



the beach

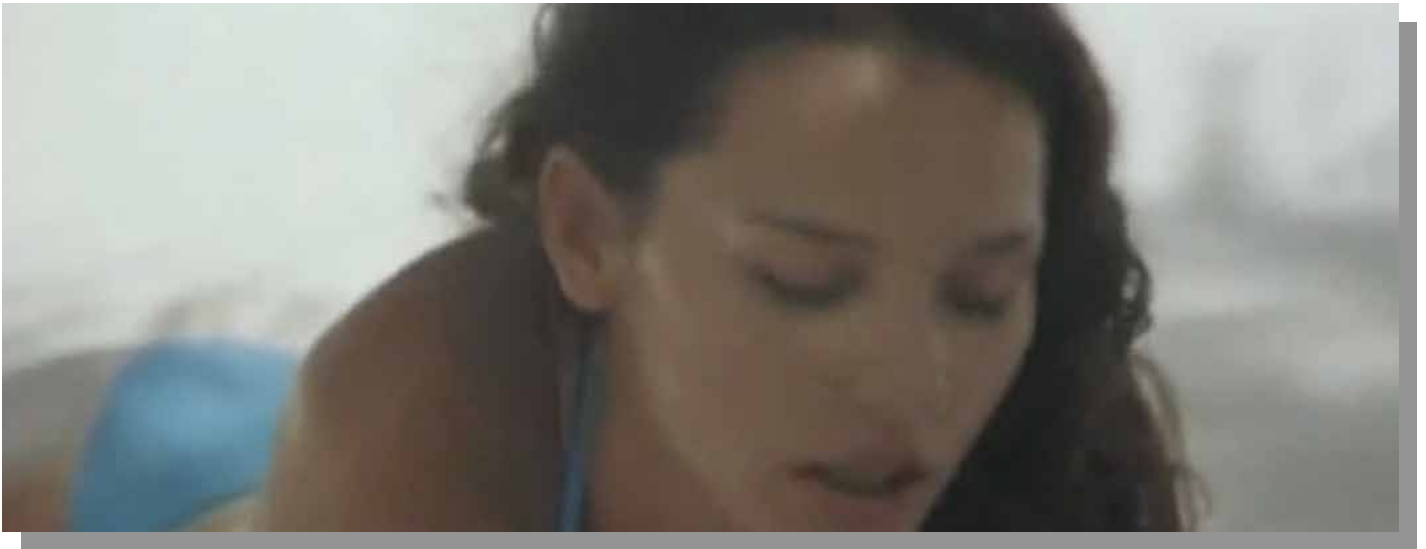


THE BEACH

(UK, 2000, d. Danny Boyle)

Richard, a young American backpacker, wanders Bangkok. At his dingy hotel, he encounters an insane Scot who, before killing himself, tells Richard about a perfect island and gives him a map. In his eagerness to get there, and attracted by Françoise, he shows the map to a young French couple. He also good naturedly gives a copy to some Americans. The three sail, then swim to the island but find trouble in a marijuana plantation patrolled by armed guards.

What they find is an idyllic commune of Western dropouts presided over by an Englishwoman, Sal. While the beach is perfect and life seems to be idyllic, tensions, especially emotional and power tensions, lurk beneath the surface. Françoise becomes involved with Richard. However, he is blackmailed into a sexual relationship with Sal during a supplies-buying mission. (Richard has lied to her about copying the map.)



A shark attack kills a member and wounds another and there are signs that the Americans will try to find the beach. Richard is forced out of the commune to do sentry duty. He is alienated from Françoise and Sal and ostracised by the group. The isolation gets to him in hallucinations and his finding his own 'heart of darkness'. The guards shoot the American intruders and their girlfriends, raid the camp and give Sal an ultimatum to shoot Richard or for all to leave. The gun has no bullets. Everyone leaves, except Sal.

The Beach draws on the modern desire to be out of the rat-race and the contaminating of the earth, the desire to find an where all is in harmony with nature, a perfect beach. Alex Garland's novel has been very popular with younger readers. He tries to capture the spirit of adventure (and the frequent uncertainties of the international backpackers). The movie received high-profile criticism during its production, environmentalists accusing the makers of ruining a beach - and warning that numbers of tourists going to Thailand to see where the movie was made would also upset the ecology.

However, the movie is beautiful to look at, has drawn younger audiences rather than older. Thailand is the setting. When Richard comes into possession of the map of the perfect beach from the raving man who kills himself, it should have been a warning. The movie combines the spirit of a modern Robinson Crusoe or Swiss Family Robinson with that of a

naive young man trying to live in a commune, frugally and in harmony with nature. But, as with William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, human beings are not perfect and, isolated, they have a tendency towards destruction. In sequences reminiscent of *Apocalypse Now*, Richard discovers his dark side and the idyll comes to an end.

Leonardo di Caprio gives a fine and nuanced performance as Richard. The Beach was made by the team responsible for *Shallow Grave*, *Trainspotting* and *A Life Less Ordinary*. Danny Boyle was to win an Oscar for *Slumdog Millionaire*.
