

Arguing a point with cinematic evidence – some examples

A case study in split natures, *The Usual Suspects* ends with a twist that requires a psychological rereading of Verbal Kint's story. Agent Dave Kujan notices that several key elements of the story have come from the objects in his office. The name of Keyser Soze's henchman came from the brand of china that Kint was drinking from, the reference to the barbershop quartet in Skokie was derived from a poster on Kujan's wall, and so on. Thus the ending of the film suggests that Kint's story is a fabrication and, because of its artistry, a reflection of his subconscious.¹

In his second film and first starring role, Ishihara Yûjirô demonstrates the close link between sex and violence that made the *taiyôzoku* (lit. "sun tribe," i.e. youth) films so scandalous. Yûjirô confronts Kitahara Mie, who has begun an affair with his younger brother, when he discovers she is already coupled with a middle-aged American serviceman. Kitahara admits this, and other affairs, but claims this time it's for real. As the jazz sound track, which was the aural condition of sexuality in late-1950s youth films, starts up, Yûjirô cynically suggests Kitahara sleep with him too and forces a kiss on her. When she slaps him, the camera cuts to a low-angle extreme close-up of Yûjirô's heavily shadowed face as he wipes blood from his lips and fixes Kitahara with a sexual gaze. He then sexually assaults Kitahara – until, in a trope increasingly common after this period, she responds.²

Recognized as the high point of German expressionism, Fritz Lang's silent masterpiece *Metropolis* (1927) borrows heavily from Marxist critiques of unrestrained modernization. Set in a futuristic high-rise city with a vast underground population, the film presents a social structure much like that described by Marx: the wealthy leisure and administrative classes of the upper world (the bourgeoisie) run Metropolis, while the laborers (the proletariat) of the lower world must tend the huge array of machinery that powers the upper world. The film's sympathies are obviously with the suffering laborers and against the pampered and ruthless upper classes.

Known for its striking compositions, elaborate sets, and expressionistic camera work and lighting, *Metropolis* presents many images that boldly register the plight of the workers and the domination of the elite: legions of workers marching slowly and mechanically through underground tunnels at the start of their shift; workers stretched across the face of clocklike machine controls, constantly moving the controls as if shackled to them; the elite, arrogant, smartly dressed functionaries and government engineers in the cloud-high command center.³

Although Watanabe is identified as the hero of Kurosawa Akira's film *Ikiru* (To Live, 1950), the director does not feel obligated to focus on him in every scene. That is to say the omniscient narrator chooses on a number of occasions to reveal things to us that are unknown to Watanabe. For instance, we know he has cancer before he does; we are also privy to a heartless conversation between his son Mitsuo and his young wife about how to spend Watanabe's money. Yet, the other characters' dispassionate attitude toward Watanabe in these scenes only serves to increase the viewer's sympathy with the hero's fate.⁴

¹ Adapted from Barsam, Richard. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2004. p. 446.

² Adapted from Raine, Michael. "Ishihara Yûjirô: Youth, Celebrity and the Male Body in Late-1950s Japan." In *Word and Image in Japanese Cinema*. Ed. Dennis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. pp. 207-208.

³ Barsam, p. 438.

⁴ Adapted from Desser, David. "Ikiru: Narration as a Moral Act," in *Reframing Japanese Cinema*. Ed. Arthur Nalletti, Jr. and David Desser. p. 64.