

LET US LIVE FOR THE BEAUTY OF OUR OWN REALITY

Scud Films: 5 Voyage (2013)

Introduction

The central theme of Scud's earlier films has been love, though there have also been hints of his other interest, the afterlife. In this, his 5th film, though love is still there as a motivating force, it is death and the afterlife that are the main focus. The film is organised into a number of episodes, all of them concerned with death in one way or another. Some, though not all, of the episodes have titles and subtitles, and I have included these headings in the appropriate places in my account. And just to quickly add: those of you who have read my previous stuff will know that I have a penchant for finding musical analogies when describing Scud's films, and this film is clearly a theme and variations and we start with a very substantial statement of the theme itself:

If we look at the synopses of the film to be found around the place, in Wikipedia for instance, or in IMDB, or even on Scud's own website, we are told that it is about a young psychiatrist who embarks on a voyage in the course of which he revisits some of the cases that he has been involved with in his life so far. It is, unsurprisingly, not as simple as that. In fact the main protagonist, the psychiatrist, if he is indeed the main protagonist in a film that has many protagonists, only turns up when we are about a third of the way through the film. Before that we have what to all intents and purposes is a short film all of its own, some 20-25 minutes long, which is set in China in 1968 at the time of Mao Zedong's cultural revolution, whereby high school graduates were sent out into often remote areas of the country to be 're-educated' by the local rural population. (All of this is explained in titles at the beginning of the film.) They were known as the 'lost generation', and Scud, in political mode, dedicates this section of his movie to them. Our first protagonist is one such student – we never learn his name – and we first meet him, a tiny figure, making his way across the empty grasslands of inner Mongolia, beautifully shot by Scud, taking full advantage of a scope screen ratio that emphasises the wide open spaces of the steppe; finally arriving at the small sheep station that has been allocated to him. As he arrives Scud has a brief freeze frame of a young man riding into the settlement, and it will be he that becomes the object of the young student's affections. Initially all are very standoff-ish: the chief greets him coolly and the young guy just touches his hand in greeting. No sooner is the student there than he is flung in at the deep end, learning to ride by being hoiked up onto a horse, and helping in the slaughter of a sheep, but things begin to thaw a bit as he helps the young guy with the fence, and indeed they become friends. They don't share a language, everything is done in dumbshow, and when they do talk we don't hear what they are saying. We do however hear when the young guy laughs when our student splutters over a drink, but for the rest Scud must rely on the language of the silent cinema, the language of gesture and event, of facial expression and bodily attitude, though he does have Yo Yat Yio's music. A title informs us that people from the south are generally good cooks, and so it proves when the student does the cooking. His now new found friend invites a young woman in to share the food and there are smiles all round – she even wraps her scarf around his neck; and the student and the young guy bond further when they have a wrestling match and the student manages to floor his opponent. In the meantime he has shown his books to his friend, who takes them away to be inspected by the chief. He is reluctant to part with them: a title tells us: 'To take away his books is to empty his soul.' He only gets one book back – a poster of Chairman Mao looks down on him from the roof of the yurt*– approved reading we presume. (*Yurt: a fairly large tent type structure built onto a wooden frame that can dismantled and moved when necessary. We are with a nomadic people.)

Wolves present a major threat to the community, getting into the corrals and attacking the sheep and the student sees them off by yowling at them, but Scud-cross fades until the student's face is merged into that of one of the wolves – despite everything the student is still a threat and it is left for us to guess why: he is after all still the outsider, from their perspective a representative of that other world of distant authority that does not have their best interests at heart – but perhaps I am over-interpreting here. Suffice it to say that the wolves wake him up the next night and he sees that his friend's bed is empty – he's visiting the woman in the next door yurt. Going out he sees the guy naked – he's come out for a pee. He beckons the student to come in and join them but the student sulks: he won't. Instead he looks at the photograph of his parents that he had been using as a bookmark. Several interpretations suggest themselves:- Is it that he can't cope with the different cultural values implicit in the invitation? Or is it that he doesn't want to share the young guy with the woman? Or is it that he cannot yet come to terms with the sexual implications of the invitation. Or is it all three?

The section reaches its climax when his friend disappears and he and the girl gallop off and find him dead. The tribe ritually cleanse the body, circle him chanting, cut him across his chest and thighs, and cremate him. He has died a premature death and, as Scud makes explicit later in the movie, we must therefore presume that he is now in the afterlife. At this point it is time for the tribe to move on and they pack up and go: the student waves them goodbye. Wolves descend and kill a sheep and the student now empties *his* soul by throwing his remaining book onto the fire. Chanting, he circles the dead sheep whom we may now suggest represents his dead friend, and stripping off his clothes he cuts his own chest and thighs, and finally his own throat. Whatever may not be clear at this point it is certainly clear that both he and the young guy have died prematurely and we may presume that he has gone to join his friend / putative lover in the afterlife. And as far as the structure of the movie is concerned, we have established the main theme of the movie: premature death.

As I say, this episode seems like a film all of its own, an impression supported by the fact that at this point Scud runs end titles, with the names of the actors – half of whom are playing themselves, with himself as director, etc.

Variation I

And it is only at this point, the start of the film 'proper', that we finally meet the psychiatrist himself, and we are, as I say, about a third of the way through the film. We start with a very short 'variation' in which eight people sit around a table and are served with a meal that obviously contains a quick acting poison since they all fall onto the table and are then covered in white shrouds by the attendants. A crowd of people watch from a balcony and the camera comes to rest on the last of them, the psychiatrist himself. There's a shot of eight wreaths, each of which contains the names of the primary creators of the film, the director, the editor, the costume designer etc., effectively a second set of credits, and we must presume that these are the people whom we've just witnessed eating the poisoned food. A burst of music, (by Smetana, an unexpected choice but very effective – Scud's use of music is always very effective) takes us to the psychiatrist getting onto a boat in Honk Kong harbour – the boat's name is Scud, i.e. Scud will accompany him on his voyage. He is being shown how to drive it by the owner – again we don't hear their conversation. He shows the owner his ID card, which has the actor's real name on it, Ryo Van Kooten, and we know from interview material that Scud likes to draw on his actors' real lives in the course of making his films. In voiceover, duplicated as written text, Ryo tells us that he doesn't know whether his job led him to his depression or vice versa, but that he intends to use the time to record stories from his practice and from his research to address the question and that, if he doesn't succeed in answering it, it will be the last voyage of his life. From which we may gather that, for all that we see a real boat in a real voyage from Hong Kong down through the islands of the South Pacific, the journey is at least as much a

psychological journey as it is a real one. At the end of the movie there is an epilogue in which he offers to write better endings to the episodes, which we then see, but in my analysis I shall re-attach them to their respective episodes. And just to note, his appearances in some episodes can be very brief, he would seem to be more of a silent witness than someone who is an integral part of the action.

As he drives out of the harbour there is one of Scud's self-referential moments as he passes under the now completed bridge from *Amphetamine*, and sees the heads of Spider and Moon, two of the major characters from *Love Actually... Sucks*, floating in the sea – which is where we left them at the end of that film. And an incidental detail – his parting is watched by a Taoist priest whom we hardly notice, but who will turn up later in the film.

Variation II *The Lady Who Can Tell Everything: Red and Jayson*

The second 'variation' is about a fortune teller, Red, and her son, Jayson who will be killed in a bus crash. We first meet Red as she sets out her stall on the side of the road, a banner proclaiming her business, and she tells her customers their fortunes, examining their palms, casting a set of shell like wooden counters, and etc., and crucially from our perspective, suggesting to them that heaven and hell are different interpretations of the same concept, and that there are many universes. A friend turns up and tells her she has no need to worry about *her* future, she has a son who will look after her in her old age. This is, incidentally, the first time in the film that we have heard live conversation. She heads home and records advertising messages on a little tape recorder. We cut to Jayson himself on the bus from Taiwan ringing her to tell her he is on the way home; the bus driver is having a row with someone on his phone, shouting and yelling and not watching what he's doing, the cause we presume of the crash. Red tidies herself up in the mirror in preparation for her son's arrival, but suddenly stops and looks startled and on second viewing we will realise that that is the moment of the crash. Scud emphasises the point by having the camera pull focus onto a photo of her and her son that is hanging on the wall. We next find her in some sort of hotel lobby: in the background an attendant lays the table – for the next lot of 'suiciders'? Her friend turns up and tells her about the crash and she starts throwing things at her – the bringer of bad news. She goes home and destroys all her advertising tapes – her future has disappeared at a stroke – and the next morning she heads for the bus terminal and watches the unfolding news on the television, a destination board flips over with the names of the passengers whose arrivals have been delayed, etc. She heads for the beach where she finds a group of people who circle her and walk off into the sea. They're all naked and we surmise that these are the ghosts of the people who died in the crash – ghosts are always naked in Scud's films. Ryo appears amongst them, another brief appearance in his role as witness, and the last person in the line is Jayson himself who stands and weeps. Scud further develops his notion of the afterlife as an intertitle tells us that: 'Many Asians believe that there exists a plutonian territory outside of heaven and hell, a city of premature death where the ghosts of those who died before their destined time will reside.' (In Greek mythology Pluto is the god of the afterlife, generally seen as more benign than otherwise.) In The Epilogue of the movie we see Red receiving another phone-call from Jayson telling her that he is still in Taiwan, but that he is now in a beautiful place, presumably in one of the many universes of the afterlife itself, and Red seems to be happy with this since we see her back on the street setting up her stall again and turning her attention to new customers.

Variation III *Fall in Love: Leni and Sebastian*

There is, in Hanover, which is where we are next, a fountain, known as the Grosse Fontäne, which every few minutes shoots great spurts of water high into the air. At the end of the episode Sebastian will have drowned himself in that fountain. On first viewing it is not entirely clear

why he has done this, though the subtitle of the section, 'Fall in Love: Leni & Sebastian' should have given us all the cues that we needed. The episode starts not with the couple but with Ryo on his boat washing and getting his breakfast, and we hear him saying the title of the section, 'Fall in Love'. We cut to Leni, noticeable in a green coat, heading, as we shall discover, for a life drawing class (where we will catch a glimpse of Ryo, who is also there – again in his role as a silent witness?) Leni arrives and once there, after settling herself, she wanders around looking to see what the other students are doing and stops behind Sebastian who is not drawing the naked models but a clothed woman sat in a thoughtful pose – whom we shall discover is Leni herself. She smiles at him but he doesn't turn and smile back, instead he looks fixedly to the front. Not a word has been spoken but the next thing that we see is the two of them sitting by the fountain, now chatting away, though still he finds it hard to look at her, and we get the impression that he is very shy. She tells him that she is fascinated by men who can draw, and that she has to use words, and he tells her he can only communicate using pictures: a bid for her affections? They go back to his apartment where she takes a bath. He draws her – his way of saying that he loves her, then joins her in the bath. But when he goes to kiss her she turns away and catches sight of one of his pictures – a picture of a naked woman with what looks like blood running over her – and takes fright, getting out of the bath. Watching the episode for the second time, when we know what the denouement is going to be, we recognise that already all the signs of their incompatibility are there. Back at the life drawing classroom we find the both of them on their own – both naked, Sebastian is drawing her – trying literally to capture her on the page as it were, but she is not to be captured, and therein lies the problem.

There's a dramatic gloomy shot of three industrial chimneys with a caption that tells us that this is Hanover – clearly not an encouraging image.

Next morning Leni is woken up by her computer clinking, and she finds all the pictures of her that Sebastian has been drawing, including the first one that I've already mentioned and culminating in one where he is kissing her. She responds on line and we hear her words as she walks around the city with, not irrelevantly, her back to the camera, telling him that she's a columnist of love stories who needs inspiration but that she herself is not in the mood for love: 'I'm sorry if I've given you wrong signals.' She returns to her apartment and looks at more of Sebastian's pictures, one of them including a road sign saying caution, another showing a torso without a head – warning signs whatever else they aren't. At the same time he's sent her a message inviting her to meet him again at the fountain. After considerable hesitation she agrees, but when she gets there she finds him lying naked on top of the quiescent fountain itself: waiting for its next ejaculation – a not inappropriate word. It spurts, and she watches as he is carried upwards by it. But there's an abrupt cut to Leni at home and then going out for a walk with her mother. Her mother has an appointment and walks on but Leni stays, standing in front of a long wall covered with graffiti, where she gets a phone-call telling her that her mother is dead, followed by a gun shot, followed in its turn by a shot of Leni looking down – at her mother's corpse we presume – and weeping, whereupon it cuts back to Sebastian turning over and over in the now subsiding fountain until he ends up face down in the pool, drowned. We must presume that it is his unrequited love for Leni that has driven him to it and Leni tells his floating body that this not the way to love. His death may have been a premature death but he has not passed over. Instead we watch as he comes back to life and clambers back up onto the top of the fountain and a title tells us that some suicides are condemned to be repeated over and over again to repeat the agony indefinitely. As for the episode with her mother that has interrupted the sequence, it remains a puzzle, though one suggestion might be that it is a flashback to her mother's death and that, for Leni, Sebastian's death echoes that of her mother, though why does the gunshot come after the phone call? Is that the moment at which Sebastian dies? Whatever else, the episode certainly compares Sebastian's death with that of Leni's mother and Leni herself appears to be more upset by her mother's death than by Sebastian's. In The Epilogue

we find Leni back in her apartment – she now does have a boyfriend who looks over her shoulder as she receives e-mails from the ‘dead’ Sebastian telling her that now she can write about him; but she writes that love is insane, that it makes no sense, that it is depression. And as a footnote, watching the sequence over and over again as I have been doing, you realise what an important contribution is made by Yu Yat Yio’s music – not just used to create mood and emotion but as an integral part of the movie, particularly with regard to the pacing of it. It is a good deal more than just accompaniment.

Variation IV

We are now in Amsterdam. This episode features Ryo himself and Adrian, a guy who he picks up at a club. They are not named in a subtitle, and by contrast with the other episodes in the film, this episode is gleefully comic. It opens with a shot of Ryo on his boat in the gloom of the morning. The shot is taken from the side and Scud has a cut as Ryo lights a cigarette on the boat in the morning and exhales what is seemingly the same cigarette that night in the men’s room of a club. The two shots are framed identically, both taken from the side, and Ryo seems not to have moved at all. It’s a brilliant cut: you have to blink a couple of times to register exactly what Scud has done. Adrian comes in, looks are exchanged though nothing is said, and it is only subsequently that we realise that it’s a pick up. We watch them in the bar then in an opium den talking away twenty to the dozen, laughing uproariously, clearly getting on like a house on fire. We don’t hear what they are saying, but we do hear the clinks of china as cups are put down in front of them etc, this inconsistency masked by the accompanying music: thus a seamless blend of the diegetic and the non-diegetic, the potential incongruities of which entirely pass us by. We continue to not hear what they are saying as, high as kites, they rush out into the street, stop by a beggar with a sign in miss-pelt English, ‘NEED HELP PLIES SPARE CHANGE’. Nothing abashed they strip off their clothes and give them to him, and start rushing around the streets stark naked to the delight of a couple of prostitutes advertising their services in the shop windows. They even steal a couple of bicycles and off they go, two naked cyclists riding around the streets of Amsterdam. (And they did it for real! as the two actors attest in the making-ofs.) The whole sequence is utterly laugh out loud gleeful, and by and large Scud doesn’t do gleeful. The mood only changes the next morning as the two of them get to know each other when Ryo asks his pick-up his name. The guy tells him he has an unpronounceable Chinese name so Ryo settles on Adrian, and the guy tells him he doesn’t care. (A friend turns up with their clothes, and with Adrian’s guitar – it’s the first time that we see the guitar.) It is not long before Adrian picks up a book about suicide and we are back to the main theme of the movie. They ask each other whether they themselves have considered suicide – Ryo tells him that his job is to prevent people from doing it, but that he isn’t always successful, but we get the decided impression that Adrian has considered it. A holiday brochure for Australia is lying around and Ryo suggests they go. It cuts to Ryo alone on his boat singing along with a Ramses Shaffy song: *Sing, Fight, Cry, Pray, Laugh, Work, and Admire*¹ good admonitions all: the music this time carrying the film forward thematically, and the next thing we know they are in Australia, still very much enjoying each other’s company. They drive off into the outback and Adrian takes photographs telling Ryo that he will take more, and send them back to him to help him with his suicidal clients.

The Epilogue – Adrian gets named in his own subtitle this time, finds him in Australia visiting both Uluru, (the Aboriginal name for Ayres Rock) and a similar sandstone outcrop of hills some 25k away, Kata Tjuta (Mount Olga), both sacred places associated with what is known as ‘The Dreaming’, often described as an everywhen, clearly another version of the afterlife itself, in which the ancestors can be found and which, unlike other versions, includes animal as well as

¹ Translation: Google translate

human imagery. The section begins with Ryo finding a newspaper headline about a mysterious Asian man who has been found dead surrounded by the bodies of birds, illustrated by a photo of Adrian. In his thoughts Ryo tells Adrian how close he feels to him and we cut to Adrian himself driving through the outback and telling us in voiceover that he likes being back – it's the only thing that keeps him going whether he's alive or dead. He hits a bird. Getting out of the car he digs some sand out of the desert, animal imagery emerging as he digs as a dog would dig, shooting the sand into a little pile between his legs. He finds the bird, wraps it in his T shirt, puts it tenderly into his hold-all and sprinkles the sand over it. Just along the road he gets to Uluru – the place where all the spirits rest as a title tells us, and as he leaves he holds the hold-all up as an offering to the rock. The next morning we find him at Kata Tjuta where, with his guitar on his back, he sets off walking towards the hills until he becomes a tiny, figure and eventually disappears. He has entered the dreaming. Back at the boat Ryo rings him. A female voice informs him that Adrian is dead, and invites him to pay some money into her account – she even gives him the HSBC number! He weeps. He has a vision of the naked Adrian (he is after all already a ghost) strapped to a cross and ascending into the clouds – Christian iconography is part of The Dreaming too. And as for Ryo himself, Adrian is the only character with whom he has had an emotional relationship, a relationship in which each is part of the story of the other. He is no longer the dispassionate observer. A positive relationship it may have been but Adrian still ends up killing himself.

Variation V *Mute Fate: Ming and Leela*

This is a comparatively short episode and we only see Ryo as he types up the title onto his computer, so we presume it is another of his cases. We open on Ming walking out of a shop as a series of titles flash across the screen questioning whether he really is mute, suggesting that he is only pretending and also suggesting that the maid who looks after him is a whore. Whatever else, he seems in some way be mentally challenged, always looking down at his feet, never smiling, clearly finding life problematic. And as we watch the episode we discover that he is indeed mute, and that indeed he has a maid, Leela, who looks after him and who provides for all his needs, even to the extent of showering him and masturbating him. In his turn he clings to her and cries bitterly. She takes him to see the doctor to see if he can prescribe any treatment but he threatens to hospitalise him, otherwise . . . he will die? – we don't get to hear what 'otherwise' is, but that would seem to be the implication. Anyway Ming attacks him and Leela has to drag him away as he yells at the staff; and back home we find him ill in bed. Leela produces a cake – it's her birthday. She questions him, is he in pain? can he hear her? is he afraid to die? and wondering to herself what will happen to her when he does. Which he does – die that is. Has she put him out of his misery? There is no evidence that she has but the thought does cross one's mind. Whatever, we next find Leela in tears sitting on the promenade; a nearby couple have his photo, another nearby couple have his ashes. The latter are to be scattered at sea and the Taoist priest, whom we hardly noticed from earlier in the film, officiates. No sooner are Ming's ashes scattered than he re-appears, now another naked ghost, and as such only she sees him, the priest doesn't. And there we leave it until The Epilogue where we find Leela back at the apartment sorting through his stuff. Opening a cake-tin she finds payment slips of one sort and another. So off to the bank to cash them in, there's a lot of money so her future is secured. Ming's ghost encourages her from the other side of the counter, nudging the teller and even turning her head to redirect her attention. The teller is aware of something, a breeze maybe, but can't see Ming; nor can passers by as Leela holds his hand and sets off down the street, a middle aged lady holding the hand of a naked young man, the latter invisible to all except her. Shot from ... of a ... behind, it's a delightful shot!

Variation VI

As the film moves to its end the episodes start to be shorter, though the theme remains the same and we now find Ryo back in his boat. He has a vision of his father who tells him that there is a world beyond life. Ryo wonders whether his vision is a dream, or a product of his imagination, or a projection of his wishes, but his dad tells him there is no difference. In the afterlife all differences dissolve. With his father 'dead' he wonders what the point is of staying.

Variation VIIa *Voyage: Last Words: The Entrepreneur: Uncle Chan*

Variation VIIb *Voyage: Last Words: The Entrepreneur: The Artist: Ryan*

Two linked episodes.²

Episode vii a: The link is made right at the beginning of the first one as we watch Uncle Chan waving goodbye to his extended family who are leaving in a car labelled 'ARTIST'. Left on his own we read his thoughts as he wanders round the house. It's a lovely house: there are pictures on the wall, beautiful vases on side tables, all tastefully arranged. There's a collection of vintage electric fans on a sideboard, there are photos of his family. He feels that there is nothing unfulfilled in his life and he has made proper provision for his family. All he faces now is aging, and he would like to skip that bit. We may have noticed in passing that he wears a long blue scarf which we now see hanging from a big, slowly revolving ceiling fan. We must presume that he has committed suicide. There has, as I have indicated, been no live sound in the episode, but again we have Yu Yat Yiu's haunting music.

Episode vii b: After the entrepreneur, the artist, Ryan, who will also kill himself. We find him in a jacuzzi at the top of a high skyscraper; an attendant appears and hands him his robe and congratulates him on deciding to become a film director. He tells him that he is his big friend, he's clearly a fan, but Ryan bangs his head against the wall yelling 'Depression!' and strides around the roof making big melodramatic gestures and yelling about the year he has just had: 'I can't take it anymore!' and he bows to imaginary audiences. Are they farewell bows? Maybe. Suffice it to say that he feels as if he has achieved nothing. Getting a text he discovers that he has missed an important appointment, what can he do? Looking around he sees a bird sitting on the edge of the roof and watches as it flies away, and taking the cue from the bird he decides that he too can fly, and spreading his arms bird-like he jumps off the edge, we must presume to his death. As for his attendant, once I'd got the notion into my head that he was a big fan of Ryan's I couldn't resist the temptation to start finding the puns: Uncle Chan is after all being watched by his collection of fans sitting on the sideboard and his biggest fan is his slowly revolving ceiling fan, the one over which he hangs his scarf to signal his demise. Ryan's attendant is *his* biggest fan, and he has bowed to his imaginary audiences, they presumably are also his fans. Also to be noted, and this link is real enough, Ryan's robe is the same colour as Uncle Chan's scarf, and on a more serious note, the entrepreneur commits suicide because he is content with his life; the artist commits suicide because he is unhappy with his.

² Anyone who has any knowledge of Scud's own biography cannot but have noticed autobiographical element in the two episodes, not least because Scud was an entrepreneur who became an artist, but I am not writing a biographical study, my primary evidence is the work, and that is what I am analysing.

Finale *Voyage: Epilogue*

It's at this point that Ryo, urged on by Irving Cheung on the sound track to 'Start from here', revisits all the major stories – except the Mongolian one – in order to write 'better endings' for them. In the course of my analysis I have re-attached these endings to their parent stories in order to see their narrative trajectory more clearly, but having them all together at the end of the film encourages us to compare and contrast the various deaths that have occurred. Jayson is killed in a road accident, an accident that he had no control over, and he appears along with his fellow passengers as a ghost that only Red can see. He is clearly in the afterlife, a fact confirmed when Red gets a post mortem phone call from him telling her that he is now in a beautiful place. We have Sebastian, by contrast, committing suicide, his unrequited love for Leni having driven him to it. He has not crossed over, and is instead doomed for ever to perpetually relive the agony of his death. Ming, by contrast again, has died of natural causes, so he too has passed over into the afterlife, seen as a ghost only by Leela. And we've just had Uncle Chan committing suicide because he is happy with his life and Ryan committing suicide because he is unhappy with his. We do not see what their respective statuses might be afterwards. Finally we have Adrian, a different death again – he's returned to the only place that he has ever felt happy with his life and he's walked into the sacred hills of the outback and disappeared after which he is seen by Ryo ascending Christlike into the clouds. Which is where the film could well have ended: and it would appear that, as far as Ryo is concerned it has ended there since we see that he has sent an e-mail to Scud himself (and to Lena as it happens) with an attachment linking them to the now finished film. A title tells him (and us): 'Your message has been sent.'

Coda

We have seen the various narratives coming together in the epilogue, but as I say, it doesn't end there because after the epilogue comes the Coda – that's my name for it – and one question remains unanswered, the question that Ryo raised as he set off on his voyage, and that is the question of whether his job has led him to his depression or vice versa, and we remember that if he hasn't answered that question (by the end of the movie) then this will be the last voyage that he ever takes. We may also remember that he has told Adrian that it is his job to prevent people from committing suicide, and he hasn't exactly been successful at that. So when we see him drawing down the blinds and taking a handful of pills and falling to sleep, we must guess that he has failed to answer the question and that this has been his last voyage. BUT a title comes up telling us that film is like life, that you have to look past the end otherwise you will still be missing something. Thus when he is 'awoken' by some knocking we may guess that we are looking past the end, confirmed when a young guy wearing only a wreath of leaves – credited as Nature Boy in the final cast list – appears and shows him that there's a desert island close by. Again he wonders if his vision is a dream or a product of his imagination or a projection of his wishes, and we remember that his dad told him that there was no difference between them. In sign language Ryo tells Nature Boy that he's come from a distance, mimes cutting his own throat, points to Nature Boy who looks puzzled, but who then points to the island. They paddle across to it in Nature Boy's canoe and we have a quick glimpse of a hunter who shoots them dead. A spray of blood and they are now finally into the afterlife proper:- two beautiful young men, now divested of all their clothing, gleefully chasing each other along the beach of a deserted desert island, accompanied by Julio Iglesias's *Le Mejor de Tu Vida* - the best thing in your life. What could be more appropriate? What more could you ask for?