

35 Shots

By Rebecca Boyle

There's always something vaguely disturbing about realism, possibly because when we go to the cinema reality is what we are there to escape. But sometimes a little dose of reality is needed to make an impact—it is something different enough on the screen to make us sit up and pay attention but familiar enough for us to understand and sympathise with characters and plots.

The 2009 creation of French writer-director Claire Denis, *35 Shots* portrays the changing relationship between a widowed father and his university-aged daughter in a poor part of France, where dissatisfaction and uncertainty creep into their lives with the suicide of the father's colleague and the introduction of a love interest for the daughter. The plot has no twists and turns and no climax: don't expect one. It is perfectly linear, told not in the form of the traditional dramatic three-act script but as though the viewer were merely privileged to pry into the family's life for a few days, observing everything exactly as it happens, down to the dull cycle of menial tasks such as dressing, cooking, and eating. It is a study of lives, rather than a dramatisation of them, one with which it is impossible not to sympathise. Like it or not, the repetitive tasks, and the complete ordinariness of characters and situations, is something we are all familiar with.

Everything about this film is understated: the lighting, which is dull and allows interesting effects with shadow; the cinematography, which, while not cutting edge, is well composed for an effect of discontent and poverty; and the soundtrack and dialogue. Dialogue is used sparingly, and, when it is used, is not flowery, witty, or scathing, and, as such, is completely believable. The soundtrack is mainly a soft, quietly mournful instrumental piece that gives the film an almost ghostly atmosphere. It really does seem like the film is full of ghosts: not of people but of memories and regrets. All these factors combine to create a mature and surprisingly moving film, considering the plot deals with such familiar situations. More likely, the movie is more powerful *because* we are familiar with its themes.

I only have one concern about this movie. A young people's film festival seems a very unlikely place to find something that is so slow moving, has a linear plot, and relies on complete subtlety. It's something that many adults would find hard to appreciate, let alone children and teenagers. Despite this, I think everyone, whatever their age, will be able to gain something from this beautifully crafted film—it is impossible not to become engrossed by this simply told piece of reality.