

SUMMER SCARS

MOVING PICTURES ARTICLE

It was only after watching Cameron Crowe's VANILLA SKY that I became aware how decisions we make in our life could be directly influenced by the culture that we consumed during our youth.

So, if Dario Argento is responsible for the type of girls that I date, who can I blame for the films I choose to make?

Critics and reviewers were quick to draw comparisons between DARKLANDS and THE WICKER MAN, as they were between THE LAST HORROR MOVIE and MAN BITES DOG, but recent comparisons between SUMMER SCARS and STAND BY ME have raised more questions than they answer.

SUMMER SCARS is based on a true life incident that happened to me during my childhood. When I was 11 years old, my friends and I would spend our weekends in the woods, playing war games and letting our imaginations run wild. Our favorite spot was called Devils Drop; two muddy embankments leading to a narrow stream with a fallen tree across the top. Think KING KONG and you should be able picture it.

One Sunday morning, we were building a dam in the stream when a man appeared, dressed in a combat jacket, sporting an air rifle. If we tried to escape, he shot at us, his aim getting closer and closer, until one of us was hit in the face. Eventually he got bored and let us go, but it was a terrifying ordeal, one that still haunts me when I hear about massacres like Virginia Tech.

So, whilst I agree that my earlier films owe a debt to previous icons of cinema, the same can not be said for SUMMER SCARS...

Or can it?

I often become aware of the influences on my work after the fact, and it was during a festival screening of SUMMER SCARS in Sweden that I made a connection between the football sequence in KES in which games teacher Brian Glover bullies Billy Casper and the way that Kevin Howarth terrorises the kids in SUMMER SCARS. Somehow, the spirit of that scene in KES found its way into SUMMER SCARS, as did the core ingredients of British realism that personifies much of Ken Loach's work (non-actors, available light, hand held camera).

In this context, we are ultimately products of our environment, and as much as we try to blow the monkey off our shoulder, there is often no escaping that forces that have formed us.

What always surprises me about the creative process is how influence becomes apparent after the fact. Six months into SUMMER SCARS touring the festival circuit I became aware, through reading various reviews, that the most obvious comparison to my coming-of-age drama was Rob Reiner's STAND BY ME, a film I had seen and admired, but which, probably due to it being set in the US, was not the most immediate influence. Watching SUMMER SCARS for the umpteenth time at BUFF (a children and youth film festival in Malmo, Sweden) it suddenly struck me how the relationship between my adult character and the kids resembled that of the games teacher and Billy Casper in Ken Loach's KES. What struck me about KES and what I set out to achieve with SUMMER SCARS was a heightened level of authenticity, an agenda which permeated every aspect of the film-making process.