*Malin & Block secretary*)
 Allison Furman (*Malin & Block office woman*)
 Robert Dylan Cohen (*Paramedic Greenhill*)
 Ben Shenkman (*Dr Spencer*)
 Keith David (*Big Tim*)
 Dylan Baker (*Southern doctor*)
 Shaun O'Hagen (*Ward Attendant Seto*)
 Leland Gantt (*Ward Attendant Penn*)
 Bill Buell (*court doctor*)
 Jimmie Ray Weeks (*prison guard*)
 Greg Bello (*ER doctor*)
 Henry Stram (*ECT technician*)
 Heather Litteer, Jenny Decker, Ami Goodheart,
 Nina Zavarin (*Big Tim party girls*)
 Stanley B. Herman (*Uncle Hank*)
 Scott Bader, Jim Centofanti, Scott Chait, Daniel
 Clarin, Ben Cohen, Eric Cohen, Brett Feinstein,
 Ricky Fier, John Getz, Andrew Kessler, Ross
 Lombardo, Carter Mansbach, Scott Miller, Todd
 Miller, Joshua Pollack, Craig Rallo, Geordan
 Reisner, Keith Scandore, David Seltzer, Chris
 Varvaro, Ricardo Viñas, Chad Weiner, Jesse
 Weissberger, Greg Weissman (*party animals*)
 Hubert Selby Jr (*laughing guard*)
 Liana Pai (*angelic nurse*)
 USA 2000©
 102 mins
 Digital

Content warning: Contains strong violence,
 drug use and distressing scenes

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Leto), his girlfriend Marion (Connelly) and friend Ty (Marlon Wayans) that truly
 fires the film; to have done otherwise would both have confirmed the
 conventional wisdom that young male directors are only happy dealing with
 young male subjects and sabotaged the denouement.

Alongside his film's ferocious stylisation Aronofsky develops a genuine
 empathy with his characters, granting them substantial interior lives without
 recourse to having them explain 'how they feel'. And for a director accused in
 the US of seeing his cast as little more than meat puppets, he does a fine job
 of coaxing some sublime performances from his principals. By the film's bitter
 conclusion I felt a deeper attachment to all four of Aronofsky's supposed
 ciphers than I did to anyone in *Magnolia* after three hours plus of Paul Thomas
 Anderson's sprawling opus. And I liked *Magnolia*. Without such a connection,
 the film's infernal final third would be a mere exercise in guignol; as it is, it's a
 brutal but unforgettable kick in the chest. And, for an audience dizzy with the
 slack-jawed irony of modern US cinema, a shot in the arm.

Which brings us, glibly enough, to heroin. In the US, where its reception
 bordered on outrage, one of the more enthusiastic notices described
 Aronofsky as having made the 'definitive skag movie'. And it's certainly true
 that *Requiem for a Dream* has a far clearer grip on opiate compulsion than
 such ostensible peers as Gus Van Sant's prettified *Drugstore Cowboy* or the
 empty fripperies of *Trainspotting*. The proximity of smack to the spine of the
 narrative was always going to give Aronofsky problems: wallow in grimly
 prosaic junkiedom and you've got another tedious, repellent *Christiane F.*;
 airbrush reality and the spectre of *The Basketball Diaries* rears its glossy,
 pouting head.

Certainly, Aronofsky goes with sexy young faces for three-quarters of his cast,
 with the attendant risk of reviving heroin chic. But with heroin chic the glazed
 nonchalance of the models is exactly that, a profound indifference to anything
 beyond artifice; in *Requiem for a Dream* it's all about anaesthesia trying to kill a
 pain that won't die. While Connelly and Leto initially make an exquisite couple,
 their gently wasted allure only adds to the pathos when their worlds cave in.
 Beauty, to Aronofsky, doesn't fade so much as fall apart. Throw in the
 septicaemia that dominates much of the film's closing stages and chic seems a
 long way away.

In any case, heroin itself is irrelevant in the face of the film's overriding theme:
 the need for an escape, for over the rainbow, and the cataclysms that await as
 a consequence. In *Requiem for a Dream* that can mean anything from the
 'pound of pure' Harry and Ty never quite catch sight of to Marion's lust for
 independence or – most poignantly of all – Sara's visions of being needed
 again. And here Aronofsky deserves every plaudit for never condescending to
 the apparently tawdry dreams of a dilapidated old woman desperate to appear
 as a 'winner' on a television infomercial where there are no winners, only
 salesmen.

Ultimately Aronofsky's concern is not with junkies, cokeheads or tragic Jewish
 mothers but with the gaping universal psychic wounds that Hollywood merely
 dresses with plastic redemption. Like staring into the sun (as a young boy did
 in *Pi*) or into the abyss (as Aronofsky does here), *Requiem for a Dream* won't
 let you look away the same person. For that, we should be grateful.

Danny Leigh, *Sight and Sound*, December 2000