

DE-410

Perspectives in World Cinema

Film Diary



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Sergei Eisenstein

Battleship Potemkin

Movie Notes

While reading about the movie it was mentioned that it served as a Revolutionist propaganda , what's interesting is that the movie was actually banned in many countries including Soviet Russia which establishes that the movie was powerful enough to actually incite people to action. The first thing that I as a modern observer noticed was the loud acting by all the actors, though going by the discussion in class it was due to the theatrical roots of the early actors, also the severe limitation of technology like absence of audio puts the director of movies at certain disadvantage as opposed to theatre .Eisenstein successfully overcame this barrier and was able to portray every emotion effectively. One more interesting thing that needs to be mentioned is that the famous Odessa steps sequence didn't actually happen, but the movie had such a great effect on people's perception that most people accept it as reality. It is a rare instance of the imaginary affecting the real world, which I think is a testament to Eisenstein's superior skills as a Director.

The Red Flag as an early example of visual effects.

- The flag shown at the end of the movie was red, which considering the movie was entirely black and white had a strong effect on the audience as it breaks the monotony of story line and highlights the moment for the audience. The technique was beautifully used to deliver the theme of the movie. One example that came immediately to my mind was Steven Spielberg's '[Schindler's List](#)' where the director used black and white medium to shoot the movie instead of colour and highlighted the most important and emotional scene by using colour ([The girl in Red](#)).
- The movie makers hand painted the Red flag on the on the movie film to achieve the effect, which would have involved a lot of hard work considering there are roughly 30 frames per second and the scene was quite long. Also this technique or hack got me interested in finding out how the early movie directors attained visual effects and I

discovered a source explaining most of the effects and how they were accomplished ([Link](#)- Also posted on moodle)

Lack of a lead character

- The lack of a lead character here aids the theme of the movie which was revolution, It showed that the revolution was by the people and everyone was the hero. If there was a hero the movie would've been about the heroism of the lead character and his vendetta.
- The movie at various points had different heroes first the crew which rises against the injustice, Vakulinchuk has a brief heroic moment, the people at the shore who rise up in arms. It emphasized that the revolution wasn't a single person's agenda but it was masses who were fed up and they started revolution. The revolution did in fact start with Vakulinchuk but his death didn't end the revolution.

Theory of Montages.

- Eisenstein manages to easily get over the limitations of the medium at that time by showing closeups of objects to show the activity taking place Ex. Boiling water to show food is being cooked, cleaning of the cannon to show workers carry on with their work, Empty bowls to show sailors didn't eat food etc. Though closeup shots of actors are common Eisenstein used closeup shots with objects too, this I believe was really masterful and managed to convey the meaning very effectively and in a brief time.
- The directors from Russia followed the Montage theory of cinematography, which claims that the editing of shots is more important than the content of the shots. Eisenstein heavily relies on it to convey complex emotions through sequence of shots. This can be seen from the fact the movie has almost no long takes instead it uses a lot of short takes and edits them together. The movie uses heavy symbolism along with montages to emotionally involve the audience (Ex. When the ship doctor is thrown overboard and the shot is immediately followed by a shot of maggots and the by text to say 'He's gone to feed the fishes')
- Also the movie seemed to juxtapose two different types of images to create contrast, example in one shot the flag was shown flowing peacefully and the next image was of the engine parts moving. This theory of stasis vs dynamism wasn't immediately noticeable but after reading about it and rewatching the movie it was apparent. This creates some pace in the narrative and involves the audience.

Movie split into distinct Acts

- The movie is split into 5 distinct acts which by going the discussion in class was a remnant from the theatre roots of early cinema.
- This technique works in favour of the movie because the story involves many plot points and stringing them together was possible in this manner because of the linearity of the story.

Effective handling and filming of large crowds

- Eisenstein manages to capture the large no. of people very effectively in almost all the scenes in the movie. I cannot point the exact technique but though the crowd is huge the scenes or shots have some order and seem to follow a flow instead of looking haphazard or chaotic.
- The 3rd act really puts into perspective the effective handling of crowd, the flow of crowd is like clockwork and the movements are pleasing to eyes.

Vilification of the Church and rejection of Racism.

- The movie showed the priest as siding with the officers and hence the crew overpowers him and throw him in the cabin. The symbolism with the cross like the slow tapping of the cross and the cross being stuck on the ground. The people thought of church being one with the elite (or officers in this case) and the movie used this scene to generate hatred towards the church
- Though the movie vilified the church they were never the main focus of the hatred, this lead me to believe that the scene with the priest served no other purpose than being a blatant propaganda piece.
- The scene in Act 3 establishes the identity of the uprising as the nationalistic uprising rather than one along racial lines. One man from the crowd yells 'Death to the Jews' which people react very angrily against, they maul the person to death. The people at that point were very much aware of the 'divide and rule' policy and identify the attempt to sabotage the revolution.

Wide angle shots in Act 3 (A Dead man calls for justice)

- The act starts with wide angle shots of the ocean and ships and goes on till almost 5 mins. These shots are cinematically very beautiful and along with the music set up to mood for the act.

Use of graphic violence

- I think the appeal of the 'Odessa steps' sequence is that it is very graphic in nature for Ex.Soldiers stepping on an innocent child, The pram falling down the stairs, Old woman shot in the head. This graphic depiction of the sequence provides a visual shock and the viewer is more emotionally involved with the scene.
- The movie was appreciated for its use of graphic violence, the main advantage is that the use is tasteful and done only when the situation demands it, for example the mutiny on the ship could've been more graphic or violent but Eisenstein did it only for the Odessa Step sequence which raises the emotional impact of the scene.

Closing Thoughts

The movie being very old I didn't expect to get involved or engrossed but I was surprised at how much involved I was in the Odessa Steps sequence or the suspense during the last scene where Potemkin meets the squadron. The movie even after so many years manages to evoke such wide range of emotions from the audience. Even without knowing about the technical aspects of the movie I was able to enjoy the movie in the first screening, which speaks volumes about the way the movie was structured and directed. The theory of montages was very visibly at work throughout the movie, after reading about the theory it became much more obvious and I enjoyed finding how it managed to convey different meanings. It took me 2 viewings to appreciate the technicality of the movie but, as a normal viewer the movie is captivating and entertaining.

Alexander Dovzhenko

Earth(Zemlya)

Movie Notes

The very first thing I got when the movie started was that the movie wasn't conventional in any sense, the opening shots of trees and fruits along with the scene in which the old farmer Semyon dies paint the death of an individual in a very optimistic sense. The first screening for the movie left me confused as I followed the story and the message it gave but I was sure I was missing something, viewing the movie after watching so many other movies by other Directors helped me understand some of the nuances. Still I would say the movie was pretty confusing for me, but in the end I thought I was able to make sense of it .

Use of Montages with a stark contrast with Eisenstein's method

- Eisenstein used short takes with contrasting images to evoke strong emotions whereas Dovzhenko uses longer takes and similar subjects to convey emotions in a very natural manner. The images which portray similar things like the green fields, ripe pears, children playing all portray abundance even in the sad and tragic moment of death of Semyon.
- The above mentioned montage technique along with the subject matter of the film which is close to nature helps to create the poetic effect for which the movie is said to be very famous.

Large no. of portrait like closeup shots

- The movie is replete with portrait shots of individual characters. The portraits are almost like a painting and continue for a significant amount of time.
- After thoroughly reading about this peculiar type of shots I came to know that Dovzhenko heavily emphasized on Byzantine iconology in his movies ([Link](#)).

Characters are never together in the same shot

- The characters never appear in the same shot and this is very noticeable even if I didn't look for this nuance, After reading about the camera and screenplay of Dovzhenko I came that he went against the well established rules of filmmaking for example the gaze of a character is supposed to be towards a certain character whose place is fixed in an imaginary space called 'Diegetic space'. Dovzhenko goes against the rule by placing characters in the same spot ([Source](#)).
- What this technique does is preserve the sense of stillness of the movie scene, which again amplifies the poetic effect the movie talks about. Dovzhenko doesn't overdo the effect, some scenes like when the tractor arrives is a good exception to this rule as the scene doesn't demand stillness, whereas this effect very prominently at play during the opening sequence which has a sense of calm and stillness.

Sense of rhythm throughout the movie

- Many sequences in the movie are in perfect rhythm throughout, for example when they show the sequence where they harvest grains using tractors every machine has a rhythmic motion.
- This helps in creating a flow throughout the sequence where nothing seems abrupt or out of place.

Children playing

- In movie both the death scenes have the shots of a dead person or dying person interleaved with the shots of infants playing.
- The message that the director wants to convey is that however bad situation is life always goes on. The child doesn't care about what is happening around him, he is just engrossed in whatever he is doing.

Rejection of church

- The Russian revolution vilified the church and the directors of that era reflect that, Eisenstein and Dovzhenko both put priest in an antagonistic view, though Dovzhenko does it very subtly.

Circle of life

- During Basil's funeral a lady gives birth to a child, this reinforces the thought that as one life ends another one begins.
- This is the theme throughout the movie and it's been reinforced by showing the correlation with fruits and the harvest.

Closing thoughts

It took me 2 viewings to understand the artistic significance of the movie, if it wasn't for the online resource which I found I wouldn't have appreciated the movie in depth. The movie for me was hard to understand and helped me learn about various other nuances involved in filmmaking. I learned about what are the areas in which a Director imparts his special touch.

Federico Fellini

La Dolce Vita

Movie Notes

The film takes on a very different take on Neo-realism which combined some of the most well shot scenes. The movie was made of some very beautifully shot scenes and plots only some of which contribute to the main story line. The movie explains the story of Marcello who lives life night after night pursuing the high life but is ultimately unsatisfied. The movie is full of symbolism which were hard to grasp at first but after reading about and re-watching the movie revealed the hidden play of symbolism by Fellini.

'Rome' as an important character

- The story revolves around the happenings and life in Rome, Fellini manages to capture the life of Rome in a very visually appealing manner. The scene where Anita Ekberg takes off at night paints Rome in an almost poetic manner. The life at Rome as metropolis and the night clubs shows the culture of Rome as very modern.
- The scene where Anita jumps in the Trevi fountain is very beautiful and is one of the most iconic scenes. It represents the eccentricity of Anita's character as well as the futile pursuit of Marcello after what he idolises as the perfect woman. Fellini spent most of his life in Rome and that explains his obsession with Rome.

Symbolism

- The movie is replete with symbolisms and hidden meanings, For Example in the opening sequence Marcello goes in a helicopter covering the event of Jesus statue being fitted which is interrupted when he talks to some girls sunbathing, this I heard allegorizes the descent from heavenly to more materialistic being.
- The symbolism works throughout the movie where the director tries to create an elaborate but related plots which are mirrored in the movie itself, for example the scene where Marcello chases actress Anita is mirrored in the scene where the

religious people are lead astray by the appearance of a woman(Mother Mary). Both (The Zealots and Marcello) are lead by the lure of what they perceive as the perfect woman and in the end they are far from being anywhere close to them.

Nights end fail to achieve anything, the Day brings a sobering realisation

- Once the movie moves forward the pattern becomes clear, Fellini chronicles the life of Marcello night after night. He chases something which is his idea of perfection, the whole night ends with disillusionment and the morning after shows Marcello reflecting albeit subtly about what happened last night. This pattern becomes more obvious and towards the end the nights get more indulgent and Marcello drifts away from himself and becomes more and more materialistic.
- Fellini portrayed this by very beautifully by using staircase. He descends down into the materialistic world by climbing down the staircase and in the morning he gains a sobering perspective by climbing up staircase and coming out of the materialistic world. This was a very revealing observation for me which was only possible after reading about this from an online source .

A commentary on Modern vs the old ways of life.

- The movie shows the current generation and the problems with it like the need for instant gratification, the blatant disregard for honour, the society that's too full of glamour and pleasure. Fellini manages to capture that in very subtle ways such as the way paparazzis hound Sylvia, the way they shoot pictures of the person who just died because he was trampled.
- The movie acts as a cautionary tale for the future generation, that a life without aim is not worth living for. The blind lust and need for instant gratification lead you nowhere in life. Many people we idolize have put a false facade and the life they lead may not be very fulfilling. The actor playing Marcello, Mastroianni is said to have led a very similar life.

'Steiner' as a flawed Idol

- One of the central plots is of 'Steiner' a man who Marcello Idolises, he has everything Marcello wishes for status, money, a beautiful wife and is apparently enjoying the company of the best people. Steiner pushes Marcello to work on his book and inspires him to work on his passion.
- Marcello later realises that this was all a facade which Steiner managed to keep up but even he reached a breaking point. He murders himself. I think this plot is a harsh reminder in the movie that even the most ideal life that the movie portrayed was a lie. What should have acted as a turning point for Marcello reduces his hope of a normal life even further.

Relation between ending and opening sequence

- The movie showcases how the will of Marcello to lead a content life breaks down episode by episode where the last scene represents how the personality of Marcello has sunk to the lowest point. The ending showed a dead whale which I think represented the absolute low point of Marcello's life. It is worthwhile to remember that the movie started with a Statue of Jesus, So it chronicled the life of Marcello from his best to his worst.
- The slow emotional isolation of Marcello causes the viewer to connect with the character and actually feel sorry as the movie progresses. Initially he was living the life but as more aspects become clearer the viewer feels sorry for him, the loneliness he suffers drives home the message of the film.

Closing thoughts:

For me the movie was a cautionary tale about pursuing what seems to be a glamorous life comes with its own set of caveats, It suddenly puts into perspective the life of Actors which many Indian aspires to live would be difficult and really not as glamorous as it seems to be. The way the movie is shot and produced is top notch, though the medium was black and white the movie hardly seems old or irrelevant to current generation. I think the movie is currently very valid in the Indian sense as Indian was late to the club and nightlife scene. The movie was shot exquisitely and the actors really made the characters come alive on the screen.

François Truffaut

Jules et Jim

Movie Notes

The movie for me started off very normally and took on increasingly absurd turns. The way the movie is shot beautifully and the shots seem perfectly placed. I had one more reason to look forward to watch the movie as it is the favourite movie of one of my idols Stephen Hawking. The most noticeable thing in the movie for me was the Jules and Jim's acceptance of the fact Catherine was not bound by traditional standards of morality. The movie represented French new wave in the way it put forward progressive view regarding marriage and the way it empowered Catherine the lead actor. The other aspect that was equally more obvious was that Catherine definitely suffered from some form of personality disorder, the movie managed to keep me hooked till the end and that I think was the beauty of the movie.

Perfect Pace

- The movie covers a vast time interval from the starting till end and yet the movie never seems hurried or even slow. The pace is perfect for the movie and rarely the viewer feels robbed of any significant moment not captured.
- For me the way Truffaut handled the pace of story was very interesting, he used narration to clearly communicate the events and to pace along the movie. There were many events where the narrator cuts the story and concludes it, this is very efficient because the actors needn't act out the scene and hence the pace of the movie is maintained. The movie would've been very boring and cumbersome if every major event was acted out.

Catherine as the lead character

- The interesting part for me was though the movie was titled 'Jules et Jim' the actual lead was Catherine, the whole story revolved around her character. She is the heart of almost any incident in the movie and even in the incidents she is not in she affects them indirectly.
- The movie was very bold in the way it portrayed women and having a strong female lead character I think was instrumental in it. Catherine represents the modern woman who is not bound the shackles of morality and monogamy. The strong lead character is what I think is the main driver of the movie.

Use of still frames

- Truffaut used still frames to highlight a particular moment in the narrative. The incorporation of still photography into movie making was novel at that time and was considered path breaking.
- The movie's fast paced narration tends to ignore some significant events, Truffaut tackled this using freeze-frames or still-frames to highlight the importance of that scene.

Camera movement and capturing motion

- Truffaut used lightweight cameras to capture many shots such as the scene where Catherine is followed by her two lovers on a cycle or the scene where the three of them race across the bridge. Truffaut mounted these cameras on cycles or moved them with the character to capture the sense of motion
- What the above technique does is involve the audience into the scene. Truffaut moved away from the established and traditional ways of shooting towards the handheld type of shooting style. The 'French New Wave' was composed of such revolutionary ideas which disregarded tradition in favour of experimentation.

Ideal Friendship

- After initial screening I was sure that the movie couldn't have happened in real life, because the camaraderie and bonhomie shown by the two friends was too much to be true. They agree to live with a single girl and still no one gets jealous or angry was a far fetched idea for me.
- But after reading about the movie I came to know that this is in fact a true story and the events though not exactly similar have occurred in real life. I think this has to do with the environment and general nature of modern society which doesn't appreciate such relationships. In our culture though the friendships as such exist they are strictly in bound of the cultural norms.

Closing thoughts

The movie represented one of Truffaut's finest works in the 'French New Wave'. The movie for me aside from the technical aspects was 'New wave' in the type of content it handled. It was really ahead of its time and the way it portrayed strong independent women must've connected with the women at that era. The quiriness of Catherine's character definitely would fall into mental illness category, the sudden changes in her behaviour are characteristics of Bipolar disorder but the way the male leads are accepting of her speaks about the message the movie wanted to send. For me the movie was empowering and the acting by Jeanne Moreau was exemplary. The ending was unexpected but I have come to accept that as a norm in all great movies.

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Yasujiro Ozu

Tokyo Story

Movie Notes

The movie represents for me the hallmark of Japanese culture, the focus on family and tradition. The movie is considered to be an all time great and has been awarded many awards, though as discussed in the class the appreciation of Ozu's work has increased much later after the release of his work. The movie tells a simple story of Japanese parents and their visit to Tokyo to meet their family, it shows the disconnect of the modern family from their parents and the realisation that people do move apart. It may sound incredibly naive but the movie reminded me of Bollywood movie 'Baghban' and the sharp contrast with it that led me to appreciate the movie, Ozu managed to evoke so many emotions without the Movie feeling emotionally manipulative. The strong emotions the movie managed to evoke without being melodramatic is what the critics admired the most about the movie and it is one of the main reasons the movie holds so well. The simpleness of the story and the filming technique is what is immediately noticeable.

Low placement of camera

- The placement of the camera is set very low throughout the movie, this placement give the movie a very unique sense of composition. The explanation of the camera placement given is that it eliminates depth from the scene and makes it a two dimensional space. The flat nature of his technique forces the viewer to appreciate the facial features and the tones of the characters which convey the most information in a typical Ozu film.
- The camera is placed precisely 3 feet above the floor which is said to be the average eye level of a Japanese person sitting on a mat. This helps us gain a perspective into the way Ozu thought, the camera is placed roughly at the point of view of the viewer, as if he was present in the scene and observing it.

Lack of camera movement

- The movie lacks any sort of camera movement in a scene. This is in contrast with Kurosawa who made it a point to include some sort of movement in every frame. The stillness of the camera helps Ozu to bring out the emotions more subtly and forces the viewer to pay attention to the dialogue and the emotions portrayed by the actors.
- Ozu uses the characters to depict motion in the movie instead of camera movement. This is largely noticeable for example in scene where Ozu captures the room before the character enters or when the character walks up the stairs. He is also takes a very original approach in the sense that he tries to minimize the cinematicity of a scene for example he rarely cuts the speech of an actor, the character continues his speech till the end and noticeably it also includes silence, this again helps the viewer to infer much more than the dialogues.

The simplicity of story and lack of melodrama

- Comparing to other movies of the same genre, I found the story to be pretty simple and straightforward. Which is what makes the movie so special, the movie managed to make a simple story a memorable one by sheer technique and acting. The storytelling in this case was much better than the story.
- What is even more surprising is that Ozu managed to do so without being melodramatic or overt in anyway. This is even more noticeable in scenes where you expect Ozu to focus more on or extract much more emotional value but he continues with the story without passing any sort of judgement and letting the viewer make sense of the situation.

No black and white treatment of the characters.

- One of the most beautiful things about the movie is that Ozu avoided portraying any of the characters in a black and white tone. The parents are disappointed with their children but they still acknowledge that their children are not the worst. Ozu as a director avoided painting the children as villains or antagonists but rather made the viewer derive the judgement himself.
- The dialogue between Kyoko and Noriko at the end after funeral highlights this aspect, Noriko says that in life people's priorities change and though they mean well they may act selfish. The children though portrayed negatively mean well and are guilty of not finding time to make their parents travel around Tokyo hence they send them to hot springs.

Still shots of empty room before cut(Pillow shots)

- Ozu places still life shots after the characters have left the screen location, this is in contrast with many of the other directors who after an intense scene cut to a different scene immediately to keep the emotional momentum or pace going.

- I think this technique aids greatly in the viewer forming a view of the situation that just elapsed. The window of silence forces the viewer to analyze the scene that just happened. The Director forces you to think about the scene that just happened and avoids moving directly into the next scene.

Acting of the cast.

- Considering the story was very simple and the dialogues were very limited what made the movie effective was the stellar acting performances by the cast. The cast portrays every character with such familiarity that the viewer connects almost instantaneously.
- The cast portrays each role with ease and manages to convey the feelings easily through body language and expressions. The cast consisted of Ozu regulars and I think that helped with the sense of ease with which the actors portray their roles.

Ozu breaking the 180 rule

- The 180 rule says that the two characters in conversation are to be filmed from the same side, the imaginary axis running through both of them is never to be crossed. Ozu broke this rule in the movie routinely, in many cases causing the actor to speak directly to the camera.

Closing thoughts:

I think the major appeal of the movie was its family centric story and the depiction of situations relatable to most people. The lack of time and the general disconnect with parents that grows connects with many people at an very emotional level. What was extraordinary about this movie was the way Ozu portrayed this using cinema. He broke most of the rules of filmmaking and weirdly enough they helped the movie to connect better with the audience. The cast put out a stellar show and the acting was very natural but in retrospect would've required a lot of skill from the actor's side. Ozu's pursuit of minimalism is what made the movie a masterpiece and his cinematic style greatly aided in the success of the movie.

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Kenji Mizoguchi

Ugetsu

Movie Notes

The movie was supposed to be the first mainstream movie which introduced the western audience to Japanese cinema. The various elements which make the movie such an entertaining one arouses curiosity about the culture or rather the western perceptions of Japan as a land of magic and enigma. Noted below are some of the standout features of the film compared with the previous movies.

Movie subject and script is targeting more mainstream audience

- The subject involves all the things that characterize the general perception about Japan. The film generates suspense through the Magic subplot which is very well portrayed through the actors especially the actress playing Lady Wakasa
- The story acts as a perfect fable for the movie which includes love, moral responsibility as well as magic and war.

The outstanding sound score for the movie

- The one part which made the whole movie experience more immersive was the music, the music though traditional japanese connects almost immediately with the viewer.
- The sense of dread that exists in the ghost sequence was amplified very beautifully by the music. The slow drumming raised the tension of the scene and viewers could sense that something was wrong even though nothing in the actual movie suggested such things.

Hard cuts between scenes and splitting the scenes into specific episodes.

- The movie alternates between different timelines and the editing makes sure that the transition is well noticed by the user. The separation of episodes helps to contrast the decisions taken by the male leads with the repercussions and hardships the female leads have to bear.
- The separation of various aspects of the story was similar to *Battleship Potemkin* and as the story was linear it was well suited to the movie.

The excellent build up to events

- I couldn't put a finger on what exactly did it but the director made sure that the audience grasps the general feeling of where the story is going without being explicit. The combination of camera work and the general scene works beautifully to setup the final reveal or 'twist' without being explicit about it .
- The best example about it would be the scene in the Wakasa Manor. From their first encounter we knew that there was something wrong Lady Wakasa but we couldn't say what exactly, as the story progresses to the castle and the love affair between Genjuro and her this feeling gets amplified, the general haziness of the camera work and the mystical atmosphere created in the castle contributes to that.

Lack of special effects works in the favour of the movie

- The 2 ghost sequences were both beautiful and the thing that works for them is the audience/viewer is made to sense of the whole dreamy scenario and logically conclude or at least move towards accepting that something is off and it may be ghost sequence. This may have been spoilt if there was special effects involved.
- I think the director gets the credit for conveying so many things by scene composition and camera work alone. For example the last scene where Genjuro encounters the ghost of his wife Miyagi, He enters the house once searching for her then he encircles the house to find her cooking a meal. This though obvious at this point of the story makes audience realize that this may be a dream sequence or a ghost sequence.

Lack of closeup shots

- The movie contrasts heavily with Ozu's *A Tokyo Story* in the way it is shot, notable among these things is the absence of closeup shots. While Ozu relied heavily on closeup shots of the lead characters, Mizoguchi takes the opposite approach by working almost exclusively with wide panoramic shots. This movie in particular is composed almost completely of wide angle shots.
- Some of the most notable scenes for me were

- The boat scene on the lake, the scene looks great and the movement of camera when they encounter the boat with the looted merchant is very visually appealing,
- Almost all the scenes in the Castle, the dread and gloom portrayed helps immensely in setting up the later part of the scene and gives an eerie feel to the whole episode.
- The last scene where Genjuro encounters the ghost of his wife.

Lack of shock or jump scares in a ghost movie

- Though the movie is supposed to be a ghost movie it doesn't do the things that characterize a ghost movie. The ghosts do not try to scare the protagonists or the viewers by shocking them but it manages to portray the ghosts as unsatisfied spirits and actually manage to generate empathy for them.

Parallels between Genjuro and Tobei

- Though initially Tobei is projected as whimsical and foolish, in the end both the male leads come to same realisation. Both the stories show the foolish pursuit of two men while ignoring the most important thing a man can have i.e 'Family'
- Genjuro is infatuated by money while Tobei lusts after becoming a samurai, both in the pursuit disregard their family and cause problems for their spouses.

Closing thoughts:

The movie manages to deliver a very Japanese message of placing one's family above lust and greed. Though both the male protagonists prioritise their passions over importance of family, but they are family men at heart which can be seen by the scene where Genjuro imagines his wife in beautiful robes in the market. Genjuro wants his wife to have the best life but he loses track of it in his blind pursuit of wealth. The other story showcases how after achieving his aim of becoming a samurai general Tobei breaks down to find his wife working at a *geisha* house (Japanese brothel), he has a revelation and gives up his life of dreams to be a family man.

The movie was a hit with the western audience as it portrayed everything the western audience were enamoured by in the Japanese culture, the film portrayed the enigma and the deep set values of tradition in the Japanese culture in a very effective and beautiful manner. The major credit of the film should go to Mizoguchi for subtly conveying the story with camera movements and scene composition.

Akira Kurosawa

Rashomon

Movie Notes

The movie represents one of the first films along with Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* which introduced the western audience to Japanese cinema. The movie had a very interesting script and with Kurosawa's technical mastery behind the camera the movie was a really good entertainer. The major thing I noticed was this movie was not created keeping in mind a niche audience, the movie was really easy to understand and was suited for a larger audience base. The story like 'Through the olive trees' urges the audience to apply his perspective and this is what increases the involvement of the audience. The ending doesn't reveal anything about what actually happened but delivers a positive message. *Rashomon* I think was successful because of the outstanding story and the brilliant cinematography.

The outstanding script and story.

- The story of the movie is one of the biggest factors contributing to its continued success, the story combines all the elements required in a good entertainer like magic, honour and action.
- The story was certainly not conventional, so much so that Kurosawa's 3 assistant directors were unable to understand the story. They met with Kurosawa and only after he personally explained the story were they able to understand the story. The out of ordinary story in my view demanded much more skill on Kurosawa's part. Kurosawa managed to tell the story flawlessly and made it look pretty easy.

Flashbacks as plot devices

- The flashbacks in the movie manage to be interesting even though they are all referring to the same event. The flashbacks all referring to the same event and yet being completely different takes on the event was really interesting. The amount of creativity and foresight that was required to come up with such a plot is mind

boggling to me. Kurosawa used the plot device to its fullest extent and managed to make the movie very interesting for me. We instinctively assume the flashbacks to be true because we are watching it from first person perspective but this myth is broken by the plot.

- The use of flashbacks by Kurosawa in this specific way was revolutionary in the Era. A movie that comes to mind immediately is the movie “Usual suspects”, it uses flashback in the same way.

The constant confusion about what is True and what isn't

- The movie manages to hold the viewer's attention by making them question which story is real and which isn't. Each story manages to be very convincing, it would have been very hard to maintain the same level of consistency for every story. Each character's story makes sense and is well thought out, the beauty of the movie is each story can be true or not.
- The story argues that every human tells story considering that his point of view is true. The dialogues at the starting of the movie make it abundantly clear, even Kurosawa said “Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing”. I think this quote sums up the whole movie.

Loud Acting to amp up the emotional level.

- One thing that struck me was the acting of the bandit, the constant laughing and loud acting of the actor was very important to establish that the character was not bound by moral values. In other stories where the Bandit is portrayed in a positive light he lacks that characteristics. It was clear that this amplified level of acting wasn't a remnant of the theatre influence on the cinema but was a deliberate feature to amplify the emotions of the characters.
- The above mentioned acting style wasn't limited to only one character, in the story by the woodcutter the lady is shown in negative light and in this version of the happenings she shows the exact same behaviour and body language as the bandit in earlier stories. She laughs manically, shouts and expresses her emotions loudly. In this movie I think the heightened emotional reactions were used as a characteristic of the antagonist.

Element of movement in almost every frame.

- While going through some material on Kurosawa, one of the hallmarks of Kurosawa was said to be an element of motion in every frame. He contrasts even still frames with some movement of elements in the background. For example. In the opening sequence the rain provides a perfect contrast to the conversations going on. This has

been a feature of his movies throughout and I was made aware of it by a popular video on youtube which analysed this specific trait.

- He uses very fluid movements of camera to provide dimensionality and as in above point provide some element of motion. Generally when the scenes are still and involve minimal motion Kurosawa uses the camera motion to add some excitement and to amplify emotions. The initial sequence of the wood cutter walking in the forest is a textbook example of that where the simple task of a man going to work is given the perfect cinematic treatment and is made so captivating.

Mysterious ending that finishes on a positive note.

- The ending manages to bring into question the only account that the audience subconsciously wants to be true, the woodcutter's story is thrown into doubt at the last moment. I think this helps the movie maintain its character, this can be thought of as a plot twist in the truest sense. The fact that wood cutter stole the dagger was very well structured at the end.
- The other aspect of the end was the scene with the baby, which managed to rekindle the hope of the monk in Humanity. The film ends on a positive note but on a confusing plot which is not related to the main plot, what I missed maybe was some hidden or implicit meaning in the baby scene.

Closing thoughts

I was really looking forward to watch this movie, the hype surrounding Kurosawa and Rashomon is really well deserved I think. The movie was really good in every way that a movie can be, the cinematography was flawless and broke quite a few traditions like the direct sun shot, the story was exemplary, the actors were all veterans and music was also top-notch. The movie was very effective in the way it portrayed human nature and general human tendencies so much so, that it is used as an example in law school to show why human accounts of a single event cannot be trusted. The movie delivers a very good message in the end which speaks volumes about the human nature. The movie was one of the few movies in the course which I was able to appreciate both critically and as an entertainer. After watching the movie 2 times in a row the appeal and the critical acclaim for the movie became much more clearer for me. I think this would be one of my favourite movies in the course if not the only one.

Abbas Kiarostami

Through The Olive Trees

Movie Notes

The opening shot starts very interestingly and in a very light tone. It manages to introduce the plot to the viewer in a very simple and effective way, this simplistic and a direct view prevails throughout the movie. The first thing that I noticed was the movie was shot very beautifully, every frame was perfectly placed and the camera captured the beauty of rural life. The Director has captured the beauty of the countryside by long distance shots. A quick reading over the literature available shows that this movie was a part of trilogy of movies that were about the director who was searching for the actors in the movie he made earlier. The movie within a movie is the major appeal for the movie from what I've read so far and though the concept seems complicated it was portrayed very easily and in a natural manner.

Straightforward Opening

- The opening was a peculiar one for me because I didn't understand the significance of it completely initially, but reading about the movie I came to know that this movie was third part in a trilogy. The initial dialogue 'I am the actor who plays Director' succinctly manages to set up the story line for the viewer who aren't familiar with the initial 2 parts of trilogy.
- The simple way of telling story is what defines the movie for me.

Acting of Female lead

- The acting of female lead was important because the ending demanded the viewer to infer the response of Tahreh. Tahreh is expressive in all the scenes and her acting portrays her feelings very effectively for example in the opening scene, in the scene where she rejects Mrs. Shiva's suggestion to dress in peasant's clothes but the hardest task she managed to do for me was not expressing her true feelings about

Hossain. The viewer is clueless about her true feelings and that point leaves the ending open to interpretation.

- The credit for this also goes to Kiarostami who makes sure that the reaction of Tahareh is not conveyed to the viewer. The viewer is as clueless as Hossain till the very end.

Separation between the movie being shot and real life

- One interesting aspect I observed was that Kiarostami tried to provide visual feedback to users to make sure they distinguished between what event was happening in real life and the ones happening in the movie. One scene where Hossain tries to woo Tahareh between the actual scenes being shot, the real life events happen on the terrace with the camera set for a wind angled flat shot, whereas the actual shooting happens below.
- Though there are many things that make this distinction obvious but such distinction makes it very easy for the viewer to register this subconsciously. The viewer differentiates between real and reel life interactions easily without having to think too much about it.

Confusing portrayal of reel life

- The retakes in the cinema being shot in the movie (sorry for the confusing line) wears the viewer down without contributing much to the story line.
- The portrayal of cinema in cinema isn't easy and comes with its own set of challenges which were evident in above mentioned scene. Though Kiarostami is masterful at his art even he couldn't get over the limitations set by the story line, unless i'm missing something that was implied by the retakes. I couldn't find out any deeper meaning that could be attached to this scenes and hence would consider it as a net negative point.

Some Non-linear plot points

- I observed some of the plots in the movie are nonlinear which I think were an artifact of the film-within-a-film nature of the story. For ex. In the initial shot the Director states that all the actors were hired on the location and then begins hiring the lead actress, here the past shifts into present. One more scene was of Hossain's visit to graveyard of Tahareh's parents, in this a past scene was dramatized in present.
- The movie has no other non linear plots so I believe that initial plot point was just due to some lack of oversight whereas the second plot point was necessitated by the story which reveals at the end Hossain follows Tahareh because of her glance.
- The points above were not at all noticeable in the first viewing of the movie but only became apparent when i rewatched the movie after reading some analysis.

Connection with Indian culture.

- The major part for me was the connection between the family values ,the acknowledgement of education as the ultimate tool to climb up the societal ladder of the portrayed society and Indian society. Though he himself is uneducated due to various circumstances Hossain was thoughtful enough to understand that his children would be well educated. Even in India the heavy emphasis on education for the poor is to make life better for future generations. The motivation to be educated or to provide for education of future generations is characteristic of many developing countries. The middle class wants to be upper class and the lower classes dream of moving to middle classes.
- The restrictions on inter-gender interaction which was evident from the initial scene where the actor before Hossain used to stutter while speaking with girls, also in the scene where the director asks the peasant's girl to act, she never maintains eye contact with the director. The restrictions on the conduct of unmarried women was also the reason Tahreh didn't reply to Hossain's proposal. India also has the same dilemma for ages, the arranged marriage vs love marriage debate rages on till date. The struggle to approach a girl he likes is made harder because he doesn't fulfill all the necessary criterias set by the society is something similar to Indian society.

The 'Open' ending

- Kiarostami left the ending of the movie open for interpretation which was for me reminiscent of "La Dolce Vita" and also to some extent the movie shown in Women's Movie festival "Under Construction" by Rubaiyat Hossain. Though this is a well known practice the way Kiarostami handled it was very interesting. Generally movies push you towards believing about one logical output and put a cliffhanger which doesn't confirm the obvious, but in this case both the cases are equally probable (reasons are discussed in closing thoughts). This is what I found interesting.
- The ending scene is shot in wide panoramic frame with almost painting esque placement of the natural elements. The trees are placed in perfect position in the camera frame as is the fields and path. Though I didn't understand the technicalities but visually it was very pleasing. The last sequence was long drawn which I think helped the viewer to think about the outcome.
- The following line by Kiarostami I think explains the director's vision about the ending succinctly : "***The film-maker has carried the film up to here, and now it is given up to the audience to think about it and watch these characters from very far away.***"

Closing thoughts:

I enjoyed the movie thoroughly but I found the retakes scenes shown in the movie mildly annoying. The one thing that struck me was the beautiful rural backdrop to the whole movie. The Director Kiarostami also commented about the perseverance of Hossain by saying that “Because Iran lacks in resources people here make up for it by being resilient”. The Open ending was according to me a firm “No” by Tahreh because except for a glance she didn’t show much liking for Hossain, but in other case the society was so restrictive that she couldn’t express herself even if she could so it may also be a “Yes”. This is exactly the type of emotion conundrum Kiarostami wanted to put the Viewer in and I’d say he has succeeded in it.

Rubaiyat Hossain

Under Construction

Movie Notes

I saw this movie as part of the “Women’s film festival” organized in campus, It is based on Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Red Oleanders’ play. The movie experience was very enriching for me as I got to learn about the culture and the struggles of women in Bangladesh. The class divide shown and the empowering message sent by the movie was very eye opening for me. The movie represented a country that was very similar to the India in the 90’s. The struggle for doing what you love versus what society expects you to do is a theme that instantly connects with most of the audience, this central theme along with women empowerment made the movie a very compelling one for me.

Interleaved shots showing the life and ground reality in Bangladesh

- The movie revolves around Roya as the lead and her relationships with various other characters, still the movie gives us constant reminder of the current condition of the poor in bangladesh. The constant shots of the under construction buildings, the rickshaw rides, the news bulletins all serve as a reminder to the viewer that the story is not only about Roya but about bangladesh as a country and the problems plaguing it.
- The movie may naively seem about Roya and her struggle but in reality it is a commentary on the problems plaguing Bangladesh as a country and Bangladeshi Women who are struggling to find their equal place in society. The constant cuts to Urban life provide a glimpse into this ground reality.

Religion as a way to socialize

- What was very intriguing for me was the way movie handled the delicate matter of why religion is important. We come to see that Roya’s mother is becoming more and more religious by the day, Roya tries to stop her but isn’t able to connect with her.

Roya doesn't have time for her mother and it becomes clear that she leads a very lonely life. Religion here seems to be a way to fight the loneliness that gradually sets in as the children move away from her.

- The other aspect of her sudden religiousness comes into picture when she is diagnosed with cancer. The spirituality was her way of fighting the battle with cancer. Religion gives her hope in this fight against cancer.

Criticism of the garment Industry

- Rubaiyyat manages to portray the harsh realities of the garment industry in a very compelling manner. The way the story involves Moina and the constant reminders of the dangers involved in the Industry highlight the subhuman treatment meted out to the labourers.
- Rabindranath tagore modelled the play 'Red Oleanders' as critique on the rapid urbanisation and western concept of modernity but this movie manages to adapt the play to modern times and the theme of feminism.

Dream Sequences to show the inner feelings of Lead

- Though not a new technique but the way in which Rubaiyyat shows Roya's inner desires is beautiful. The sequences are filmed with unnatural brightness and the music makes it obvious that the sequence is detached from reality and the character enters a different world. This for me was similar to Mizoguchi's 'Ugetsu'
- The way the dream sequences are structured and discussed make the meaning of them very clear, for example the dialogue before one of the sequence involves Moina telling Roya the story about a woman whose husband was a snake. The dream sequence then shows Roya visualizing her husband as snake which signifies her inner feelings about her husband.

Over stereotyping of men in the film

- As discussed in the class the male characters in the movie seem flat and lack any depth. Though the movie is about the struggle of women and the way patriarchy impedes the emotional and professional growth of women, making the male characters a less stereotypical would've helped the movies cause. For Example the movie 'Jules et jim' by truffaut accomplished to deliver a similar message with stronger male leads.
- The way all the male characters seem to be stereotyped is counterproductive for the movie. The character of Imtiaz which looks promising and supporting is again cut out of the story after he gets intimate with Roya. Though I may have missed the subtleties I think the male characters all lacked in depth.

Closing thoughts

The Movie finished with a unexpected ending as remarked by the audience during the viewing but I have come to accept this as a hallmark of a good movie as a student taking DE410 course. The movie took on a very different take on Feminism and showed the ground reality instead of sugarcoating it, some of this treatment came out in the way the male characters are structured and defined. The movie wonderfully capture the urban life of Bangladesh and is interesting because of the cultural similarity to India.

Mazhar Kamran

Mohandas

Movie Notes

The movie was interesting for me as I knew our instructor had Directed the movie. I had planned to watch the movie but I was pleasantly surprised when the movie was shown in our class. The movie highlights a very strong point that plagues India i.e Corruption. The movie touches a nerve with the audience and manages to keep the audience entertained throughout its duration. The story rarely deviates from the topic and I think Mazhar has done a very good job of keeping the movie on point and devoid of any visual or other embellishments. The only bone of contention for me was the songs which seemed unnecessary.

The shooting style of the movie

- The movie is shot extensively in a rural background and consists of large spaces which give the viewer the feeling of openness. The best thing about the cinematography was that the attention remains on the subject and story at all times, rarely does the camera divert viewers attention from the story except for maybe the songs.
- The pace of camera work and the story really makes it a compelling movie to watch, most of the suspense is created by the story but the camera work rarely interferes and manages to keep the pace set by the story.

Name of the movie (Mohandas) was it a reference to Gandhi ?

- Initially I thought the name of the movie was purely coincidental and had no relation to Gandhiji but after reading various interviews I came to know that Mazhar Kamran named the movie because of the importance Gandhi gave to villages and the life there.
- I think the quote with which the movie begins “One should measure the soundness of any step one takes by the effect it will have on the weakest person in society”

highlights the Director's way of thinking. He commented on the state of the poorest and the backward in the Democracy of India and the message of Gandhi to empower the poorest was being forgotten.

The brilliant acting of the lead and the other cast.

- The actor playing Mohandas did complete justice to the part he played, the look of solemn dejection on his face helps to set the identity of the character Mohandas. The actor rarely smiles or evokes strong emotions normally but at some emotional scenes he erupts and that automatically raises the severity of the situation.
- The choice of other actors is impeccable they carry out the roles assigned to them perfectly and provide a rare quality of believability to the characters. The lack of glamour in all the characters portrayed helps the movie's story and the message it sends.

The flip ending

- This is a technique that is commonly employed by many great Directors and Mazhar uses it to its fullest extent to deliver a hard hitting and a poignant message that the system is still being manipulated and abused by those in power to extract their gains.
- The flip ending prevents the movie from becoming the cliched Bollywood movie with a happy ending and pushes it into the neo-realistic domain.

Songs break the continuity of story

- The songs in the movie break the continuity and are not in anyway related to the storyline, the songs act opposite to the feel of the movie and seem out of place.
- I think this was the Director's way of appealing to wider audience base and to make the movie slightly more mainstream. As discussed in the class the songs were a part that could've been eliminated.

Closing thoughts

The movie was hard hitting and managed to convince me about the story without trying to hard to sell it. One of the best things was the movie never seemed too artificial or made up to me and setting in which it was shot gave it a very rustic and rural feel. The acting of the cast was really good and the slightly out of place songs were an ignorable aberration.