

WE ARE THE FLESH
 Directed by Emiliano Rocha Minter
 (2016) Arrow Video Blu-ray / DVD combo



Life, sex and death. Three of the most primal and fundamental experiences that human beings have. One leads to another and then back again—at least that's how transgressive Mexican director Emiliano Rocha Minter (*Inside*, 2013; not to be confused with Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury's 2007 French film of the same name) sees things in this often-bizarre, controversial, repugnant and deeply layered film. It's an unsettling mélange of art house, porno theater, avant-garde and psychological character study.

We Are the Flesh is not for the faint-hearted, easily offended, or those looking for a traditional narrative. The story—extremely difficult to follow and continually reshaping itself—begins with Mariano (Noé Hernández; *Sin Nombre*, 2009), a homeless man squatting in a dilapidated house. He drags in bundles of cardboard, takes some sort of drug from an eye dropper, and beats on a drum when not making gasoline or trading for food from an unseen source. Mariano is a complete nut job and basket case. After watching him descend into a frenzy of percussive exhaustion, viewers can be forgiven for wondering so early on just where in hell this is headed.

Enter Fauna (Maria Evoli) and Lucio (Diego Gamaliel), siblings in search of food. The oddball hermit takes them in and puts them to work building a structural framework from timber, old chairs and other bits of detritus, all held together by an endless supply of packing tape. The superstructure is then covered in cardboard. The rooms of the old building become a series of womb-like caves—stages upon which dark things are going to happen. After watching Mariano force vegetarian Lucio to eat a steak in order to save Fauna's life (perhaps influenced by Anthony DiBlasi's *Dread*, 2009), viewers can be forgiven for wondering just what the hell all of this is supposed to mean.

As it turns out, Mariano isn't merely an unpredictable, quirky hermit eeking out an existence among the ruins. Once Fauna and Lucio are fully in his power, he becomes Dante's Virgil, Satan, a deliver, a liberator, and the fullest expression of humanity's darkest fantasies all rolled into one. Sometimes guiding, sometimes participating, sometimes watching, he draws his two protégées into a phantasmagoric web of forbidden desires, shattering every social and moral boundary. In the final act, two other characters are lured into the cave-womb: a soldier named Mexico (Gabino Rodríguez) who is ritually killed, and María (María Cid) who is violated by both Fauna and Lucio.

Every performance is powerful and compelling, but it is the unholy trinity of Hernández, Evoli and Gamaliel who command the screen. Their depictions are uninhibited and fearless, especially when placed in some extremely intimate scenes. Hernández's leering, maniacal hermit-guide projects a constant aura of menace and domination.

The transgressive elements on display are plentiful, and just when the viewer thinks the most unbelievable taboo has been breached, another comes along to up the ante. Be prepared for urination, cannibalism, rape, masturbation (male and female), necrophilia, incest, fellatio, and Fauna letting her menstrual blood drip into the open mouth of her brother. None of this is hinted at, shown off-screen or relegated to the shadows. It is plainly and unflinchingly expressed in ways designed to violate and destabilize the viewer.

There are a few films that make one want to take a shower afterward to wash away the funk—Nico Mastorakis's *Island of Death* (1976), Kazuo Komizu's *Entrails of a Virgin* (1986), Jorg Buttgerit's *Nekromantik* (1987), and Srđjan Spasojević's *A Serbian Film* (2010) to name a few—but *We Are the Flesh* may just top the list. Several scenes are overtly pornographic but nothing is presented as titillating or erotic. Rather, sex acts are offered up as a messy, bestial exchange of bodily fluids and nothing else. According to critic Virginie Sélavy's 35+ minute video essay on the film (included as a special feature), Rocha Minter's emphasis on the body and its primal functions derives from the ideology of the Marquis de Sade.

De Sade's writings focused on exploring the darkest aspects of human nature, and acting upon those aspects to their fullest. He believed that all civilized restraint on behavior should be eliminated. Writing in "*Aline et Valcour*," de Sade said "We are no guiltier in following the primitive impulses that govern us than is the Nile for her floods or the sea for her waves." De Sade's philosophy is one component that pervades *We Are the Flesh*. Another is the Theater of Cruelty, developed by Antonin Artaud of France.

Artaud (who spent a considerable portion of his life in insane asylums, as did de Sade) experimented with a brash, offensive and confrontational approach to theater. He relied more on movement and gesture than on dialogue, and subjected his audiences to bright lights and discordant sounds during performances. The intent was to blend actors and audience into a single visceral experience that unveiled and encouraged the baseness of human nature.

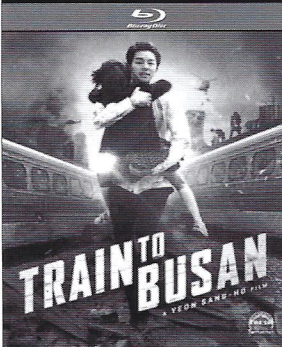
Rocha Minter takes both of these influences—as well as the work of Alejandro Jodorowsky, specifically *El Topo* (1970) and *The Holy Mountain* (1973)—and successfully weaves them together to create a film that bombards the viewer from start to finish. Utilizing strong colors, overwhelming sonic distortion, repellent images and a story that offers itself up for multiple interpretations, there is no sitting back and just watching the film. It's nearly an interactive experience. It shocks, confuses, angers and mystifies. The one thing it *doesn't* do is allow the viewer to be comfortable. It explores some of the darkest and most unthinkable elements that reside in the primordial center of our human nature. It's not something that should be viewed when young or impressionable people are present.

The high definition (1080p) presentation is beautiful to look at. Colors are amazing—the viewer can almost feel the warmth of the reds and oranges, and the coolness of the blues—and detail is extremely clear (perhaps *too* clear, as when we are shown prolonged close ups of human genitalia). Two audio options are included: 5.1 surround and uncompressed 2.0 stereo.

Optional English subtitles are also available.

Special features include the original theatrical trailer, a stills gallery, two short films by Rocha Minter (*Dentro* and *Videohome*), the aforementioned video essay by Sélavy (founder and editor-at-large of *Electric Sheep*, an online magazine for transgressive cinema), and individual interviews with the director and cast members Noé Hernández, María Evoli and Diego Gamaliel. Sélavy's essay is a must-watch in order to bring some sense of coherence to the film.

J. Todd Kingree



TRAIN TO BUSAN
 Directed by Sang-ho Yeon
 (2016) Well Go USA Blu-ray/DVD

Perhaps no other subgenre of horror has experienced the fantastic evolution of zombie movies. Disregarding the pre-Romero variety, zombies were a legitimate, ghoulish new threat upon their debut at the box office in the 1960s, a grisly memento mori to audiences already too intimately familiar with the specter of death from the ongoing Vietnam War. That lasted a good ten years, until the 1970s simultaneously split the undead into cannon

fodder for action movies and transitioned them from icons of fear into totems of disgust thanks to the Italian gut-munchers. Though a few steadfast holdouts like Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* tried to keep the faith, not even that classic could entirely get away from emphasizing the gristlier elements inherent in zombie films. Soon "zombie" became shorthand for films in even poorer taste than the beleaguered slasher—horror pictures for the truly disturbed or disturbing.

As the past decade-and-a-half has shown us, though, zombies as a genre have not been immune to the same cycle as horror franchises, which all feel the need to eventually descend into repetition and finally borderline comic outlandishness (here I present *Hellraiser* in Space, *Jason* in Space, *Leprechaun* in Space, *Leatherface* in the Illuminati, and Michael Meyers on *Big Brother* as evidence). The mindless dead have slowly transitioned away from a terrifying threat into a source of derision at best and comedy at worst. *The Walking Dead* has almost become a byline for overly-hyped, underwhelming television, while every week a new spate of direct-to-video zom-coms hit the racks; what was once fresh and original in *Shaun of the Dead* is now the bargain movie of the week at Wal-Mart, and it feels as if horror fandom is collectively holding its' breath, waiting for someone to come along and put a bullet in the zombie genre's head so we can all go back to remembering the time that everyone and their grandmother—literally—didn't have an "I Heart Zombies" bumper sticker.

Enter *Train to Busan*.

Because it comes out of South Korea, *Train to Busan* is such a welcome departure from zombie pop culture as we've come to know it. Boasting frightening zombies, some welcome social commentary that isn't "people are the REAL monsters," and a unique setup, *Train to Busan* is the zombie movie for people who're tired of zombie movies. It's a love letter to what made us all fall in love with the subgenre in the first place, and a sign that maybe, just maybe, zombies can stick around a little while longer before they rot out their welcome.

Seok-Woo is on his way to winning the "worst dad of the year" award. Not only did he forget his daughter Soo-an's birthday, he also missed her class recital, and his half-hearted attempt to make it up to her—a new Nintendo game system—is the same gift he gave her the last time he forgot an important holiday. A cut-throat funds manager, Seok-Woo inexplicably has guardianship of Soo-an, and the viewer gets the impression that's probably due to the presence of his mother, whom the