Celluloid

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From the Editor's Desk

In an age dominated by dazzling screens, instant images, endless scrolling, and digital algorithms competing constantly for our attention, Celluloid remains something different. It is a quiet lighthouse. It does not demand attention through noise. It invites us to pause. Fifty years of the Rainbow Film Society. Twenty-five editions of the Dhaka International Film Festival. And at the heart of this long journey stands Celluloid a modest yet powerful publication that has continued to preserve, question, and celebrate cinema through the written word. Celluloid is more than a magazine. It is an act of belief. It is a belief in cinema as an art form, in criticism as a form of engagement, in writing as a way of preserving memory, and in the printed page as something that still possesses a unique cultural and emotional power. The story of Celluloid is inseparable from the story of the Rainbow Film Society. Since its beginning in 1978, the Society has carried forward the vision of a group of young film lovers who believed that cinema could open windows to the world. They believed that films should not simply be watched and forgotten. They should be discussed, questioned, analysed, remembered, and allowed to continue living beyond the moment when the screen goes dark. Celluloid emerged from that very belief. It was never created merely as a publication. It was created as a space for thought. A space where cinema could be examined beyond its immediate images, where films could be connected to history, politics, society, culture, gender, identity, and human experience. For the Rainbow Film Society, the magazine was never about fame or profit. It was about preserving a conversation. And that conversation has continued for decades. Every issue of Celluloid carries the charm of an old library and the energy of a spinning film reel. Its pages contain not only words but traces of time. Yet every time, Celluloid returns. It returns because some things cannot be replaced by convenience. A digital article can disappear beneath a thousand new posts. A screen can be closed with a single touch. But a printed magazine asks something different from its reader. It asks us to slow down. To hold it. To turn a page. To return to a sentence. To underline a thought. To allow an idea to remain with us. A printed page does not vanish with a swipe.

This year, the significance of Celluloid becomes even greater as the Rainbow Film Society celebrates fifty years of its cultural journey and the Dhaka International Film Festival approaches its 25th edition. These milestones are not simply numbers. They represent thousands of films screened, countless conversations held, filmmakers welcomed, audiences introduced to new cinematic worlds, volunteers who worked through exhaustion, writers who wrote without expectation of financial reward, and countless individuals who believed that cinema could make society more thoughtful, more empathetic, and more connected. For half a century, the Rainbow Film Society has worked to create a space where cinema could travel beyond borders. The Dhaka International Film Festival has carried that vision forward by bringing together filmmakers, critics, academics, artists, and audiences from different parts of the world. Every edition of the festival has been an attempt to create a conversation between cultures through cinema. The 25th edition, therefore, is not merely another festival. It is a moment of reflection. It invites us to look back at the distance travelled, to remember the people who made the journey possible, and to imagine the future of cinema in Bangladesh and beyond. In this way, Celluloid continues to do what it has always attempted to do: expand the conversation. The survival of Celluloid has always depended on an invisible network of people who believe in its existence writers who contribute because they love cinema, editors who work tirelessly, volunteers who give their time, friends who help distribute copies, readers who wait for every new issue, and supporters who understand that culture cannot survive without collective responsibility. This community is the reason Celluloid continues to return. As I look at the journey of the Rainbow Film Society over these fifty years, and at the Dhaka International Film Festival as it approaches its 25th edition, I feel a deep sense of gratitude. Gratitude for the people who began this journey. Gratitude for those who carried it forward. Gratitude for every filmmaker, writer, volunteer, audience member, partner, and supporter who has contributed to this continuing story. Some things must adapt. Some things must endure. Celluloid must endure. After fifty years of the Rainbow Film Society and twenty-five editions of the Dhaka International Film Festival, Celluloid continues to stand as a fragile yet powerful testament to one enduring truth: Cinema is not only something we watch. It is something we remember. And as long as cinema lives, Celluloid must live with it.

Celluloid

a magazine on creative cinema

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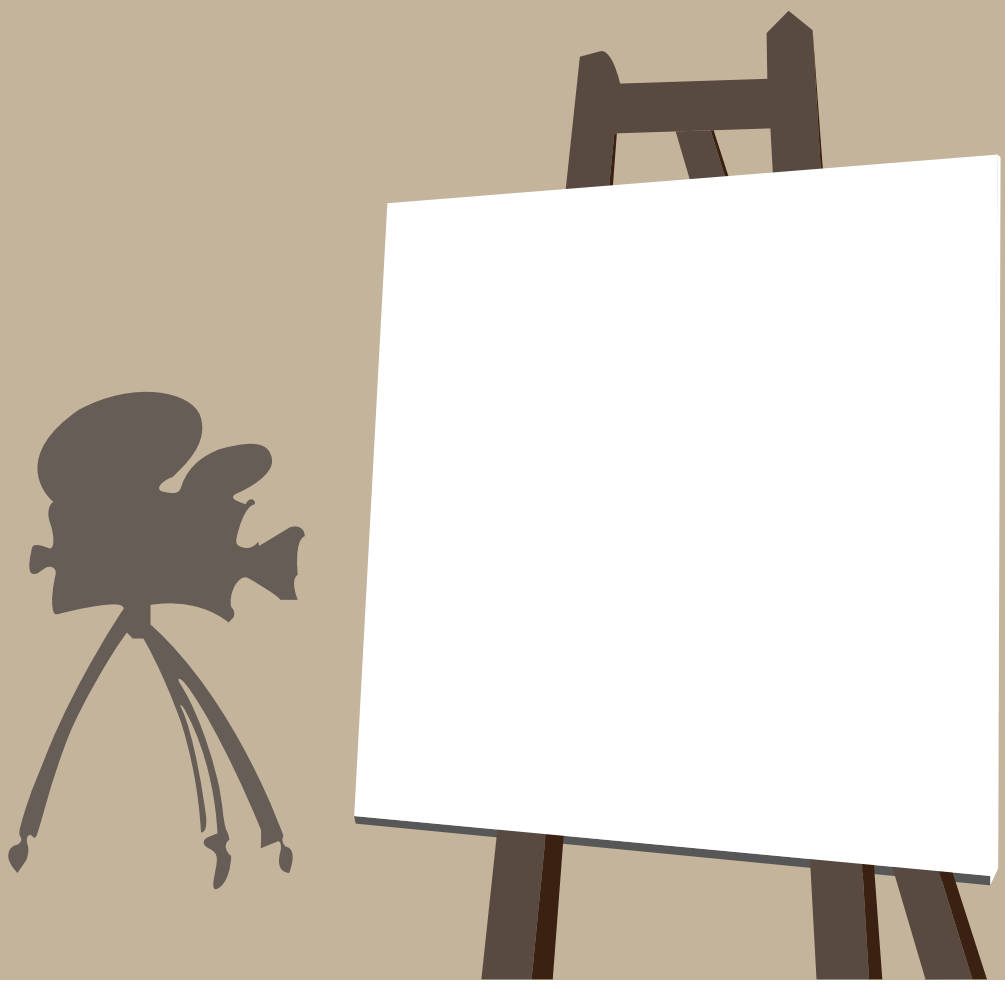
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Articles, reviews as well as interviews with film personalities reflecting opinions, comments and observations of any colour or of any school of thought are most welcome for Celluloidwhich comes out on every 30th day of January, April, July and October, As is widely appreciated. Celluloid is known for its serious reflections on film making and avowed approach toward healthy cine-journalism. Obviously, we would expect our contributors to bear this in mind, while writing for Celluloid, manuscripts must be neatly typed in double line spacing and relevant film stills may be enclosed with the article by way of illustrating a point.

Culture and Aesthetics



Letters from the Editing Room: Reclaiming Women's Narratives in the UK and Europe

Aleksandra Markovic

A Reflection on Gender, Authorship and Creative Survival in Contemporary Documentary Cinema

Abstract

Letters from the Editing Room: Reclaiming Women's Narratives in the UK and Europe explores the intersection of gender, authorship and creative survival within the documentary and non-scripted film sector. Drawing on the experience with producing the film Inanimate Objects (2024), which I co-directed with Julia Konarska, the paper reflects on how women filmmakers navigate the structural and financial inequalities that continue to shape the industry.

In both the United Kingdom and across Europe, women make up fewer than one-third of documentary directors and are disproportionately affected by precarious freelance conditions, funding scarcity and limited access to repeat commissions. These systemic barriers force many women to self-finance, collaborate across borders, or leave the industry altogether. Yet, within these constraints, new forms of authorship emerge rooted in collaboration, intimacy and resistance to dominant portrayals of female experience.

Through comparative data, creative reflection and case studies, this paper situates women's documentary practice as both artistic expression and socio-political testimony. It argues that reclaiming women's narratives requires more than inclusion; it demands structural change in authorship, funding and representation. By viewing the editing room as a metaphorical space of rewriting, listening and repair, the presentation highlights how women filmmakers transform limited resources into spaces of agency, empathy and renewal.

Ultimately, the paper asks: how can women not only appear within the frame, but own the frame itself?

Introduction: Framing the Lens

I truly believe in the saying, "where there is a will, there is a way." I am certain that most women filmmakers would agree as our journeys are often marked by obstacles that test our determination to see a film through to completion. What has sustained me most throughout my filmmaking path has been collaboration and the generosity of women I've had the privilege to work with.

In March 2021, during our Master's degree in Documentary Filmmaking, Julia Konarska, Yin Yu and I were presented with a challenging assignment: to create a 10-minute documentary during the COVID-19 lockdown. Julia and I were confined to our respective flats in different parts of London, while Yin was in lockdown in China. After countless Zoom meetings and long discussions, we decided to create an essay film in epistolary form. At that time, I had just completed a short

documentary, The View, shot entirely from my balcony during lockdown (insert excerpt from The View, 2 minutes).

The idea for our new project was to explore how government policies impact bodily autonomy, focusing on China's one-child policy and Poland's restrictive abortion laws. Given the tight deadline, we had to move quickly. We divided our tasks: Yin and Julia researched and found two people from their respective countries who were directly affected by reproductive rights policies and willing to share their experiences through personal letters. I concentrated on developing the pitch deck, shot list and structure of the film, which relied heavily on editing, a role that became my primary focus.

The letters we received were profoundly moving and despite all challenges, we met the submission deadline. After graduation, once we could finally meet in person again, Julia and I wanted to remake the film. In the first version, we had been forced to significantly shorten the letters due to time constraints of the assignment and it felt like a disservice to the depth of those stories. We wanted to give them the space they deserved. Once again our collaboration resumed over many email exchanges and zoom meetings discussing what would be the best way to execute another longer version of the film. Unfortunately, Yin was unable to continue due to personal commitments. I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Yin for her early contribution to the early stage to the project.

With no budget to rely on, Julia and I turned to our own limited resources and the generosity of friends who believed in the project. Inanimate Objects became more than a film; it was a collective act of resilience and care, sustained by shared conviction rather than institutional support.

The film is also an act of remembrance. It is dedicated to one of our contributors, Alicja, whose strength and story form the emotional core of the work. Alicja passed away during the film's production and her absence left a profound imprint on us. What began as an exploration of policy and personal autonomy evolved into a meditation on loss, legacy and the responsibility of representation. Editing her words after her passing became both an ethical and emotional negotiation how to honour her voice while acknowledging that she was no longer with us.

PLAY Inanimate Objects (Alicia's letter-link)

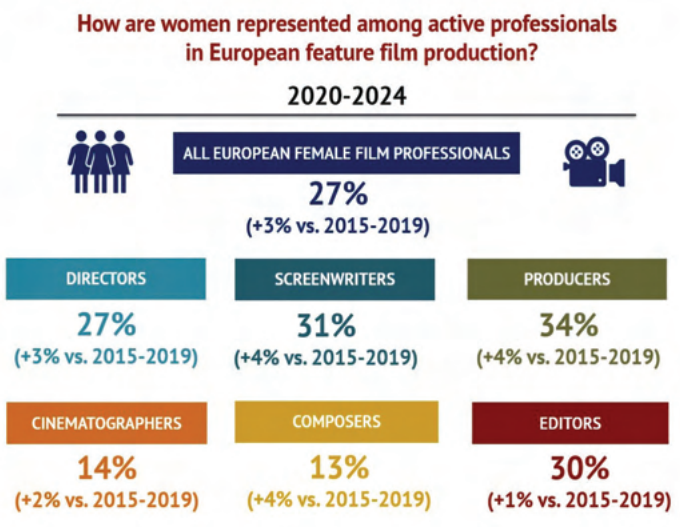
In the cramped editing suite where Inanimate Objects took shape, Julia and I encountered a creative paradox. The footage we have was raw while the narrative in the form of received letters were intimate and deeply vulnerable, yet our authorship felt constrained by funding realities, institutional expectations and the invisible pressures that define women's labour in the film industry. It was in that small room the "editing room" that the central question of this paper emerged:

How can women filmmakers move beyond simply appearing within the frame, and instead own the frame itself?

This paper explores that question through the lens of documentary and non-scripted content in the United Kingdom and Europe. The editing room becomes both a literal and metaphorical space of rewriting, listening and repair. Our film, rooted in the

lived consequences of reproductive policies in China and Poland, serves as a case study for how women can reclaim narrative agency within systems that often reduce female experience to statistics, policy cases, or moral debates.

Across Europe, women remain underrepresented in key creative roles behind the camera: directors, cinematographers, composers. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory, between 2020 and 2024, only about 27% of feature film directors in Europe were women. Documentary filmmaking shows slightly better representation, with women directing roughly 30% of European documentaries, yet structural inequality persists.



Source: European Audiovisual Observatory / LUMIERE

Note: The female share is calculated by combining all professional roles, including directors, screenwriters, producers, cinematographers, composers and editors. Films with varying degrees of coverage information on the different crew roles are included.

In the UK, this imbalance is compounded by precarity: freelance working conditions, short-term commissions, self-funding and gendered labour burdens make it difficult for many women to sustain long-term careers. In this context, "reclaiming narratives" requires more than access it demands transformation in authorship, production models, distribution systems and institutional culture.

This paper unfolds in six parts. First, I examine the tension between visibility and authorship in women's documentary practice. Next, I map out the UK documentary landscape with particular attention to gendered precarity. I then turn to comparative European perspectives before exploring collaborative, intimate and resistance-based modes of production. Finally, I propose structural and creative interventions that aim to move women's filmmaking beyond representation toward true authorship.

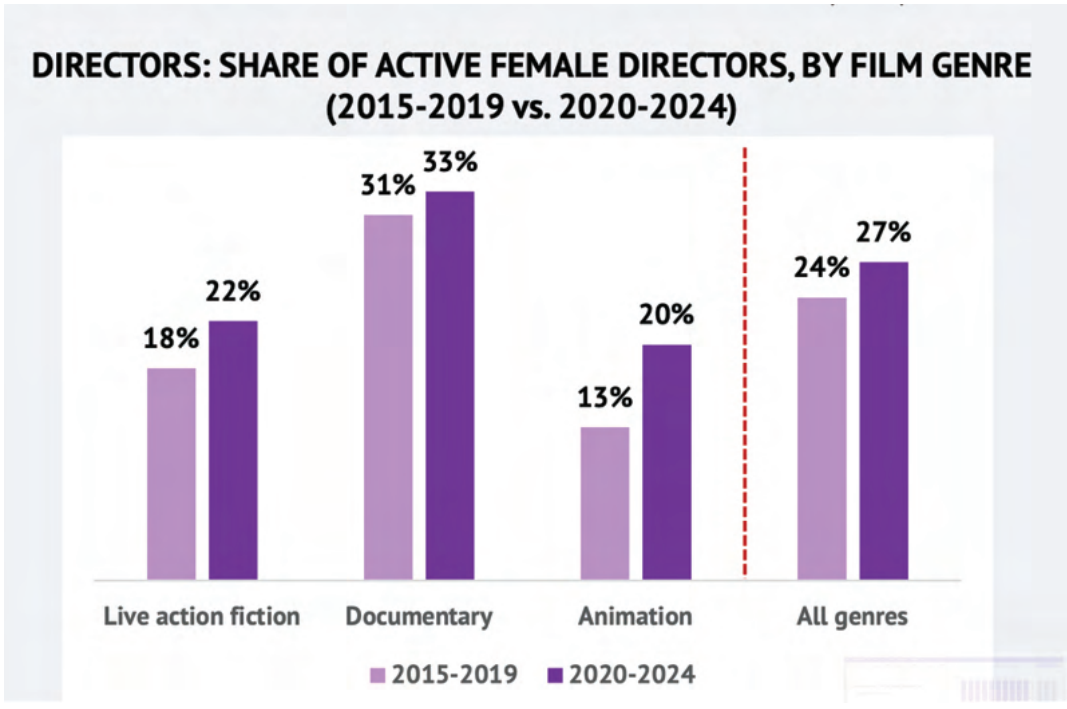
Women in Documentary: Visibility vs. Authorship

In turning the camera on women's lives, documentary cinema often offers rich possibilities: voices previously unheard,

spaces of intimate witnessing, testimony from the marginal. But as the feminist film theory reminds us, visibility alone is insufficient.

To be "seen" still does not guarantee agency: who frames the shot, asks the questions, selects the take, edits the sequence?

As Patricia White argues in Women's Cinema, World Cinema, authorship is a site of power: "The woman who appears on-screen may be a subject, but very rarely the one who frames, edits, decides."



Between 2020 and 2024, women represented approximately 27% of all active directors working on European feature films. While this figure marks a modest but meaningful 3% increase compared to the preceding period (2015–2019), it nevertheless highlights the enduring gender disparity within the European film industry. Progress, though visible in numerical terms, remains slow and uneven, revealing both the persistence of structural barriers and the resilience of women who continue to enter and redefine the field despite them.

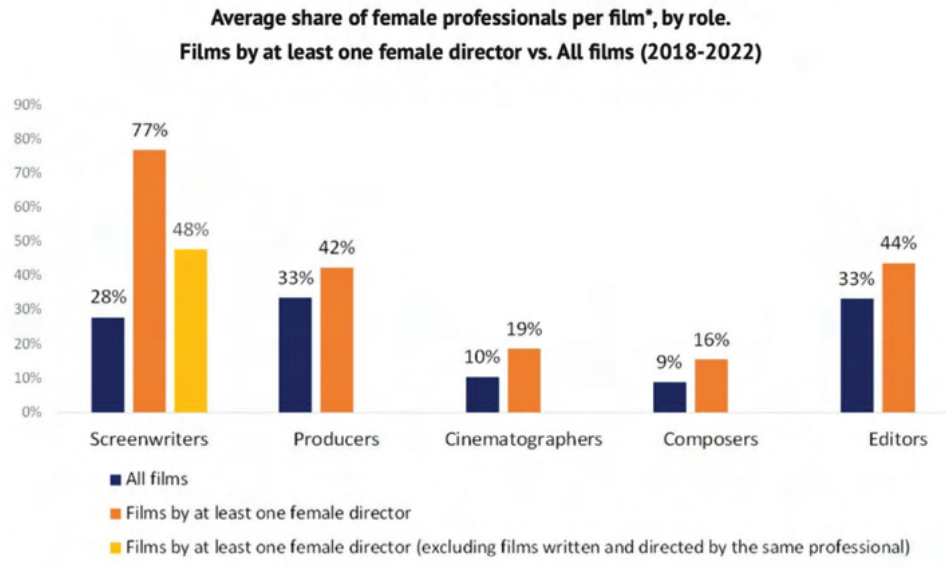
When we look more closely across different genres, the data exposes significant variation. The documentary sector emerges as the most inclusive space, with women directing roughly one-third of all productions (33 %) between 2019 and 2024. This comparatively higher representation

suggests that documentary filmmaking continues to serve as an important entry point and creative refuge for women, offering a degree of artistic freedom and accessibility not always available in more commercially driven forms of cinema.

By contrast, the share of women directors in live-action fiction during the same period remains considerably lower, at around 22%. This imbalance reflects the enduring challenges women face in securing funding, institutional backing and distribution opportunities in narrative filmmaking domains that continue to privilege male authorship and traditional hierarchies of production. The picture is even more restrictive in animation, where women accounted for only 20% of directors. Despite the perception of animation as a progressive and innovative field, its upper tiers of creative control remain dominated by men, revealing how gender inequality persists even within newer and technologically dynamic forms of cinema. Taken together, these statistics do more than simply quantify participation; they map out the uneven terrain of authorship and opportunity across the European film landscape.

The distinction between being within the frame (as the subject) and owning the frame (as the decision-maker) is crucial. When women are primarily the subjects of policy-driven documentaries – for example reproductive rights, health, domestic violence their agency can still be subsumed under institutional assumptions. They are represented, not representing. Reclaiming narrative means shifting the focus of narrative authority. It means women deciding how their stories are told, edited, distributed.

Collaborative practices are one route towards this. When women co-direct or co-create, research shows a positive ripple effect: films with at least one female co-director tend to have higher female represen-



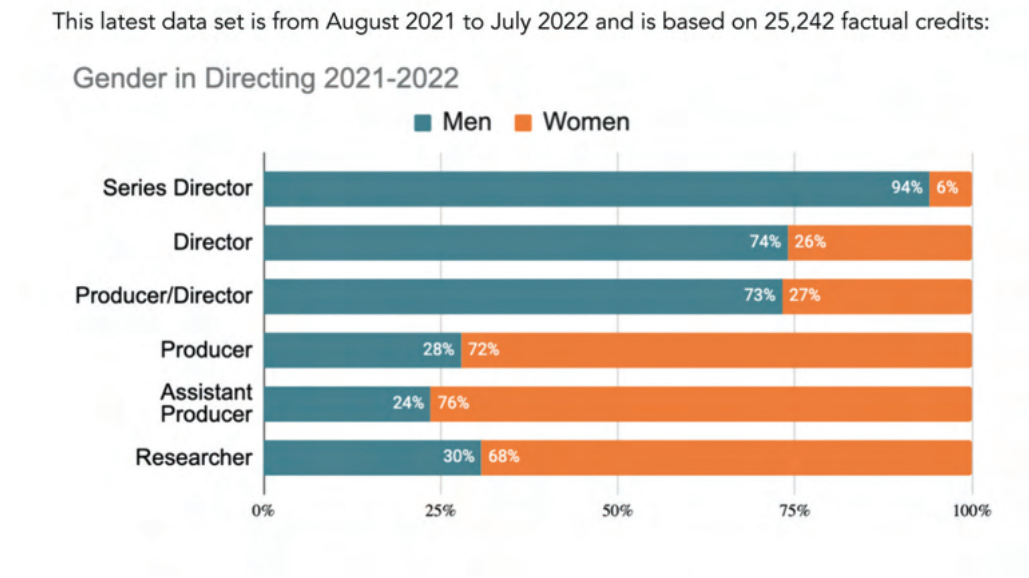
Source: European Audiovisual Observatory / LUMIERE

A positive correlation between the presence of at least one female co-director and an increase in the overall average female share was observed across all film types.

tation in crew roles. This suggests authorship matters not just symbolically, but structurally: it changes who gets behind the camera.

The UK Documentary Landscape: Precarity and Persistence

Fast forward to 2023 and WADW, in partnership with the Creative Diversity Network (CDN), released new figures showing where things stand. And while there has been some movement, the results tell a mixed story.



The UK's documentary and non-scripted sector presents a complex and often contradictory landscape for women filmmakers. While documentary work is often perceived as more accessible than big-budget fiction, accessibility does not automatically translate into authorship, visibility, or sustainable careers.

In October 2022, We Are Doc Women (WADW) launched something truly important: the 50/50 Pledge. This was a call to action, asking broadcasters and production companies to make sure that half of all their factual programmes are directed by women. The goal was simple but powerful – to ensure that women's voices and perspectives are shaping the stories we see on screen.

The data shows that the number of women directing factual television has actually fallen over the past two years. At the same time, women's representation has increased in the lower-paid editorial roles and women continue to be most visible in the Assistant Producer position.

But when we look at the top of the ladder, the picture changes dramatically. Men hold 94% of Series Director roles, leaving just 6% for women. To put it another way, in 2020, fewer than one in three Directors were women and by 2022, that number had dropped even further, to fewer than one in four.

This imbalance doesn't just affect who tells our stories it also deepens the gender pay

gap within the industry. Too many women find themselves staying longer in lower-paid roles, while men move up into higher-paid, senior editorial and directing positions.

Yet despite these barriers, women directors continue to achieve remarkable creative success. At the most recent BAFTA Television Craft Awards, the Grierson Awards and the Broadcast Awards, women directors won 48% of the awards in factual categories.

So while women may still be underrepresented behind the camera, they are undeniably leading the way in creativity, innovation and storytelling excellence.

The challenge now is clear: we need to match that creative success with equal opportunity. The talent is already there, the industry just needs to open the doors wider and make sure women are given the space, the trust and the resources to direct, to lead and to shape the future of factual television.

Several intersecting factors shape this precarious terrain:

Funding scarcity and self-financing. Many women are forced to assemble their projects through small development grants, personal savings, or unpaid labour. This reliance on self-financing places disproportionate strain on those with caring responsibilities or without economic safety nets
.

Freelance culture and career gaps. The UK's documentary sector is heavily freelance-based. For women who take breaks for care or personal reasons, re-entering commissioning pipelines is notoriously difficult. The result is attrition many leave the sector or struggle to accumulate repeat credits.

Genre and subject stereotyping. Women are often confined to "soft" genres such as health, lifestyle, or domestic narratives rather than high-prestige investigative or political subjects. This gendered typecasting limits creative scope and upward mobility.

Recognition and distribution gaps. Even when women produce strong, distinctive documentary work, they frequently face barriers to festival exposure, broadcaster acquisition and repeated funding. Visibility does not always lead to recognition and recognition rarely guarantees sustainability.

In my own experience with Inanimate Objects, these realities were palpable. Julia Konarska and I relied on a lean, self-funded model and collaborative post-production. Our editing room became the one space of control we could claim: where structure, pacing and tone became instruments of resistance against the institutional logics that often flatten women's stories.

Yet the larger structures remain slow to change. Many UK women documentarians describe a cycle of "no repeat commissions," of becoming "invisible between projects," and of having to self-fund simply to stay relevant. The result is a shrinking pipeline of women directors a quiet attrition that weakens the sector's diversity and vitality.

Reclaiming the frame, therefore, must go beyond isolated success stories. It requires systemic reform that supports continuity, values women's creative labour and recog-

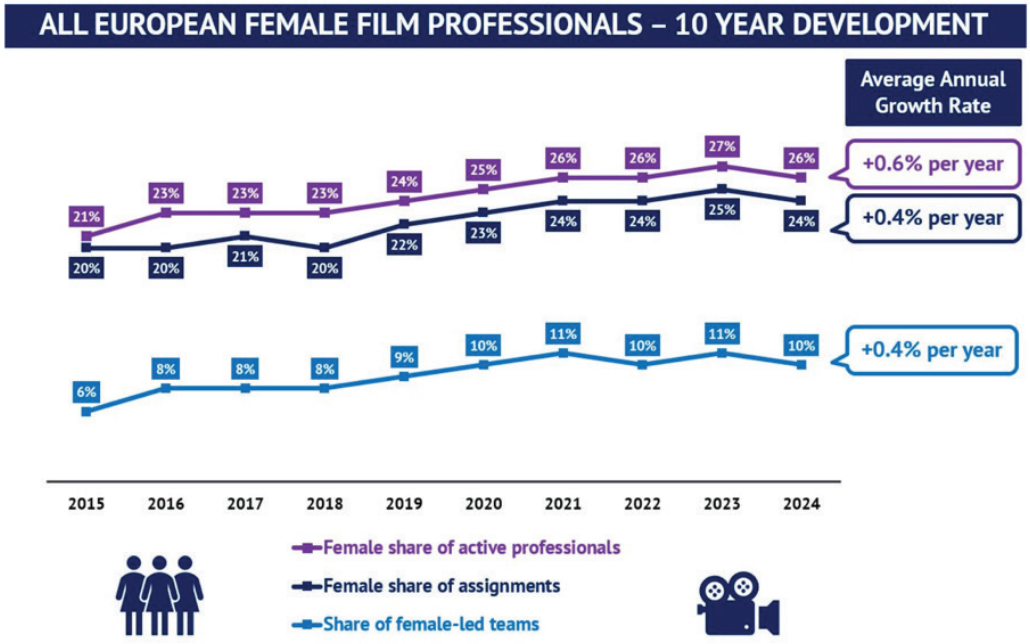
nises documentary filmmaking as a legitimate form of authorship, not an ancillary genre.

This situation raises important questions about authorship, sustainability and representation. It is not enough to grant one female director a commission; the system must support repeat work, career progression and resource equity. The editing room metaphor returns: women must not only be given a place at the table, but the table itself must change.

Comparative Perspectives Across Europe

Looking beyond the UK, women documentarians across Europe face a shared set of challenges: funding inequity, precarious authorship and structural underrepresentation. Yet regional differences reveal both obstacles and possibilities.

The disparities between countries are striking. Nordic nations such as Sweden, Iceland and Norway approach or exceed 30% female representation in some sectors, supported by quota-based funding schemes and strong institutional mandates for parity. Meanwhile, Eastern and Southern European regions often report female director



Source: European Audiovisual Observatory / LUMIERE

Note: In this context, 'female-led' refers to feature films in which a majority (≥60%) of the professionals involved are female, taking into account all the roles covered in this report. The percentage displayed next to the timelines indicates the average annual growth rate.

shares below 20%. Spain, for instance, lists only 22% female documentary directors, with documentaries receiving just 6% of public film aid.

Despite these imbalances, European women filmmakers have developed innovative models of transnational collaboration. Co-productions across borders allow shared authorship and collective risk-taking, especially valuable in the underfunded documentary field. Films led by at least one female director statistically show higher representation of women across the crew, indicating that authorship has tangible ripple effects on employment and mentorship.

The European context underscores that progress toward gender equity is incremental but interlinked. Structural reform in funding and authorship must be coupled with a recognition of documentary as a powerful cultural form not an auxiliary category. Entry alone is not enough; sustained authorship and creative autonomy are essential for real transformation.

Collaboration, Intimacy and Resistance

Within the constraints of funding, institutional models and precarity, women filmmakers are carving alternative pathways of authorship. These pathways emphasise collaboration, intimacy and resistant storytelling.

Collaboration: Another interesting finding from The European Audiovisual Observatory Report reveals something that many of us in the industry have long suspected. Women in film particularly in the documentary sector tend to work in teams far more often than their male counterparts. In other words, women are more likely to share their professional roles with colleagues, rather than occupying those positions alone.

This pattern appears across multiple areas of production, directing, editing, cinematography and producing. Whereas male directors or editors are more frequently credited as the sole creative lead, women often appear as co-directors, co-editors, or part of collaborative teams. On paper, this might look like a matter of preference or working style. And indeed, collaboration is one of the great strengths of women's creative practice it often brings richness, empathy and a multiplicity of perspectives to the work.

However, it also reveals something deeper about how authorship is recognised or, perhaps, how it is not recognised. When women are consistently credited alongside others, their individual creative contribution can become diluted in the public record. Their authorship risks being absorbed into a collective identity, rather than celebrated as singular artistic vision. This tendency reflects broader patterns within the industry: where women's labour is essential but often less visible and where collaboration can sometimes be both a strength and a survival strategy.

It is important to recognise that this is not simply always a matter of personal choice. Many women collaborate because the structures of the industry make it difficult to access funding or commissions as a sole author. Working collectively can provide a sense of safety, shared risk and mutual support in an environment that often undervalues female leadership. So while collaboration can be a profoundly feminist mode

of working, rooted in care and solidarity, it can also mask persistent inequalities in recognition and credit.

What this tells us is that authorship, for many women, does not follow the traditional "auteur" model that has historically defined film culture. Instead, it often takes the form of shared authorship: fluid, dialogic and interdependent. Yet, the challenge remains: how do we ensure that this collective mode of making does not erase the creative identities of the women who sustain it?

Intimacy: The film form itself can act as a quiet act of resistance when it turns inward when it privileges intimacy, personal testimony, slower rhythms and reflective editing. Within women's documentary practice, intimacy is not simply a stylistic choice; it is a political gesture. By centring the personal, the domestic and the emotional, women filmmakers disrupt the conventions of the institutional gaze the external, objective and often masculine perspective that has long defined what counts as "serious" or "public" filmmaking.

The metaphor of letters from the editing room speaks directly to this kind of authorship. It evokes the act of correspondence of one woman speaking to another, of filmmakers addressing their audiences with care and vulnerability. In this sense, the editing room becomes more than a technical workspace; it becomes a site of listening, rewriting and reparation. Each cut, each pause, each lingering frame is an act of communication. It says: "I see you. I hear you. I am part of this conversation."

Women's documentary often privileges this language of closeness. It foregrounds the private sphere the home, the body, the family, the emotional landscape as political territory. Subjects such as domestic work, motherhood, reproductive rights, or the quiet endurance of everyday life become central rather than marginal. These are stories that mainstream cinema has historically overlooked or reduced to background detail, yet in women's documentaries they occupy the frame with dignity and urgency.

This form of intimacy operates as a mode of resistance precisely because it reclaims spaces and experiences that have been dismissed as apolitical.

Ultimately, intimacy in women's documentary is not about sentimentality or confession; it is about reclaiming narrative agency. It insists that the interior life of women, their emotions, relationships and private struggles, deserve cinematic attention. It transforms what was once invisible into a site of visibility and what was once considered personal into an act of collective witness. In this way, intimacy becomes both aesthetic strategy and feminist politics: a way of seeing and a way of surviving.

Resistance: Women filmmakers resist dominant portrayals of female experience as passive, victimised or marginal. Instead they present layered, contradictory, resilient subjects. They challenge institutional hegemony: for example, reproductive rights policies in China and Poland (as in Inanimate Objects) become not only policy critiques but poetic reflections on lives shaped by state regulation. In doing so, the editing room becomes the site of rewriting

the story: not only of the subject, but of the author-subject relation.

These practices are not free from tension. Collaborative models can blur authorship credit; intimacy can risk softness or marginalisation; resistance may mean fewer institutional supports. But they represent a redefinition of what authorship can be: networked, relational, feminist.

In this model, the female filmmaker becomes not only a director of the shot, but a curator of voice, a mediator of testimony, a preserver of memory. She claims the editing room as her space and in doing so, claims the frame.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that reclaiming women's narratives in documentary cinema is more than a matter of inclusion: it is about authorship, structure and creative survival. Women may still appear in the frame, but unless they also own the frame, decide the shot, edit the sequence, commission the project, distribute the work, the power imbalance persists.

The editing room metaphor encapsulates this shift: it is where stories are shaped, voices are refined and meaning is contested. In the UK's non-scripted and documentary sector, women face particular constraints funding precarity, freelance attrition, gendered project pipelines but also possibilities: documentary's relative openness, transnational collaboration, intimate form. Across Europe, data show modest gains yet persistent gaps: directors (~26% female), cinematographers (~11% female) and slow progress toward parity.

By weaving together personal reflection from Inanimate Objects, industry data and theoretical insight, this paper offers a roadmap for creative and structural change. Female documentarians must not only make their mark, but change the system that tells whose mark is counted. As we enter the editing room, we ask: how will we decide the sequence, voice, structure how will we claim the frame?

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Cinema with Purpose: The Responsibility of Changing the Narrative Now

Milena Queiroz





Cinema, in its 120-year essence, has never been just entertainment. It is, and always has been, humanity's most powerful dream machine; a mirror that not only reflects who we are but actively shapes who we aspire to be. For more than a century, however, control of this machine has been overwhelmingly in the hands of a single demographic. The lenses were polished by a masculine gaze, the projectors operated by male hands, and the stories, in their vast majority, were told to validate a male world experience.

Today, what we call the "Celluloid Ceiling" an invisible but painfully real barrier for women in key positions in cinema is not just cracked; it is being actively demolished. But this demolition raises a fundamental question: what do we build in its place?

For me, as a filmmaker and screenwriter, the responsibility in contemporary cinema transcends simply occupying space. It is not enough to have women credited as directors or screenwriters just to meet a statistical quota. The true responsibility, the "purpose" that defines this new era, is an act of historical correction. It is the monumental task of unearthing, interrogating, and rewriting the narratives that formed us, challenging the standards we accepted as "universal" when, in fact, they were merely "masculine."

This is not an article about the lack of women in cinema. The data already proves this exhaustively. The annual "Celluloid Ceiling" report by Dr. Martha Lauzen shows us year after year that in the highest-grossing films, women represent a grim minority of directors (around 18% to 22%) and writers (around 17% to 19%).

In Brazil, the scenario, although growing, is similarly unequal. A study by ANCINE (National Cinema Agency) on female participation in Brazilian feature films released in 2022 revealed that only 23% were directed by women, and 36% had women on the script (often in co-authorship). But this national figure of 23% hides an even more complex reality: regional disparity. Brazilian cinema is historically

and economically centralized in the Rio-São Paulo Axis (Southeast), which concentrates the vast majority of produced and financed feature films, absorbing over 70% of public development funds in some years.

Although most women who manage to direct and write are, in absolute numbers, in this region, they are still a minority within this dominant hub. For female filmmakers outside this axis—in the North-east, the North, the Center-West, or even the South—the barrier is twofold.

They fight not only against the "Cellul-Gaze" of gender but also against the "Concrete Ceiling" of economic and cultural centralism, which drastically limits access to robust grants, large production companies, and distribution networks. Therefore, a female filmmaker in Pernambuco, Pará, or Goiás faces an exponentially narrower access funnel than a male colleague in Rio de Janeiro.

These numbers are not just statistics; they are evidence of a system of exclusion. But the real debate, the debate that defines cinema with purpose, begins after we acknowledge the numbers. The current responsibility is qualitative, not quantitative. It is about what we, these 23% of female directors and 36% of female writers, choose to say.

It is about the courage to look at a story in my case, a story that has been with me for 20 years and have the moral and artistic clarity to say: "This must change. The protagonist can no longer be a man."

This is a silent revolution, waged in writers' rooms, in casting decisions, and in editing bays. It is the revolution of narrative responsibility. And this is my reflection on it.

1- The heritage of objectification and the triad of the gaze (male, oppositional, female)

To understand the responsibility I feel today, I needed to dissect the heritage of yesterday. The central pillar of feminist film theory, which underpins the urgency of my "purpose," was articulated in 1975 by Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey introduced the concept of the "male gaze."

It is not a complicated concept, but its implications are profound. Classical



Kim Novak in Vertigo

cinema, Mulvey argued, is structured around a power dynamic: the man is the "bearer of the look" (active, the subject, the driver of the story) and the woman is the "image to be looked at" (passive, the object, the prize, or the obstacle). She does not exist for herself; she exists to be seen, desired, rescued, or punished by the male protagonist. In films like Hitchcock's Vertigo, Kim Novak's character is literally dismantled and rebuilt to satisfy the fantasy of James Stewart's protagonist; she is objectification in its purest form. In modern action films, think of how Michael Bay frames Megan Fox in Transformers: the camera glides over her body like a consumer evaluating a product, disconnected from any character subjectivity.

This structure was no accident. It was the direct result of who was writing and directing. When 90% of creators are men, the "universal" becomes, by default, their experience. Women on screen were flattened into convenient archetypes: the femme fatale (dangerous to the hero), the damsel in distress (needing the hero's rescue), the selfless mother/wife (the hero's emotional support), or the "cool girl" (who likes everything the hero likes, without having any desires of her own).

This heritage is the "historical context" against which I, and so many other female filmmakers, fight. The "purpose" is, first and foremost, an act of refusal.

The theorist bell hooks, in response to Mulvey, coined the term "The Oppositional Gaze." She argued that for Black women (historically excluded even from the role of "object of desire" in white cinema), watching films was an exercise in pain and erasure. The "oppositional gaze" was the political act of looking back, of criticizing, and of refusing to internalize the dehumanizing images on the screen.

If the "Male Gaze" is the problem and the "Oppositional Gaze" is the critique, a proposed solution was missing. This solution began to be called the "Female Gaze." This concept, popularized by filmmakers like Jill Soloway (creator of Transparent), is not simply about "inverting" the game and objectifying men. It is about creating an entirely new cinematic language. The "Female Gaze" is:

- **Subjective:** The camera tries to film what the woman feels, not just how she is seen. The priority is the internal experience. Think of how Jane Campion films desire in The Piano.

- **Reciprocal:** The look is not one-sided. Characters see each other mutually, and the camera captures the complexity of this exchange, rather than just a "hunter" and "prey."

- **Focused on bodily experience:** Instead of fragmenting the female body (close-ups on breasts, buttocks), the "Female Gaze" seeks to show what it is to inhabit a female body be it pain, pleasure, childbirth, menstruation, or aging.

As a filmmaker with purpose, I don't just employ an "oppositional gaze" as a viewer; I actively seek to build with a "female gaze." My decision to change the protagonist of my script was not just political; it was a decision of language.

2- The act of narrative correction: my story, my responsibility

It is in this scenario that I arrive at the core of my creative responsibility. What happens when I inherit or discover a story a good story, with a solid structure,

one that I myself conceived decades ago but that was originally centered on a man?



Temples of Bertioga

This is the real dilemma I faced. I am a filmmaker from the Northeast of Brazil living in Bertioga, and my work has always sought a purpose as in "Templos de Bertioga" (Temples of Bertioga), a documentary that explores the diversity of faith. My commitment has always been to shed light on invisible communities and perspectives.

Recently, I returned to developing a script based on a story I conceived 20 years ago. And for 20 years, that script remained unfinished.

Today, I am convinced that the crucial point, the knot that kept the script from maturing for two decades, was precisely its protagonist. Beyond the psychological and regional complexity of the plot, something fundamental didn't fit. The reason was simple, though hard to admit: I was stuck on the default.

The unconscious habit, internalized from a lifetime of consuming cinema with a male gaze, of seeing male protagonists as the "universal" vehicle for major plot twists, led me to the obvious. As this story originally presented itself to me and here I try to give context without spoilers, as the script is still in development the idea came with an initial narrative, and I finished it incorrectly. I tried to develop a complex male character who, amidst a journey of morally questionable acts, would ultimately win the audience's compassion.

And that's where the story died.

Because certain actions, seen through the lens of male privilege, simply cannot be treated with "compassion" in today's cultural context. They become morally problematic, bordering on the justification of indefensible acts. The world has changed, and my responsibility as a storyteller has changed with it. Trying to force an acquittal or compassion for a man who commits certain acts, when the real world is screaming for accountability, felt... false. Wrong.

The turning point came when I stopped looking at the character and started looking at the conflict. What was I trying to narrate? It was systemic reprisals, invisible barriers, a struggle against others' disbelief, and an internal psychological exhaustion. That's when I reflected: a man, whose world was fundamentally shaped for him to take off, for whom 'no' is a temporary obstacle and not a concrete wall, would never face these conflicts in the same way.

The reprisals that showed themselves as the true turning points of the plot wouldn't stick to him. They would slide off.

I understood, with a clarity that bordered on grief for the two lost decades, that this was, and always had been, a woman's journey.



The instant I made the change in the script treatment, the story breathed. The conflicts gained weight, the character's psychology gained depth, and the ending... the ending made sense. And this clarity came with a choice. Yes, I know what the data says. I know that, statistically, films with female protagonists still struggle more at the box office and are seen as "niche" or "unpopular." But I found myself with the moral obligation to treat this story as purpose, not as capital. Narrative responsibility is greater than the financial return.

This act of "retroactive correction" is one of the most powerful tools of feminist responsibility in cinema. It is me, as a filmmaker, saying: "I know how this story was told for 20 years. Now, I'm going to tell it how it should have been told."

3- The vanguard of reivindication: I'm not alone

My decision, though deeply personal, is part of a global movement, conscious or not, of narrative reclamation. Several female screenwriters and directors have made similar choices, using their power to subvert, reconfigure, or "correct" male-dominated narratives. They prove that changing the gaze changes the story.

A. Explicit subversion: Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Killing Eve

When Phoebe Waller-Bridge adapted Luke Jennings' novels, Codename Villanelle, she could have followed the standard spy thriller path. The books are good, but it's the Killing Eve series that becomes a case study. Waller-Bridge's biggest change was not genre, but focus. She took the archetype of the femme fatale (Villanelle) and the intelligence agent (Eve Polastri) and, instead of focusing on the spy plot, she focused on the mutual obsession between the two.

She took the "gaze" and made it the central theme. Eve is not a passive object; she is an active hunter, as fascinated and dangerous as her prey. Waller-Bridge subverted the genre by refusing to make her protagonists pawns in a men's game. The game was theirs. Furthermore, by casting Sandra Oh, a middle-aged Asian woman, in a role that 20 years ago would have unquestionably gone to a young white woman, she added layers of invisibility and underestimation

that made Eve's character infinitely richer.

B. Recontextualizing history: Greta Gerwig and Little Women

The story of Little Women has always been





female. However, for over a century, its film adaptations focused predominantly on romance, marriages, and domestic drama. Jo March's ambition was treated as a charming quirk.

Greta Gerwig, as writer and director, made a narrative correction. She restructured the story, beginning with Jo March as an adult trying to sell her work in New York. From the first scene, the film is not about "who will Jo marry?". It's about "will Jo get her book published and get paid for it?". Gerwig transformed a story about domestic romance into a story about female authorship and economic independence. She took a passing line from the book "Money is the end and aim of a world that seems to have no other" and made it the film's emotional pillar. She didn't change the story, but she changed its purpose, aligning it with a modern responsibility: to expose the economic structures that trapped women, not just the romantic ones.

C. Infiltration and genre subversion: Kathryn Bigelow and action cinema

Kathryn Bigelow is perhaps the most powerful example of a director who refused to accept that certain genres "belonged" to men. With The Hurt Locker and Zero Dark Thirty, she not only entered the war/action genre; she redefined it.

Where a male director might focus on the spectacle of the explosion (the "gaze" at destruction), Bigelow focused on the psychology of adrenaline addiction. The Hurt Locker is less a war film and more a character study about a man's inability to function in domestic life. In Zero Dark Thirty, the protagonist Maya (Jessica Chastain) is not an action hero. She is an obsessive analyst, whose "fight" is bureaucratic and intellectual, waged in windowless rooms against a sexist intelligence



system that doubts her at every turn.

Bigelow didn't "gender-swap" a protagonist; she proved that the director's gender could fundamentally change the nature of a story, finding humanity and complexity where before there was only spectacle.

D. Horror as a feminist tool: the gaze of Julia Ducournau



The horror genre has historically used the female body as a site of punishment and spectacle (the virginal "final girl" who survives while her sexually active friends are killed). Recent female directors, however, have taken the genre for themselves. Julia Ducournau, winner of the Palme d'Or for Titane, is a prime example. In Titane and her previous film, Raw, she uses body horror not to punish, but to explore the female experience. Her films are about female desire, rage, bodily transformation, and the rejection of gender norms. She doesn't film the body from the outside in (as an object to be feared or desired), but from the inside out (what it feels like to have a body that bleeds, that changes, that desires in "monstrous" ways). She reclaims the monstrous as feminine.

E. Explicit gender correction: Battlestar Galactica and Starbuck

Although it's television, the impact of the Battlestar Galactica reimagining by Ronald D. Moore (with strong influence from female writers like N. Weddle and B. Espenson) is undeniable. The most controversial and brilliant decision was to change the character Starbuck, a charming, cigar-smoking "cowboy" pilot from the original 70s series, to Kara "Starbuck" Thrace (Katee Sackhoff), an equally





arrogant, self-destructive, and smoking woman.

This was not a "gender swap" for aesthetic reasons. The change made the story exponentially richer. Starbuck's dynamics with her superiors and lovers were fraught with tensions over authority, sexuality, and insubordination. What was a clichéd male archetype became a complex and innovative character study about trauma, faith, and identity. They took a 25-year-old story and "corrected" it for the present, proving that the original male protagonist was, in fact, the least interesting version of the story.

F. Silent subversion in Brazil: the case of Anna Muylaert



In Brazil, narrative correction often takes the form of a shift in point of view. In Que Horas Ela Volta? (The Second Mother), Anna Muylaert uses cinematic language to dismantle the class structure. The film begins with frames that physically separate the employer (Bárbara) and the maid (Val). The camera respects this division. When Val's daughter, Jéssica, arrives, she refuses to accept these invisible barriers. She invades the "master's" spaces, and Muylaert's camera goes with her. The film's "purpose" is achieved not through speeches, but through how the camera chooses where to stand and whom to follow. Muylaert isn't just telling Val's story; she is forcing us, through the "Female Gaze," to feel the spatial oppression of that house, something a director focused on the employer's drama might never have captured. **G. Fiction as off-axis confrontation: Mariana Brennand and Manas** If



Muylaert's film uses a São Paulo filmmaker to look at the migrant's experience, the work of Mariana Brennand, a filmmaker from Brasília (Center-West), is a powerful example of how "purpose" is linked to decentralizing fiction. In her feature film Manas (2024), Brennand chooses to build her narrative on Marajó Island (Pará, North Region), a territory almost invisible in the national fiction imaginary.

The film focuses on the journey of Marcielle, a 13-year-old girl who, instead of passively accepting the cycle of violence that defines the lives of women in her community, decides to "confront the machinery." Brennand's act of purpose is twofold: first, she rejects the "Concrete Ceiling" of the Southeast, proving that a universal and urgent story can (and must) be told from the North of the country. Second, she rejects the male gaze, which so often victimizes women in violent contexts. By centering the story on the perception, pain, and, crucially, the agency of a 13-year-old girl, Brennand uses the "Female Gaze" to explore resilience and the possibility of rupture, giving a powerful voice to those the system tries to silence.

These examples, from Killing Eve to Manas and The Second Mother, show the power I now wield over my own 20-year-old story. The responsibility is not just to tell the story; it is to interrogate the story. Why was it conceived this way? Whom did it serve? And, most importantly, whom does it serve today?

4- Intersectional responsibility: more than gender, the fight for plural voices

"Cinema with purpose" does not stop at a simple binary swap from male to female. The responsibility I feel as a modern filmmaker is, by definition, intersectional. The "male gaze" that dominated the 20th century was also, overwhelmingly, a white, cisgender, heterosexual, and Western gaze. Today's responsibility is to break all these patterns. In Brazil, this is particularly urgent. The history of Brazilian cinema has its pioneers, like Gilda de Abreu, but it was for a long time a male-dominated industry. The arrival of Adélia Sampaio, the first Black woman to direct a fiction feature film in Brazil (Amor Maldito / Cursed Love, 1984), was not just a milestone; it was an act of rupture.

Today, filmmakers like Viviane Ferreira (Um Dia com Jerusa / A Day with Jerusa) or Grace Passô (Vaga Carne / Roving Flesh) are not just making "women's cinema"; they are making Black cinema, cinema that decentralizes the Southeast experience, cinema that questions the body and the norm. They carry the dual responsibility of fighting against industry sexism and, at the same time, against the structural racism that defines which stories are considered "worthy" of funding and distribution.



Adélia Sampaio

But intersectionality demands that we look even deeper. "Purpose" means fighting for LGBTQIA+ narratives to move out of the margins or the "best friend" role. It means creating space for lesbian and bisexual female directors to tell their own stories of desire, and for trans women, like director and screenwriter Estrela Straus, to control the narrative about their own bodies and lives, far from the fetishistic or victimizing gaze.

Likewise, narrative responsibility in Brazil is incomplete without the voices of Indigenous women. For decades, cinema portrayed Indigenous people as objects of anthropological study, almost always under the white gaze. Cinema with purpose is cinema made by them. It is the work of filmmakers like Olinda Yawar, of the Baniwa people, or Graci Guarani, who use the camera not as a tool of observation, but as a tool for demarcating territory, for memory, and for political struggle.

My work on "Templos de Bertioga" aligns with this greater responsibility. By choosing to document the diversity of faith, I was already practicing a cinema of purpose, one that refuses to accept a single narrative (in this case, the hegemonic religious narrative) as the only truth.

When I decide that my new protagonist will be a woman, I join a global chorus that



Olinda Yawar



Graci Guarani

affirms that the complexity of the world can only be captured by a plurality of voices. "Purpose" is the understanding that every script choice, every framing, every casting decision, is an opportunity to affirm a humanity that has been historically denied.

5- The practical challenges of purpose

Recognizing the clarity of this responsibility is the first step. The second is understanding why its practical application is still so challenging. The answer is that 'cinema with purpose' swims against a 100-year tide of commercial infrastructure. We, female filmmakers, face concrete and multifaceted challenges.

A. The funding obstacle

The brutal reality is that films centered on women (especially Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, or older women) are still seen by executives and investment funds as "niche" or "commercial risks." As Carla Maia's article on female participation in Brazil highlights, we face more barriers to accessing public development funds. When seeking funding, I must convince the "money-holders" that my story—the "corrected" story—is "worth" telling. Often, the original 20-year-old version, with the male protagonist, would be a "safer investment." My responsibility, therefore, requires financial courage and exhaustive persistence.

B. The burden of representation

When one of us manages to make a film, we rarely have the luxury of making "just a film." We carry the burden of representation. If our film fails, it's not "a film" that failed; it's a "woman's film" that failed, and the door closes a little more for the next one. There is pressure to create "perfect" or "inspiring" female characters, which can be just as limiting as the old archetypes. True liberation—and true purpose—is giving our characters the right to be as flawed, complex, morally ambiguous, and fascinating as male protagonists have always been allowed to be.

C. The "boys' club" (networking)

The film industry, as the "Celluloid Ceiling" points out, runs on contact networks. It's the same producers hiring the same directors of photography, who in turn recommend the same assistants. These networks are, historically, male. We often need to build our own networks from scratch, or fight to be taken seriously in an environment that, by default, questions our technical authority and creative vision.

D. The "strong female character" trap

This is one of the most treacherous challenges, as it disguises itself as progress. In reaction to the "damsel in distress," the industry created the "Strong Female Character." The problem is, she is often just a man in a female body. She is tough, emotionless, rejects everything "feminine" (like motherhood or vulnerability), and

resolves conflicts through physical violence, just like a male action hero. This is not a female character; it is a male archetype in drag. The real challenge, the one I faced in my script, is not to create a "strong" woman, but a "complex" woman. A woman whose strength might lie in her emotional resilience, her intelligence, her ability to build community, or her vulnerability. The purpose is to show that vulnerability is strength, something the "Male Gaze" rarely allows.

Conclusion: my final responsibility

Cinema is at an inflection point. Technology has democratized production, but not distribution or the power to define culture. My responsibility as a filmmaker, whether I am an Oscar-winning director like Chloé Zhao or an independent director in Bertioga, is the same: to be the conscious guardian of the narrative.

It is a two-pronged responsibility:

First, the responsibility to **deconstruct**. To look at the past, at the classics, at the established genres, and even at my own old ideas, and ask: "Who is missing here? Whose gaze is dominating? What lie are we telling?"

Second, the responsibility to **construct**. To use the camera and the pen not as mirrors, but as hammers. To build new structures, new archetypes, and new "heroine's journeys" that are as complex, messy, terrifying, and triumphant as real life.

My decision to change my 20-year-old protagonist from a man to a woman is not a footnote in my creative process; it is the creative process itself. It is "cinema with purpose" in its purest form. It is my recognition that, to tell a universal truth in 2025, the narrative compass can no longer point to the same "north" as always. My responsibility is, finally, to redraw the map. And in doing so, I know I am not just changing one story; I am joining other women who are changing who will have the power to tell all future stories.

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Empathy as Moral Imagination in Contemporary Independent Women's Cinema

Marion Standefer

The American Psychological Association defines empathy as "the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference; that is, the capacity to place oneself in another's position."[1] If the goal of filmmaking is to represent the world around us or to envision what a better reality could look like then the ability to place oneself in another's position is one of the most crucial tools a filmmaker can possess. It is employed at every stage of creation: while developing credible characters, composing shots that frame the viewer's perception, and working with actors to elicit genuine performances. Empathy allows artists not only to make art, but to make art that heals, humanizes, and reminds audiences of their shared humanity.

Yet traditional production hierarchies often make it seem like becoming a director requires anything but empathy. For over a century, cinema has rewarded traits coded as masculine: command, technical mastery, speed, certainty. In an industry that rewards dominance, sensitivity can feel like a liability. Empathy, then, is both the foundation of humane cinema and the trait most at risk of being trampled in its creation. If the sensitive are silenced or exploited, and the heartless become the storytellers, the ramifications for the stories and for the world that consumes them are grave.

This essay explores the paradox of empathy's importance and its precarity in the filmmaking process, and it concludes by showing how the works discussed suggest a practical ethic for protecting empathy while getting the film made. It draws on neuroscience, sociology, gender studies, anthropology, and film theory to examine empathy as a creative force. It asks how gendered expectations shape the ways stories are told, received, and valued—and how filmmakers can work outside dominant hierarchies to transform empathy into method and make films that heal. Through five films Charliebird (2025, dir. Libby Ewing, written by Samantha Smart), Ugualmente Diversi (Equally Different) (2024, dir. Federika Ponnetti), Je verrai toujours vos visages (2023, dir. Jeanne Herry), Funny Bunny (2015, dir. Alison Bagnall), and Le Meilleur du Monde (2025, dir. Marion Standefer) I explore empathy not as sentimentality, but as a disciplined form of perception that generates humane cinema, and how these women filmmakers preserved it in telling their stories.

I. Empathy as Moral Imagination

These filmmakers aren't just asking for empathy; they are practicing it as moral imagination. They're not making "issue" films they're guiding audiences toward understanding as a radical act of forgiveness, both of others and of self. Moral imagination is the capacity to envision another person's inner world and then to act from that knowledge; it is the creative and ethical faculty that lets us grasp the

consequences of our choices for real lives.[2] In cinema, moral imagination is the decision to build frames, rhythms, and working conditions that brings to light the humanity of others, as opposed to their function in a plot.

Neuroscience helps explain how and why this matters. Empathy involves both affective resonance and cognitive perspective-taking; it recruits the mirror systems that let us simulate another's experience while also engaging executive processes that regulate that resonance.[3] The same neural talent that lets a director sense a performance's truth can also overload in adversarial environments precisely the environments that many film sets, with their speed, hierarchy, and financial anxiety, can become. Organizational research further shows a stubborn cultural code: leadership is often rewarded when it looks like dominance and punished when it looks like care.[4] Women, on average, tend to score higher on measured empathy and emotional intelligence,[5] yet are frequently socialized to mute those responses in professional contexts that equate authority with detachment. The result is the central paradox of this paper: empathy is essential to humane cinema and simultaneously at risk within the very process of making it.

The answer is not to abandon sensitivity but to learn to protect it and to convert it into structure: to build crews, processes, and frames that shelter empathic attention so it can do the work only it can do. Each of the films I discuss enacts some version of that conversion.

III. Empathy at Work: Five Case Studies

Charliebird (2025): Transmuting Grief

Charliebird (2025, Libby Ewing; written by Samantha Smart) follows a young woman, Charlie, a music therapist grappling with survivor's guilt who develops a particularly close relationship with a cancer patient. Samantha Smart wrote Charliebird after losing a close friend in the 2019 Texas mass shooting. She not only wrote the screenplay but played the lead. Before filming, she studied music-care workers who use rhythm and melody to help trauma survivors regulate emotion. After bringing on the director, Libby Ewing, to the project, Ewing experienced the loss of a parent. Their collaboration became infused with the mourning both artists were experiencing in their personal lives. Together they cast an actress, Gabriela Ochoa, who lived with a chronic illness similar to the character's. At the Q&A after the screening I attended, Smart, Ewing, and Ochoa spoke about what making the film meant to them. The process allowed Ochoa to process



aspects of her illness, Smart to process the loss of her friend to gun violence, and Ewing to process losing her father. They described following a very intuitive process and the film arriving in their lives at the moment they most needed it. Though they came from different experiences, the empathy with which they approached one another's trauma gave them the support they needed to be truly vulnerable.

The transformative nature of the story for those who made it extended to the audience. When I saw Charliebird at Tribeca, the entire audience cried. The film touches a nearly universal wound: the pain of losing someone you love. Rather than simply mourn the loss of the person here the secondary character it celebrated the relationship between caregiver and care receiver. Having just cared for my grandfather until his death, I found myself sobbing for hours afterward. By uplifting the beauty and ephemeral nature of relationships, the film gave me a new perspective on my pain and healed a part of me I didn't know needed healing. I was not alone in this inner transformation. Through its accuracy and emotion, Smart and Ewing's film managed to hold a room full of strangers in shared sorrow until we all felt lighter.

That is empathy functioning as moral imagination. The filmmakers didn't exploit trauma; they transmuted it into collective healing. The tenderness with which Smart frames her character allows the audience to forgive themselves for still hurting. The method is as important as the theme: music-care research informed performance; grief informed collaboration; and the camera was invited to bear witness rather than force revelation. Empathy here is both subject and structuring principle.

Ugualmente Diversi (2024): Empathy as Structure and Accessibility



Federika Ponnetti's debut documentary extends empathy from subject to system. The film follows three autistic waiters Lorenzo, Andrea, and Gabriele working in an innovative Italian pizzeria staffed by neurodiverse youth. In parallel, a high-school class participates in a mobile-filmmaking workshop about difference and self-representation. When the students and waiters meet, the film shows how "normality" is a fragile social fiction: we are, as the title insists, equally different.

From the outset Ponnetti made formal choices that transformed empathy into infrastructure. The project was certified Green Film; it included subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, audio description for blind viewers, and typography mindful of dyslexia and ADHD. She even fought for audio-described end credits, turning accessibility into a manifesto that extended dignity beyond the narrative. "I didn't use the camera to film the subjects like circus animals," she told me. "The camera was in front of each of us at the same level to show

that we are all the same, the students and the waiters." She described the camera as "very observative," a tool of attention rather than of examination.

Ponnetti used her empathy to choose a shooting environment where her subjects would feel comfortable, allowing her to show these individuals at their best. "I wanted to film in Pizz'Aut because the main characters would be around others like them and feel comfortable." Her ethics of site transformed the set into a sanctuary. "Usually we judge them [autistic people]," she said. "With this movie, I want to show that we are all diverse. In order to have compassion for each other we first have to have compassion for ourselves." So the film begins with a simple exercise: the students record themselves naming three strengths and three weaknesses. By inviting the neurotypical teenagers to disclose vulnerability first, Ponnetti lets the audience see that fragility is shared rather than owned by the neurodivergent.

Ponnetti's relationship with her subject was key in her ability to put herself in their place, and help viewers do the same. To develop these relationships, Ponnetti shot extensively over a long period of time. "When Gabriele [one of the waiters] wasn't able to pass the exam, it was a collective exam for all of us," she said. "The DoP and first AD were shooting they were really involved in the story like it was our story. We became like a little family." She also shared her own positionality: "I am neurodivergent. I bite my nails when I'm stressed; Gabriele puts his hands in his hair and shakes. We don't have to judge; we can concentrate on uniqueness." In that sentence is the ethic of the film: difference as pattern, not as defect.

Because the relationship was strong enough, the waiters sometimes "seemed like actors" not because they were performing, but because the camera had learned how to watch without tightening them into self-consciousness. That is the power of a creative documentary: it captures the dignity people already possess. But, as Ponnetti emphasized, "It takes a long time."

Empathy here is an entire ecology: casting, crew conduct, accessibility, place, pace. It is also a didactic cinema in the best sense one that teaches audiences to see their own fragility first, so they can see it in others without pity.

Je verrai toujours vos visages (2023): Understanding as Justice

Jeanne Herry's film takes empathy into the



domain of justice, staging restorative-justice workshops in which victims and offenders meet under the guidance of trained mediators. The encounters are not sensationalized; they are patient, frank, and bounded by rules that protect everyone's

dignity. The camera's restraint is a moral choice: it refuses to decide for us. By giving equal weight to victims' voices and offenders' explanations, the film invites a difficult shift from judgment as distancing to understanding as prevention.

The effect on the spectator is precise. Because we experience the process through the victims' willingness to sit, listen, and ask questions, we find ourselves seeing the offenders through the victims' eyes. When a victim says, "When you tell me why you did it, I can breathe again," we experience that breath in our own bodies. The film's ethical power lies in that shared respiration. Herry is not arguing that all crimes should be forgiven; she is insisting that understanding is a condition of repair, and that repair is a public act as much as a personal one.

Watching Herry's film illuminated why my own Le Meilleur du Monde asks audiences to forgive my protagonist at the moment he confesses to lying. You forgive when you finally know a person well enough to see why the lie was once necessary for survival. Understanding is not absolution; it is context, and context is what lets the present diverge from the past.

Funny Bunny (2015): Empathy as Rescue



Alison Bagnall made Funny Bunny for her mother's cousin, an incest victim who died by suicide. "I wanted to rewrite her story as if someone had come and saved her," she told me. On a larger level than her mother's cousin's story, she "wanted to help survivors to bring secrets into the light, where they would lose their power". The film follows two misfits, Gene and Titty, who both wear their loneliness like armor. Beneath its whimsy, the film is a rescue mission in slow motion.

Bagnall's process was an ethic of care. She consulted psychologists, cast actors with deep connections to the roles, and cleared sets for sensitive scenes. She created what she called a "protective bubble," both for the performers and for the audience who would later receive the film. "In an industry that rewards dominance, empathy can be mistaken for weakness," she said. "I had to become both the mom and the dad on set." She learned how to defend softness without letting it be trampled, and how to exercise authority without adopting the very hardness she rejected.

The film's impact extended beyond screenings. After the premiere, survivors of incest wrote to her saying that Funny Bunny had given them language and, in some cases, courage to tell their families what had happened. "It worked," she said. "It was a therapy movie." This, too, is moral imagination: not a refusal to judge, but a refusal to abandon. In an interview about her research process, Bagnall told me that the psychologist she consulted told her "that in fact humor is used in group therapy for survivors. It's an important tool for working through trauma,

and taking away its power. I love humor and I wanted to inject it into this tragic and disturbing subject matter. Victims of trauma should not be deprived of laughter, of joy. That would be giving too much power to an abuser. I wanted to bring light into a dark subject. Release." Funny Bunny holds trauma without exploiting it; it turns the camera into a shelter. Humor, in Bagnall's hands, is not avoidance but mercy the relief that lets difficult truth be spoken aloud.

Le Meilleur du Monde (2025): Empathy as a means of reaching collective truth



Whereas Bagnall's film is an attempt to create a fictional rescue of a trauma victim, Le Meilleur du Monde is my attempt to tell the story of my real experience attempting to heal a trauma victim through love. Like Ponnetti's Ugualmente Diversi, the film also exposes the shared fragility of its main characters, though they come from radically different backgrounds. The film follows Mouctar, a young Guinean migrant navigating life in Paris. When he joins a non-profit theater workshop, the trauma of his past surfaces-forcing him to face the truth behind his flight from home. The cast is made up largely of non-actors improvising scenes. I cast my former students, their friends, Uber drivers, service workers, and created a multilingual set of first-timers that allowed people to bring themselves to the set without being asked to leave themselves at the door.

A key way in which I used my empathy to elicit strong performances was through not judging the actors during their performances, and, through acting myself, creating opportunities for improvisation. I made jokes to provoke spontaneous laughter during theater workshops and listened carefully and open-heartedly when West African migrants shared their stories through interviews and monologue scenes. Though this meant ceding creative control to the actors in a way which challenged the fluidity of set and the editing process, the result is something that gets as close to a collective truth as possible, representing each person - the way they speak, present themselves, see events in one collective story.

I use my character to help audiences understand a West African man who has raised himself and reinvented his truth to survive, both through the way I portray him on camera and through my character's perception of him. When he finally admits to lying, the audience is able to forgive him

because they have spent the film getting to know him, just as I did.

IV. From Empathy to Understanding

Across these films, empathy moves from private feeling to public method. In Charliebird, grief research, lived loss, and performance discipline turn sorrow into a communal rite. In Ugualmente Diversi, accessibility becomes architecture; the cinema of empathy is built with audio description, legible type, and shared vulnerability. In Je verrai toujours vos visages, justice is reconceived as understanding; the audience learns to breathe again with the victims. In Funny Bunny, tenderness without spectacle becomes a form of rescue. In Le Meilleur du Monde, co-creation and boundaries let strangers speak and be heard without being mined.

Together these films expand the moral perimeter of who gets to be seen with compassion: survivors who cannot love "normally"; offenders who are more than their crimes; migrants who alter their stories to protect their past selves; fathers who made impossible choices; sons who cannot yet face what happened to them; women who drown grief in work; self-conscious teenagers; and neurodivergent waiters. Because these filmmakers have worked to understand, accept, and forgive their characters and the actors portraying them, their films allow us to do the same. They model what it looks like to meet another human being without demand or defense. Understanding does not excuse harm; it prevents repetition, turning pain into knowledge.

There is a quiet courage running through all of this. Women, socialized to listen and to hold contradiction, are positioned by experience if not by destiny to defend empathy within systems that mistake it for fragility. But the call extends to everyone. To make art that heals, one must first protect the capacity to feel. That protection requires technique (how we cast and cut), structure (how we build crews and schedules), and leadership (how we hold a room). Sometimes it requires firing the person who undermines the process. Sometimes it requires telling an actor that we will wait until they feel safe enough to speak. Sometimes it requires admitting we do not yet know and then making a choice anyway, because the set needs direction to keep breathing.

Coda: Empathy as Moral Pedagogy

When I say that these filmmakers practice empathy as moral imagination, I mean that their films teach by the way they were made. They teach crews how to work together without humiliation; they teach actors to trust a camera that will not punish them; they teach audiences to metabolize grief without shutting down; they teach communities to sit in a room with one screen and many kinds of bodies. They are not making "issue" films; they are making films that change how issues are felt. In doing so, they grant us an apprenticeship in understanding. They show that cinema's highest purpose is not representation but restoration: the restoration of dignity, of connection, and of the simple faith that stories can mend what violence has broken. Directing, at its core, is an act of love disciplined by craft. Empathy, far from being soft, is steel wrapped in flesh. And every frame born of care has the power to make the world slightly more bearable. If the heartless become the storytellers, our collective mirror grows cold. But when

empathy leads the way when we dare to feel and still get the work done cinema becomes what it was always meant to be: a rehearsal for understanding.

Notes

1. American Psychological Association. (2015). APA Dictionary of Psychology (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: APA. "Empathy" entry.

2. See Mark Johnson, Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); see also Martha C. Nussbaum, Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), and Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3. Tania Singer and Christine Lamm, "The Social Neuroscience of Empathy," Nature Reviews Neuroscience 10 (2009): 57–65; Christian Keysers and Valeria Gazzola, "Social Neuroscience: Mirror Neurons Recorded in Humans," Current Biology 20, no. 8 (2010): R353–R354.

4. Catalyst, "The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership" (2018); also Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli, "Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership," Harvard Business Review (2007). For film-industry specific analysis, see Sherry B. Ortner, "Against Hollywood: Notes on the History of 'Independent' Film," Camera Obscura 28, no. 2 (2013).

5. Daniel Goleman, Working with Emotional Intelligence (New York: Bantam, 1998). On care ethics, see Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

6. On observational ethics in documentary practice, see accounts of Frederick Wiseman's method across interviews and criticism; while his approach is distinct, the restraint and attention he models inform a broader conversation about non-extractive filming.

7. On restorative-justice frameworks, see Howard Zehr, The Little Book of Restorative Justice (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002), for a concise overview of practices similar to those dramatized by Jeanne Herry.

8. For trauma, narrative, and testimony in cinema, see Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York: Routledge, 1992), especially on the ethics of witnessing and the transformation of private pain into shared meaning.

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Women in Cinema: Truth, Courage, and the Power of Film

Editha Caduaya

Abstract

This cinematic-essay explores the evolving role of women in Philippine cinema4from the earliest female directors who defied patriarchal norms to the contemporary filmmakers who continue to navigate gendered barriers in production, distribution, and representation. It examines the intersection of gender, media, and regional inequality through the author's own experience as a journalist-turned-filmmaker and producer of Sa Likod ng Tsapa, the first Mindanaoan documentary to achieve national theatrical release. The essay argues that the struggle of women in cinema mirrors the broader struggle for narrative sovereignty: to tell one's story truthfully, courageously, and unapologetically.

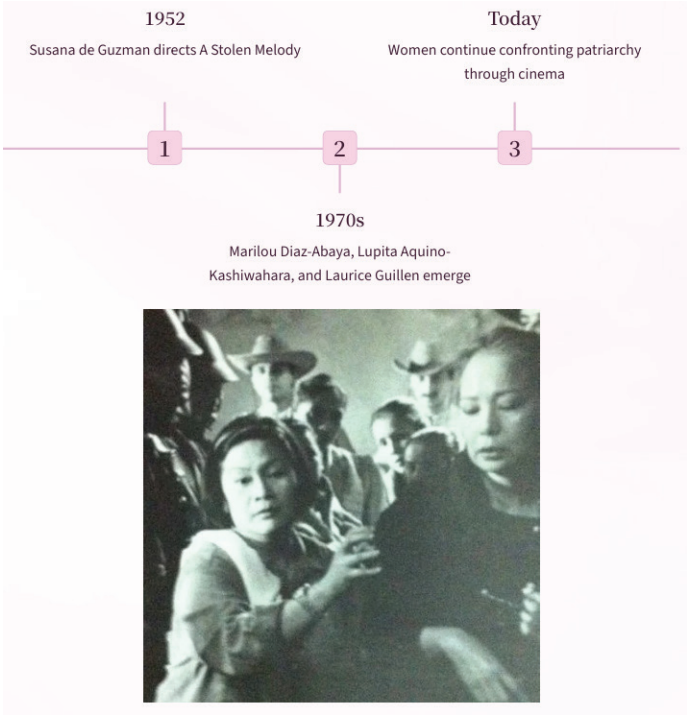
I. The Personal is Cinematic

The transition from journalism to filmmaking was not a career shift4it was an awakening. For over two decades, I worked as a reporter, writing stories about rural poverty, politics, and justice. But when truth itself became dangerous to publish, the written word no longer sufficed. I turned to film4not as escape, but as evolution. My documentary, Sa Likod ng Tsapa, chronicled the life of a controversial police officer caught in the moral crossfire of law and loyalty. It began as reportage and evolved into revelation. When it premiered across 73 cinemas nationwide, it marked not





only a milestone for Mindanaoan cinema but also a statement: that women from the margins could transform journalism into cinematic activism.



II. Women Written Out of Film History

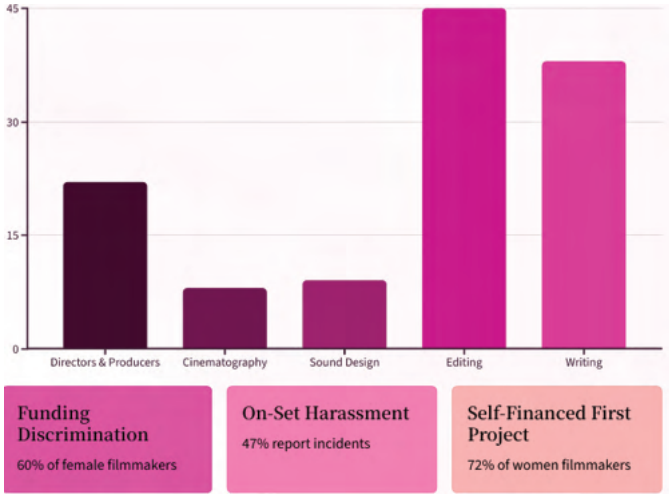
Philippine cinema, like its global counterparts, began with male dominance. The "Golden Age" of the 1950s celebrated Gerardo de León and Lamberto Avellana, but rarely mentioned Susana de Guzman, who directed A Stolen Melody (1952), one of the earliest films by a Filipina. It was not until the 1970s that women directors like Marilou Diaz-Abaya, Lupita Aquino-Kashiwahara, and Laurice Guillen made their mark. Through Brutal, Moral, and Ina, Kapatid, Anak, they broke cinematic silence by confronting patriarchy, morality, and identity under dictatorship.

These women did not simply join the industry4they transformed it. Diaz-Abaya's assertion that "cinema is confrontation" remains prophetic today. Yet decades later, the same confrontation persists.

III. Statistics Behind the Struggle

In 2023, the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) reported that only 22% of film directors and producers are women. In cinematography and sound design, the number drops below 10%. However, women dominate editing and writing4tasks often deemed "supportive." This disparity exposes a deeper bias: women are trusted to polish stories, but not to author them.

Moreover, 60% of female filmmakers



experience gender-based funding discrimination, 47% report onset harassment, and 72% have self-financed their first project. These numbers are not statistics4they are survival stories.

IV. Mindanao: The Regional Frontier

For women filmmakers in Mindanao, the challenge doubles. Distance from Manila means distance from opportunity. Film festivals, grants, and mentorships remain concentrated in Luzon. Yet Mindanaoan women persist, documenting insurgency, resilience, and cultural identity. Their works are not only cinematic acts but social interventions.

My journey with Sa Likod ng Tsapa revealed this gap. We built our own

Regional Resilience: Mindanaoan women filmmakers create without institutional support, building networks from the ground up and transforming their communities through cinema.





production network from scratch4 training volunteers, borrowing equipment, and screening in community halls before our film reached theaters. This is how regional women filmmakers survive: by building what the system denies them.

V. Digital Disruption, Digital Liberation

When streaming platforms emerged, many feared they would end traditional cinema. Instead, they opened doors for women. Online distribution bypasses male-dominated studio hierarchies, allowing independent creators to reach global audiences.

Filmmakers like Baby Ruth Villarama (Sunday Beauty Queen) and Martika Escobar (Leonor Will Never Die) proved that truth and innovation can coexist. Their films transcended national borders while maintaining cultural authenticity. In the digital sphere, women no longer need validation4they claim visibility.

Traditional Cinema	Digital Streaming
• Studio gatekeepers	• Direct audience access
• Limited distribution	• Global reach
• Male-dominated hierarchies	• Independent control
• Geographic constraints	• Borderless distribution

VI. Storytelling as Resistance

Women see differently. Our gaze is layered4political yet intimate, grounded yet emotional. We don't film to conquer; we film to connect. Each frame is empathy; each story, defiance.

Through our lens, suffering is not spectacle but structure. We turn wounds into warnings, silence into substance. When a woman holds a camera, she wields both weapon and witness.

As feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey argued, cinema historically objectified women. Today, Filipina directors reclaim the gaze, shifting from object to observer, muse to maker.



VII. Post-Pandemic Cinema and Women's Leadership

The COVID-19 pandemic nearly killed local cinema. Yet when theaters reopened, women led the recovery. At Cinemalaya 2024, 70% of short film entries were directed by women, and half of the independent producers were female. This quiet revolution reflects resilience, not coincidence.

Women drove innovation through hybrid festivals, grassroots screenings, and community-oriented productions. They revived not just an industry, but a collective will to create amid uncertainty.



VIII. The Documentary as Empathy

Documentary filmmaking is the moral compass of cinema. When I filmed Sa Likod ng Tsapa, I met a woman whose husband a police officer was imprisoned for following orders. She whispered, "At least now, someone is listening." That sentence changed my understanding of film forever.

Documentaries humanize policy and politicize silence. They transform journalism into visual justice. Through the camera, truth travels farther than print it enters the conscience.

IX. The Responsibility of Women Storytellers

Representation without responsibility risks repetition. Women filmmakers must tell stories that challenge, not mimic, patriarchal narratives. This means mentoring the next generation, ensuring inclusive production sets, and advocating ethical funding.

Our fight is not against men but against erasure. Collaboration, not competition, sustains cinema. We must build circles of mentorship, regional laboratories, and gender sensitive funding systems.

X. The Future We Are Filming

The next era of Philippine cinema will be defined not by profit but by participation.



"Cinema is not dead—as long as women keep creating."

Truth. Courage. Film.



As streaming, AI, and immersive storytelling expand, women's voices must remain central. The challenge is not only access but authorship4who controls the narrative, owns the footage, and profits from the story.

If we democratize storytelling, we democratize truth. The future belongs to those who film with conscience.

Conclusion: Cinema is Alive

Cinema lives in every woman who dares to film despite exhaustion, bias, or fear. It thrives in every frame that bears witness to justice and memory.

Women in Philippine cinema are no longer footnotes. We are authors, architects, and advocates. Our stories do not beg for inclusion-they demand recognition.

The light from a projector may fade at the end of a screening, but the light carried by women filmmakers continues to burn. It is not a spotlight for fame4it is a torch for truth.

Editha Caduaya

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The Ontology of Object-Oriented Cinema

Nadie Wasalamudaliarachchi

Abstract

This article offers a critical inquiry into the possibility of re-reading cinema through the lens of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), a philosophical framework developed by the American philosopher Graham Harman in the twentieth century, one of the most influential intellectual currents of the twenty-first century. The prevailing tradition in film theory has been grounded in a subject-oriented, human-centric view (anthropocentrism), in which the spectator as an empowered, autonomous agent reads the world and its objects (Objects) from a position of primacy, while the ontological status of those objects is largely overlooked. This article argues that by drawing on Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) particularly its central proposition that objects are autonomous entities with their own reality, operating on the exact same ontological footing as the human subject, it becomes possible to re-read cinema in a manner that grants equal ontological standing to the Object. In doing so, this article contends that such a reading may ultimately render the journey of exploring the meaning of human existence within cinema more fertile and navigable.

Keywords: Subject and Object, Human agency, Modern Western philosophy, Mise en scène, Object-Oriented Ontology

Subject and Object

Before entering the discussion of 'The Ontology of Object-Oriented Cinema' as a subject, it is necessary first to clarify what we mean by Subject and Object. In the fundamental terms of philosophy, the Subject refers to a person or observer equipped with agency, the capacity to make independent decisions and to think. The Object, accordingly, is that which falls under the gaze of this person or observer; that which is examined and perceived. The relationship between Subject and Object may therefore be understood as the dialogue that arises from this foundational division between the observer and the observed.

Henry E. Bliss, writing in The Subject-Object Relation, published by Duke University Press, describes the relationship between Subject and Object in the following terms:

In seeking a sane and consistent account of human experience, of things, of ideas, and of events, of the world and of our life in it, human science and philosophy are ever dealing with subjective perceptions of objective phenomena and with concepts developed from subjective perceptions. The properties of objects, the relations between them, and the facts of common knowledge, are known mostly through the correlative qualities of perception and the quantities of relative measurement. These involve special subjective judgments, volitions, and values, as well as the general conceptions and the norms of knowledge and function.

[Henry E. Bliss, The Subject-Object Relation, Duke University Press, 2026]

By the present moment, the relationship between Subject and Object, and the nature of their connection has departed enormously from its earliest philosophical articulations, and continues to be actively contested.

Subject and Object in Philosophy

The dialogue between Subject and Object has occupied philosophy since ancient times, and for those engaged with the discipline, the manner in which these two poles have operated throughout philosophical history will come as no surprise. As is well established, debates about the self and the nature of subjectivity have long sat at the centre of modern Western philosophy from the very beginnings of civilised humanity through to the present, and persisting for as long as human existence endures, as part of the unending quest to discover the meaning of human life. Within that tradition, Subject and Object are understood as fundamentally oppositional; the word 'subjectivity' itself derives from 'subject' in its philosophical sense.

From Kant back to Descartes, ideas concerning Subject and Object have, in varying degrees and forms both directly and indirectly, contributed to the construction and advancement of nearly every domain of Western philosophy. The roots of this fundamental notion in Western thought reach back to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's theories of the soul, and it is evident that the ideas later advanced by Western rationalists such as Descartes and Kant on the Subject-Object relationship were themselves informed by those Aristotelian foundations. Furthermore, the Subject-Object problematic has exerted influence over related philosophical concepts such as scepticism, individuality and existentialism.

Perhaps the most intellectually compelling rupture within this broader discussion, however is the tension between two distinct deployments of the subject; the subject in epistemology versus the subject in ontology. In epistemology, the subject is the knower, the observer, the conscious agent a branch of inquiry that explores the nature and limits of human knowledge. In ontology by contrast the subject refers to the entity under examination, to the fundamental 'things' that constitute reality. This distinction is of no small consequence.

Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida among others, rejected the traditional notion of subjectivity in favour of constructionism. Later philosophers challenged these long-established positions through new conceptual frameworks. Nevertheless, as long as human existence and the world persist, this philosophical conversation will continue for the world and human existence are things that no human being can ever definitively define or resolve. This may itself be regarded as something of a paradox.

Subject and Object in Cinema

In a broad sense, what cinema accomplishes is another form of the same philosophical operation an attempt to understand human existence and the world or to arrive at something close to that understanding through a different medium. Cinema is at its core a philosophical act staged through images. For this reason, the Subject-Object dialogue in philosophy is not something filmmakers can afford to set aside.

Within cinema, the relationship between Subject and Object is a matter of active

debate. Under Roland Barthes's principle of 'The Death of the Author', once the cinematic work achieves independence from its director everything contained within it may be regarded as Objects. These Objects through the fresh act of viewing, through the returning spectator's gaze in the cinema hall are transformed into subjects by the feelings and mental impressions they generate. In other words, the capacity of cinematic objects to exist independently and autonomously is of particular significance here; a film possesses genuine qualities that persist autonomously regardless of what the director intended or how any given viewer chooses to interpret it.

Filmtheory.org, in its 2014 article 'Subjective Cinema', describes the Subject-Object dynamic in cinema as follows:

The basic difference of the subjective and objective cinema depends on who sees what in what situation. Subjective cinema decides what the character and audiences has to see giving the impression of a live experience of the happening that can give the excitement that makes it look real. Subjective cinema shows the influences of the character and emphasizes on their own perspective and understanding that leading to one side view of the whole event or scene. Objective cinema makes it look as if the narrator is an outsider or third party who watches the proceedings of the scene in sidelines. The objective cinema doesn't focus on personal feelings, or show any biased influences.

[Filmtheory.org, October 2014]

While Subject and Object may be read in many different ways within cinema our discussion is constructed upon the argument that the Object ought to possess an agency equal to that of the Subject. Whatever theoretical and counter-theoretical perspectives may be advanced regarding their relationship in cinema all such positions will converge on this common ground.

The concept of Mise en scène offers a further means of bringing Subject and Object into clearer focus within the cinematic context. In filmmaking Mise en scene, a French term translating as 'placing on stage' refers to everything that appears in front of the camera and the manner in which it is arranged; set design, lighting, costumes, props, and actor placement. Directors deploy these visual elements to tell a story and establish a mood before a single word is spoken. Everything that appears before the camera may accordingly be divided into two broad categories that which is regarded as possessing agency (the actor, understood as Subject) and that which is regarded as lacking agency (set design, lighting, costumes, and props, understood as Object). It remains possible however to redefine these categories in a fundamentally different manner and that is precisely what this paper proposes.

René Descartes and Cartesian Dualism

René Descartes, the seventeenth-century French philosopher who laid the foundations of modern Western thought proposed through his doctrine of Cartesian dualism that the mind constitutes a realm of pure thought something immaterial and non-physical while the body belongs to the practical, material world. From this position emerges his celebrated proposition;

I think, therefore I am (Cogito ergo sum) placing the human mind at the absolute

centre of reality, and furnishing the grounds from which to challenge the human-centric view (anthropocentrism).

Cartesian dualism endorsed by Immanuel Kant and generations of subsequent philosophers is a philosophical idea that has conditioned human beings over centuries to perceive and understand the world through the lens of human perception alone. This is the principle of Correlationism; the belief that being and thinking are inseparable and that reality can only be accessed through the filter of the human mind. This idea, which placed the human being at the apex of existence also became one of the more celebrated philosophical positions of the post-Renaissance period, when humanist and individualist thinking held particular cultural prestige.

When this idea is carried into cinema a certain difficulty arises; in cinematic practice the spectator simultaneously encounters both Subject and Object through the Mise en scène. If that is so, then the validity of certain older philosophical assumptions as applied to cinema may reasonably be questioned. Mise en scène thus constitutes the fundamental encounter between Subject and Object within cinema and at the heart of that encounter operates Human agency.

Human Agency

In simple terms, human agency may be defined as the capacity of individuals to make their own choices, take actions and influence the world around them. It involves the ability to act independently to make decisions based on one's values, goals and beliefs and to take responsibility for the outcomes of those actions. The concept has been used to analyse how people attempt to influence or change their lifeworlds and how they act within or even resist powerful structures. When we attempt to map how Human agency operates at any given moment it becomes clear that it constitutes an extraordinarily complex domain for the authority to shape the moment is itself a function of Human agency.

The manner in which Human agency operates within cinema is somewhat distinctive though no less complex. Within cinema the director's Human agency shapes the work. But once a character is properly constructed, that character develops a Human agency that may be considered independent of the director's own. Beyond this the Human agency of the spectator watching the film is also actively at work. As one overview of the field notes:

Human agency and cinema intersect across three primary dimensions: authorship (the filmmaker's control over the medium), narrative (how characters assert free will within a plot), and spectatorship (the audience's cognitive and emotional engagement).

Yet there exists a further dimension of great importance one we have consistently overlooked and that is the agency residing within the Object itself. As stated at the outset the purpose of this article is precisely to discuss that forgotten and hitherto neglected agency. In other words this article proposes a re-reading of cinema founded not on the subject-oriented, human-centric view (anthropocentrism) driven by Human agency which treats the spectator as observer and the things observed as mere Objects while overlooking their ontological standing, but rather on the understanding, drawn from Object-Ori-

ented Ontology that objects are autonomous entities with their own reality and that the Object therefore possesses an ontology identical in standing to that of the Subject.

Object-Oriented Ontology

With Graham Harman's introduction of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) in the twentieth century the long-established human-centred universe was profoundly unsettled. The very ability of human beings to fully comprehend an entity external to themselves became a matter of serious philosophical doubt. Harman's OOO argues that objects can never be fully known not just by humans but by anything. This is the concept of withdrawal; objects are fundamentally mysterious, perpetually retreating from complete access.

Consider a concrete example when fire burns cotton, the fire interacts only with the cotton's flammability. It cannot interact with the cotton's colour, its smell or its history. Every object in every encounter with another object remains partially withdrawn, partially unknown. Human thought in this framework is simply one specific and limited way in which one object (a human being) translates another object. The human perspective has no special privilege.

What becomes particularly significant within this shift is the following; if in the foundational terms of philosophy, the Subject is a person or observer endowed with agency the capacity to make independent decisions and to think then within Harman's OOO, this individual loses the unbounded privilege previously attributed to the human observer alone. In cinema, this opens extraordinary possibilities. By acknowledging the agency and independent existence of Objects such as props, backgrounds, and all non-human elements the filmmaker gains access to a richer more substantive cinematic work.

The Ontology of Object-Oriented Cinema

This subject connects directly to the discussion above. There are moments in cinematic practice at which the cinematic work freed from its producer and director along with the objects it contains presents itself as an autonomous entity possessed of its own reality. Moreover, such a work does not merely reconstruct the director's reality, it interacts with the audience to generate an entirely new aesthetic sensibility. As Graham Harman, the primary theorist of OOO, suggests objects 'withdraw' and can never be fully accessed or described. A film



The Shining by Stanley Kubrick

constantly escapes complete comprehension, which is precisely why viewers can return to a work such as Stanley Kubrick's The Shining repeatedly and find new meaning each time.

Graham Harman's Quadruple Object Model Applied to Film

To apply OOO to cinema with greater rigour it is useful to map out Graham Harman's quadruple object model which divides objects into four distinct poles:

• **Real Object (RO):** The film as an independent entity. It exists on the hard drive, celluloid, or server, completely indifferent to whether anyone is watching it.

• **Real Qualities (RQ):** The hidden, inherent traits of the film that give it its structural integrity qualities that can never be completely exhausted by a single viewing.

• **Sensual Object (SO):** The film that exists only when one engages with it: the mental projection of the work occurring in the space between the screen and the viewer's consciousness.

• **Sensual Qualities (SQ):** The surface details the specific red glow of a neon sign, the pitch of a drone sound effect, or the rhythm of a cut.

A portion of the research article 'The Overlook Hotel as an Ontological Agent: Object-Oriented Ontology and Film Analysis', authored by Mustafa Türkan and published in Filmvisio (2025), a journal of Istanbul University Press, illuminates this framework as follows:

OOO provides a potent framework for understanding how objects both animate and inanimate relate to one another within a cinematic frame. This perspective expands our appreciation for how agency is attributed to objects in a film, not solely because humans interact with them, but because these objects possess their own inherent qualities, existing in relational networks with other objects and with the audience. If we grant the central claim of object-oriented ontology — that each entity harbours a withdrawn core irreducible to its relations — then anything that slips into the film frame, whether a sliver of light or the sweep of a Steadicam, warrants the same ontological gravity as Jack Torrance and his family. When you look at cameras, sets, metaphors, and so on, it becomes clear that they are more than inert props waiting for human intention; they transform, manipulate, and reinterpret meaning on their own terms. Nonetheless, a persistent assumption in some strains of film criticism is that objects do not speak unless we interpret them as a kind of meta-language. An essential premise in an object-oriented reading of film is that aesthetic language creates new objects. Indeed, even the audience occupies the position of a mediating object, since it is never fully in control. Cinema, by its very nature, links audience to the aesthetic object, forging a novel composite entity — one that overcomes our inability to access the object's core by compensating for the object's partial withdrawal.

[Mustafa Türkan, 'The Overlook Hotel as an Ontological Agent', Filmvisio (5): 66–86, Istanbul University Press, 2025]

What emerges from this is clear: the conventional classification of cinematic elements into the animate and the inanimate has led us to read cinema through a human-agency-driven power structure, treating the spectator as observer and the

things observed as mere Objects, while overlooking their ontological standing. What is now required is a re-reading of cinema through the lens of Object-Oriented Ontology.

Object-Oriented Ontology and Architectural Objects

'Object-Oriented Ontology', Harman's influential framework recognised as one of the most consequential intellectual developments of the twenty-first century has extended its reach into disciplines well beyond philosophy. Among these it has exerted a significant influence on architecture since the 1990s. A 2024 paper published in GRID: Architecture Planning and Design Journal, entitled 'Discussing the Object-Oriented Ontology of Harman and the Changing Status of Architectural Object', makes this clear. The paper's abstract states:

Object-oriented ontology, particularly the object-oriented ontology of Harman, affects architecture since the 1990s. It is realized due to this ontology that architectural object cannot only be a real or sensual object; it can be withdrawn from senses and relations. According to Harman's object-oriented ontology, it is even independent from its environment. Hence object-oriented ontology is related to computer architecture by which objects are independently created within a computational and virtual environment. But it is not possible to literally adapt object-oriented ontology to architecture since architectural objects are generally bound up with formal and environmental relations. This ontology metaphorically affects architecture in such a way that architects see and realize object as an entity beyond its relations. Thus, they focus on the object itself. Digital technologies enable them to create architectural object composed of information not relation. There is accordingly a shift from relation to information in the architecture of the 2000s. The main contribution of the paper is to reveal this shift in contemporary architecture; so, it is discussed in the paper that object does not relate to anything but information in the digital age. It is the autonomous and information-oriented object that defines a new ontological framework for architects.

[GRID: Architecture Planning and Design Journal, 2024]

The relevance of this scholarship to cinema is unmistakable. Architecture whether as existing built space (a house, an office, or any other structure) or as a setting artificially constructed by the film's set department drawing on architectural and design principles is the very medium through which cinematic space is created and presented to the viewer. It is therefore clear that cinema cannot be separated from Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology.

As established above filmmakers inevitably encounter Objects as props in practice and are in some measure compelled to engage in ontological reflection. It is for this reason that a reading grounded in OOO in the understanding that objects are autonomous entities with their own reality possessing an ontology equal to that of the Subject may ultimately render the journey of exploring the meaning of human existence within cinema more fertile and navigable, this is the author's view.

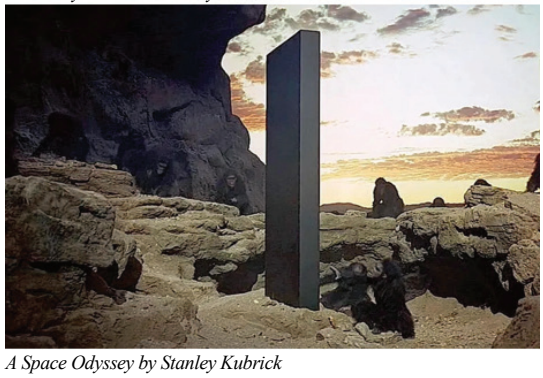
Object-Oriented Ontology and Film Analysis



The Shining by Stanley Kubrick



Stalker by Andrei Tarkovsky



A Space Odyssey by Stanley Kubrick

Pioneered by philosophers such as Graham Harman, OOO emerges from the speculative realism movement. It rests on two fundamental claims:

• **The autonomy of objects:** Objects cannot be reduced to the sum of their physical parts (undermining) or to their functional utility and effects (overmining). A movie camera or a prop gun is more than what it is made of or what it does on screen.

• **Object withdrawal:** An object's true essence fundamentally 'withdraws' and is never fully accessible to perception. We only ever interact with the sensual qualities of an object the way a prop looks on screen rather than with its real being.

It follows from this that non-human objects possess ontological standing equal to that of the Subject. They exercise power, shape narratives and interact with other objects in relational networks. Consider for instance a distinctive architectural setting such as the hotel in The Shining, a symbolic totem such as the monolith in 2001: A Space Odyssey or Stalker by Andrei Tarkovsky. These may be analysed not merely as props serving the protagonist's needs, but as autonomous entities that envelop and condition the action itself.

Rather than asking 'What does this object mean to the protagonist?', film analysis through OOO poses the following questions:

• **Autonomy:** How do the objects, sets, and the film medium itself function as independent realities?

• **Agency:** In what ways do non-human entities a weapon, the weather, a cityscape drive the narrative or interact with other objects?

• **Aesthetics:** How do the visual and auditory components of a film create a separation between an object and its qualities, generating mystery and aesthetic appeal?

Posing such questions enables a deeper penetration of cinema. Key analytical concepts in this mode include Withdrawal (objects always conceal their true essence from the camera), Sensual versus Real Objects, Flat Ontology and the Unseen (a camera angle can never capture the fullness of an object).

In 2001: A Space Odyssey, the Monolith

functions as a purely withdrawn, autonomous object. In The Shining, the Overlook Hotel acts as an independent entity with its own agency. In Stalker, the Zone changes and reacts entirely outside of human logic or control. Such examples illuminate how objects cease to serve merely human needs and begin to assert their own autonomous power, which is precisely what an analysis of cinematic props through the lens of Object-Oriented Ontology makes visible.

Conclusion

By re-reading cinema through the lens of Object-Oriented Ontology grounded in the understanding that objects are autonomous entities with their own reality, possessing an ontology identical in standing to that of the Subject we are afforded the possibility of moving beyond the prevailing conventional approach in which Subject and Object operate from a subject-oriented, human-centric standpoint (anthropocentrism) driven by the power of Human agency treating the spectator as observer and the things observed as mere Objects while overlooking their ontological standing.

This re-reading enables us to depart from the position of conventional film theory, which treats cinema primarily as a mirror for human psychology and to move towards a framework in which cameras, costumes, and physical settings are accorded agency equal to that of the human actor. By doing so cinema may be liberated from human dominion, from ideological impositions, from spectator-centrism and from other such reductive positions. The most conspicuous advantage of this approach lies in the very possibility it opens; that of examining cinema through a subject such as 'The Ontology of Object-Oriented Cinema'.

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Through the Lens : Women, Cinema, and the Double Standards of a "Moral" Society in Bangladesh



Afifa Akter

Whenever I open social media, my timeline feels like a battlefield. Not one filled with weapons or soldiers but one flooded with judgments, unsolicited opinions, and a constant barrage of moral policing. A picture posted by a young woman, a casual Instagram reel, or even a simple caption turns the digital space into a courtroom where women are accused, defended, cross examined, and finally sentenced by strangers. The comment sections read like verdicts delivered without evidence and without mercy. Words such as shameful, attention seeker, and modern girls have no values float with ease. Every scroll exposes another attack, another insult, another attempt to police a woman's existence.

It is exhausting. It is suffocating. And more importantly, it is frighteningly normal. And this exhaustion is not only as women but also as a living human being!

Today, being a woman in Bangladesh feels like living under a microscope that enlarges every step, every smile, every choice. You wear jeans and you are westernized. You speak your mind and you are arrogant. You remain silent and you are suspicious. You take a photo with confidence and society calls you shameless. You express discomfort and you are labeled over emotional. Meanwhile, men performing the same actions are described as confident, expressive, or simply living their life. This contradiction exposes something fundamental about our cultural fabric: our society remains trapped in an old script where women's freedom is dangerous, and men's freedom is natural.

Cinema, the greatest storyteller of the last century, has played a powerful role in shaping these narratives. Films reflect our collective imagination but they also shape it. And when the camera is held by men, written by men, and edited through the values of men, women on the screen inevitably become filtered through the male gaze. What we see on screen, therefore, is often not women but men's interpretations of women. Idealized, objectified, punished, adored, and controlled.

The double standards that dominate everyday life are deeply embedded in the history of our film culture. They reappear in every moral debate on social media, every viral scandal, and every attempt to shame women into silence. This article explores how the portrayal of women in Bangladeshi cinema and media continues to shape the cultural imagination, how patriarchal narratives are maintained through moral policing and digital gossip, and how women are reclaiming agency through art, activism, and storytelling. Combining creative prose with academic analysis, the discussion aims to reveal the symbolic violence embedded in representation and the possibilities for reshaping the narrative.

The Screen and the Gaze :How Cinema Constructs Women?

In film theory, one concept stands above all in explaining gendered misrepresentation. In 1975, British feminist theorist Laura Mulvey introduced the term male gaze in her groundbreaking essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Mulvey argued that mainstream cinema conditions viewers to see women not as individuals with agency but as visual objects for male pleasure.Her theory remains relevant because even today, women in many films are first introduced through pans across their bodies or through camera angles that emphasize sensuality over character. The woman on screen becomes an image rather than a person. Her worth is tied to her beauty, her sacrifice, or her obedience. She is a symbol of desire or purity but rarely a full character with complexities.



Film: Meghe Dhaka Tara

In Bangladeshi and Indian cinema, this pattern is even more pronounced. Women fall into familiar categories. The ideal woman is pure, modest, soft spoken, and traditionally feminine. She suffers silently and forgives generously. On the other hand, the bad woman is outspoken, confident, modern, or sexually expressive. She wears lipstick. She dances. And usually, she faces punishment, rejection, or death.

Cinema often becomes a tool for reinforcing moral binaries rather than exploring human realities. When the screen punishes women for stepping outside patriarchal rules, society takes cues from these portrayals and imitates them in real life. The audience learns to associate female independence with danger and female desire with sin. This is not just storytelling. It is cultural indoctrination.

The male gaze, therefore, does not simply exist within films. It extends into the collective subconscious of society. It influences how people interpret a woman on the street, a woman on social media, or a woman in the workplace. The camera lens becomes a cultural lens. A man's perspective becomes the standard for truth.

Religious and Cultural Morality : How Women Become the Frontline of Judgment?

Women getting caught. The phrase itself carries a storm of implication. When a woman's private life becomes public or when she makes a mistake or even when she does something perfectly normal that gets taken out of context, society reacts with disproportionate moral outrage.

Suddenly she becomes the spokesperson for all women, as if her actions define the gender. And when society judges women, it does not simply question behavior. It questions character.

Comments flood social media like courtroom accusations:

১."শেষ জামানার নারী, ভার্সিটি পড়ুয়া মেয়ে কোনদিন লজ্জাশীল মা হতে পারে না, পুরুষদের ধ্বংসের মূল কারণ।"
২. "তাই জাহান্নাম এ সবচেয়ে বেশি সংখ্যা হবে নারীর।"
৩. "এরা ভালো মা হতে পারবে না, সমাজ নষ্ট করছে, এরা জাহান্নামে যাবে।"

Shesh jamanar nari varsity porua meye konodin lojjasheel ma hote parbe na.
Purusher dhongsher mul karon.

Tai jahannam e shobcheye beshi shongkha hobe narir.

Era valo ma hote parbe na. Shomaj noshto korche. Era jahanname jabe.

These statements are not merely insults. They are cultural wounds. They weaponize religion to enforce patriarchal norms. They reduce a woman's identity to a moral test she must constantly pass. They strip her of humanity and collapse her entire existence into one question: Is she pure?

Ironically, many of these judgments rely on fabricated religious references. Instead of engaging with compassion or truth, people choose moral superiority. They forget that religion, at its core, stands for justice, empathy, and accountability. But when patriarchal interpretations take over, even divine principles are bent to control women.The result is a society where morality becomes gendered. Men are judged by achievements, women by sexual behavior. Men's mistakes are human. Women's mistakes are unforgivable. This pattern repeats in media, families, workplaces, and even within religious discourse. Every institution that should protect women becomes another arena for controlling them.

Men Getting Caught: Convenient Language of Patriarchal Forgiveness

The hypocrisy becomes painfully clear the moment a man gets caught. When a man cheats or lies or behaves abusively, an entirely different vocabulary emerges. The same society that condemns women now becomes sympathetic:

১. "পুরুষ স্বভাবগত এক নারীর প্রতি আসক্ত হতে পারে না।"
২. "আমার ফোনটা চুরি হয়ে গেছে ভাই, এগুলা আমি করিনি।"
৩. "মানুষ মাত্রই ভুল করে, ভাই... নারীর ফিতনা।"

Purush shobhabgat ek narir proti asokto hote pare na.

Ami phone hariye felesi, egula ami kori ni.

Amra kew vuler urodhhe noi bhai. Manush matroi vul kore.
Narir fitna, shesh jamanar porikkha.

Male sins are rebranded as accidents. Contexts. Misunderstandings. Tests. Temporary weaknesses. Even religious concepts such as fitna are misused to justify male irresponsibility. Men become victims of temptation. Women become the source of it.

This double standard appears in cinema as well. The male protagonist can cheat, flirt, or abuse yet still be portrayed as heroic. Kabir Singh from Indian cinema is the perfect example where toxic masculinity is reimagined as passion. Meanwhile, a female character with similar flaws would be vilified.This selective empathy reveals something fundamental. Patriarchy protects male fragility. It excuses men. It

polices women. It nurtures male desire. It punishes female desire.It teaches society that men's moral failures are situational while women's moral failures are inherent. Thus, moral policing becomes a way of maintaining power, not protecting values.

Normal Is Not Normal: The Silent Spread of Everyday Sexism

Normal normal. Shob normal.

That is how sexism hides in plain sight. A catcall is dismissed as normal. A sexist joke is harmless. An objectifying scene in a film is just entertainment. A comment policing a woman's dress is concern. A director sexualizing an actress is part of the job.But every normalized act reinforces the structure of patriarchy. Every joke repeated becomes a belief. Every comment liked becomes a cultural value. Every degrading film song becomes a social lesson.Cinema plays a major role in naturalizing these behaviors. Women repeatedly appear as damsels in distress, seductive villains, glamorous ornaments, or emotional caretakers. Even when modern films attempt progressive representation, they often maintain beauty standards that prioritize male desire.

Real life mirrors these portrayals. A university student becomes characterless for wearing sleeveless clothes. A working woman becomes too ambitious for focusing on her career. A mother becomes attention seeking for posting a picture online. Society weaponizes normality to preserve inequalities.This soft, quiet, everyday sexism is harder to fight because it hides behind humor, culture, and tradition. But it is no less dangerous than overt violence. It shapes the gendered mindset of the next generation. Boys learn entitlement. Girls learn fear.

The Digital Mirror : Social Media as the New Patriarchal Arena

If cinema is the traditional mirror of society, social media is the modern one. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram have become digital surveillance zones where women's actions are constantly evaluated. Women now face both the male gaze and the public gaze. Every post becomes vulnerable to sexualization, criticism, or gossip.

A woman expressing confidence online is labeled attention seeking. A woman dancing is vulgar. A woman traveling is too independent. A woman speaking up is dramatic. Meanwhile, men engaging in similar behavior are praised for being bold or fun.This double standard has given rise to what we can call digital patriarchy. Unlike traditional patriarchy, which imposes rules through family or institutions, digital patriarchy spreads through anonymous comments, viral scandals, and mob shaming. It operates without accountability and accelerates through speed, repetition, and anonymity. Ironically, many women participate in enforcing these norms. Internalized misogyny leads women to police other women. They shame, judge, and attack each other, becoming agents of the same system that harms them.Cinema often collaborates with this digital dynamic. Films pretend to be empowering but reinforce beauty stereotypes. They cast slim actresses to play plus sized characters or use empowerment narratives as branding strategies without addressing deeper inequalities. The female body remains commodified, even when framed as powerful.

Historical Framework : From Nita to Nusrat Faria, The Evolution of Female Representation

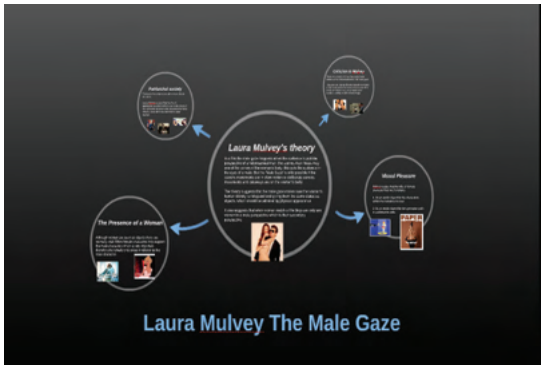
To understand the contradictions in modern Bangladeshi representation, we must revisit the cinematic past. Bengali cinema's golden age portrayed women as complex beings capable of desire, thought, and internal conflict.Satyajit Rays Charulata presented a woman who reads, dreams, and longs for connection. Ritwik Ghataks Meghe Dhaka Tara showed Nitas strength and suffering as structural, not personal. These films treated women as subjects, not objects.However, when Bangladeshi cinema commercialized in the 1980s and 1990s, the female character transformed. The Dhallywood heroine danced around trees, cried at the slightest conflict, and existed primarily to validate the hero. Her beauty was celebrated, but her individuality erased.

"When women claim space on screen or in society, people read it as rebellion rather than normalcy."

This shift indicates that representation is not merely artistic but political. Women who appear in films challenge more than cinematic norms. They challenge cultural power structures.

Theoretical Framework : Reading Bangladesh through Mulvey, Butler, and bell hooks

Mulveys male gaze remains the most powerful tool for analyzing women in Bangladeshi cinema. Her argument that women are displayed as visual pleasure helps explain the over sexualization of actresses and the reduction of female characters to supporting roles.Judith Butlers theory of gender performativity helps explain social expectations. According to Butler, gender is performed through repeated behaviors.

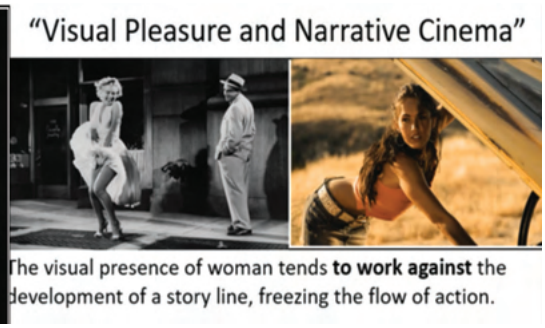




Today, actresses like Nusrat Faria, Pori Moni, and Bidya Sinha Mim navigate a complex terrain. They embody modern, independent characters on screen yet face moral scrutiny for portraying them. Their personal lives become hot topics, and their professional achievements overshadowed by gossip.As director Rubaiyat Hossain explains,

Society punishes women when their performance does not align with traditional femininity. In Bangladesh, this punishment comes through trolling, harassment, or social exclusion.bell hooks offers another critical lens by highlighting how patriarchy shapes representation. She argues that media often portrays women only through patriarchal approval. In the Bangladeshi





context, this means women must appear modest yet attractive, modern yet traditional, strong yet submissive. Any deviation invites hostility.Combining these theories reveals that female representation in Bangladesh is not merely entertainment but an ideological process. Women are constructed through layered expectations shaped by religion, class, media, and politics.

The Moral Panic of Cancel Culture : Women as the First Targets

In Bangladesh, cancel culture disproportionately targets women. A female celebrity wearing a certain outfit or speaking boldly can trigger national outrage. Meanwhile, male celebrities involved in crime often return to fame without consequence. This asymmetry reflects patriarchal conditioning where women symbolize morality.

Cancel culture becomes a modern witch hunt where women are either saints or sinners. There is no middle ground. The outrage often has less to do with the action itself and more with the fear of women breaking traditional boundaries.Social media accelerates this panic. A woman becomes a topic before she becomes a person. Her privacy collapses. Her identity becomes reduced to screenshots and headlines. As Naomi Wolf writes in The Beauty Myth, controlling womens images is a way of controlling women themselves.

Women Behind the Camera : Shifting the Gaze

Despite structural barriers, Bangladeshi women filmmakers are reshaping representation. Directors like Rubaiyat Hossain and Samia Zaman are reclaiming the narrative. Their films portray women as workers, rebels, and thinkers.Rubayet Hossains Made in Bangladesh portrays Shimu, a garment worker who becomes a union leader. Shimus portrayal rejects the male gaze. The camera observes her, not objectifies her. Her struggles are political, not erotic.These films represent what scholars call the female gaze. Instead of focusing on visual pleasure, they emphasize empathy, interiority, and agency.



Film: Meghe Dhaka Tara, Audrey from "Roman Holiday"

They challenge traditional narratives and expand the cinematic imagination.Social media is witnessing a similar shift. Young Bangladeshi women are producing short films, animations, and vlogs that reclaim personal storytelling. These micro narratives bypass patriarchal institutions and allow women to define themselves on their own terms.

Why Representation Matters?

Representation shapes social consciousness. In a country where media literacy is limited, films play a major role in shaping gender norms. The repetitive portrayal of women as objects conditions audiences to internalize sexism. As Bourdieu argues, symbolic violence thrives through cultural repetition.Changing the representation of women is essential for creating a more just society. It is not simply about increasing the number of female characters but about transforming how they are imagined.A society that cannot imagine women as full humans cannot build equality. Cinema becomes the classroom where misogyny is either reproduced or dismantled.



Film: Barbie

Towards a Fairer Frame : Building Ethical and Equitable Cinema

To change cinematic representation, Bangladesh needs structural reforms such as gender sensitive film education, equitable representation in production houses, reform in censorship boards, and critical media literacy in schools. We also need cultural reform where audiences learn to recognize stereotypes and demand better narratives.Most importantly, men must unlearn the patriarchal habits that shape how they see women. They must replace judgment with empathy and entitlement with accountability.

Can We Change This Narrative?

Can we truly shift from a male gaze to a human gaze?

Maybe, Yes? Maybe No? But we can be optimistic, right?



This can happen only when we stop mistaking control for morality. Only when we stop shaming women for existing. Only when we judge actions by ethics, not gender. Only when men are held accountable for the same mistakes that women are crucified for.**Cinema has the power to reshape minds. Society has the power to reshape cinema. And women have the power to reshape both.**But first, we must change our lens. Because only when we stop watching



Picture: Agnes Verda

women and start seeing them, can equality begin.

As filmmaker Agnes Varda said,
"If we opened people up, we would find landscapes, not labels. Women deserve to be portrayed as landscapes, full of complexity, depth, and humanity."

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When Women Shape the Frame: Contribution and Empowerment of Women in Asian Cinema

Niharika Naaz

The early contribution of women in Asian cinema development is a delicate and mostly ignored part of film history, where women involved in the film industry made substantial contributions in various capacities, irrespective of the prevailing social issues and gender discriminations. In the early ages of the cinema in the world, women had significant pioneering roles in filmmaking, such as directing, screenwriting and acting, and were mainly marginalized when the industry became more commercial and economically important. The same trend may be noticed in Asian cinematography, where female characters influenced the narratives, aesthetics and topics much more, frequently bringing important questions of gender, identity, and norms into focus.

The history of early cinema in Asia, which was mostly unwritten or fragmented as it focused on national cinemas, shows that the role of women was central. As an example, in the history of early Tamil cinema, women representing hereditary performance traditions made great contributions to the cultural heritage and overcame the process of marginalization in society to make their own contribution to the changing world of cinema.

The silent film period was a phase of discovery and exploration across the globe, such as the introduction of the concept of the New Woman. Women such as Alice Guy-Blache and Lois Weber were pioneering women in the film industry who contributed significantly during this time as film directors and film writers. Women were excluded in more and more leading production areas, although they had an early entry into cinema, as it shifted into a big business. This disenfranchisement usually made the contributions of these people obscure or forgotten in history.

The existence and involvement of women in other aspects of life were significant in various Asian cultures, such as the Kemalist modernization programme in Turkey since 1923, even though the first female film directors were not involved at the initial stages. The development of female characters as variants of traditional female roles such as the Kelin (daughter-in-law) to more challenging ones in Central Asian cinema indicates greater sociocultural changes and resistance to patriarchal culture.

These factors may shape the path of women's participation in the Asian cinema: the character of the film industries, the social patronage, the privileges of the social class, and education. The emergence of the short film form and queer Asian cinema has offered women filmmakers distinctive ways to transnationally work and reconfigure the idea of the individual auteur, as well. In the modern world, female filmmakers are still transforming the story in other Asian nations. As an illustration, in contemporary Chinese mainstream films, female filmmakers are questioning the masculine norms and male gaze, and are making realistic female characters instead,

which are based on their personal experiences. Correspondingly, female directors of New Pakistani Cinema like Afia Nathaniel and Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy have also appeared and, in many cases, performed several other roles behind the scene as producers and writers. Although in Indian cinema the stereotypical image of women had traditionalism, the tendency to show active and self-identifying female characters is gaining momentum.

It further makes the point of gender of the film work in India, where the paradigm on the politics of labour is applied to discuss modern film studies and the feminist histories of media. The Chinese film in the early years of 1896-1949 witnessed the emergence of national cinema and the exhibition of foreign films in urban areas, which is a rich background to the role of women. The role of women in the world in films in front of the camera and behind the camera is a development that depicts a global phenomenon. Women filmmakers such as Lois Weber, in the case of early women filmmakers, had prolific output, including extant and non-extant, which evidently showed great control of creativity in the period of silent films.

There is a significant change in Indian cinema that pre- and post-economic liberalization. The pre-liberalization movies generally limit women to self-sacrificing, nurturing tradition bearers who are bound to family and national morality, whereas the post-liberalization movies are more and more portraying women as independent professionals and decision makers, in a general struggle towards gender equality and shifting structures of socio-economics. Likewise, studies on gender roles in Indian cinema have been followed through a path of passive women and aggressive men becoming more equal and individualistic, with movies such as Queen and Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl creating a path of equality. The transition of cinema in South Korea is more to restrictive images of the 1970s than to the film about self-realization of the 1990s and emotionally rich images of the 21st century, where women's empowerment and changing social positions are the predictors. The Korean films of today like Sympathy for Lady Vengeance and The Handmaiden, are based on the idea of the female protagonist being based on revenge, desire and breaking down of patriarchal norms, yet functioning within the paradigms of violence and domination.

It has several overlapping waves of change in Chinese cinema. The analysis of the post-reform/opening up realist films reveals that women who work have since then stepped out of domestic settings and are now in the streets in the professional arena, gaining their own consciousness and diversified identities that express current female interests and which also indicate more cultural dimensions of femininity. The awakening of the female consciousness is long-term followed through Chinese feminist films directed by women born in the 1930s, 1950s, 1970s, documenting the joys, sorrows, aspirations and self-enlightenment of women in changing political and cultural situations.

Even though the industry has developed over the years since 1998, in Indonesia, popular films continue to stereotype women based on patriarchal ideals: as objects of dependency, at risk of much assessment based on appearance and the standards of good girls, aggressiveness among women is reprimanded, and thus,

the conservative social values are still present.

Women have been at the forefront in bringing about social change and revolution in South Asia, which has, in most cases, defied the highly patriarchal norms and systems of societies. Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani cinema explicitly as a social change agent, making the argument that films reflect the social conflicts as well as influencing the discussion of gender, caste, and class and modernity. On the same note, Pakistani cinema work reveals that modern cinema develops women who challenge patriarchal systems and therefore undergo gender role transformations in the changing media environment.

South Asia has a collection of movies that put women in the middle of legal and political battles. Indian films such as Pink, Thappad, Saand Ki Aankh, Mimi and Madam Chief Minister dramatize the debates of consent, marital rape, reproductive autonomy, ageism and caste gender intersectionality, often with the theme of women changing family, community or political institutions internally. The issue-oriented and women-centric films have ignited discussions on domestic violence, sexuality, maternal labour, and the education of girls in the mainstream media and among various audiences, disputing the silence of such issues.

The films of the Liberation War are at the heart of the national narratives, and bodies of women have sometimes been employed to represent national pride and national pain. Women have multifaceted roles in the war, but they are virtually never depicted as freedom fighters; instead, they are victims of rape whose future is death, lunacy, or extinction, and not reentry as the normal citizens of the community. This trend not only eliminates women as political subjects but also makes a vision of female sexuality as permanently dirty, which restricts their symbolic role in the new country.

Expanding on this, Chowdhury, in her writing on national cinema as human rights cinema, demonstrates how the Guerrilla (2011), with its female fighter Bilqis Banu, contradicts this gender construct by introducing a middle-class Muslim woman who goes into the armed conflict and also by challenging the patriarchal culture. Nevertheless, the focus of the film on the embodied struggle of women, their vulnerability, and love is interpreted as a feminist art that can produce ethical implementations of war, sexual violence, and transnationalism. More recent scholarship, such as Fagun Haway (2019) (which takes place in the 1952 Language Movement), is interested in how female agency is negotiated in historical cinema. The heroine is involved in protests and thereby gives the activity of women visibility, but still it is all about the male heroism and the man is considered the subject of politics. By reading Ora Egaro Jon (1972) and Meherjaan, Mohaiemen traces how the Liberation War film is shifting the discourse about women as besieged carriers of honor and disrupting that discourse by challenging religiosity and sacrificial femininity.

According to Indonesia, the participation of women improved greatly after the New Order, and women are now producers, directors, trainers, publicists, and distributors, and directly employ film as a form of ideological means to oppose gender-based violence and stereotypes. Ann Hui is recognized as one of the figures of the New Wave since 1979 in Hong Kong; her wom-

en-focused stories and festival popularity were enough to make the story of Asian women prominent on the world map and prove that a female vision can be used to influence the art and the popularity of the film.

The films of Satyajit Ray provide some of the most subtle descriptions of women in Indian cinema, tracking their inner experience in the conflicts of patriarchy, modernity, and nationalism. The women of the cinema of Ray are in a range: on one side, there are those women who remain traditional caregivers, and on the other hand, there are the contemporary, urban workers who are bargaining for the new freedoms. This variety transforms his work into a major repository of how modern India changed and the place of women in a young country where patriarchy was the order of the day. Devi (1960) fictionalizes a young woman who is worshipped as a goddess based on this premise that he uses to demonstrate how this religious zealotry obliterates her subjectivity and kills her life. The films by Ray, particularly Mahanagar (The Big City) and Charulata, play a key role in his description of the modern Bengali woman. Arati in Mahanagar, a housewife of the middle classes who leaves her paid work, is representative of the shocks and possibilities of post-independence urban modernity: the film follows her development of self-confidence in the office, into collisions with a traditional husband and in-laws, and finally, her realization of ethical and personal independence. In-depth examination of Mahanagar reveals that the everyday items, such as the bra, lipstick, and sunglasses, are saturated with the symbols of the disputed femininity that denotes the patriarchal anxiety and a utopian postcolonial feminine agency. Ray not only romanticizes the stylish, middle-class female body of a working woman but also exposes how her visibility is not only policed but also evaluated. Charulata introduces what may be the most glorified female character of Ray. This lonely, artistically sensitive, and feeling character of Charu dramatizes the isolation of educated women to the inner quarters (andarmahal) of the house as they yearn to escape to intellectual and emotional engagements. The women in Ray are often passive-looking or traditional characters who are headed toward assertion and self-definition. Comparative analysis of Devi, Mahanagar, and Ghare Baire reveals that his heroines go through the experiences of being oppressed and restricted characters to being empowered and daring the social order.

Similarly, Rituparnagh Ghosh changed the trend of art cinema in Bengali and Indian society when he put the inner world, desires, and contradictions of women at the centre of the film. Since Unishe April, Ghosh reiterated women as the main character and structured the story around the emotional, moral, and sexual contradictions that arise, and thus earned him the title of the women's director of Bangali film. The subjects of his early and middle work are women of middle and upper middle-class Bengali families, placed in a very familiar patriarchal bhadralok world with their subjectivity read in advance instead of the heroism of the male. Ghosh himself called his movies womanist, but not feminist, since they challenge patriarchy without dismissing men; his women want to be agency-seeking and yet respect relationships and family and heterosexual connections. Two of the most talked-about films by him are Bariwali and Chokher

Bali, which focus on women whose sexual and emotional wants are normally suppressed in Indian cinema. The unapologetic sensuality of widow Binodini, who is jealous and longs to be loved, in Chokher Bali do not conform to the stereotypes of the desexualized self-sacrificing widow, and the film is a fiction of the exploration of love, desire, and loneliness as the experience of women in particular. Bariwali, Banalata, is a middle-aged spinster whose unfulfilled sexual desire and need to have marital intimacy are awakened by a visiting film director. The style of Ghosh has been commonly referred to as the female gaze towards the Bengali society. His women are not ideal saintly figures as sacrifices, but they are tall by making their own decisions, bargain with taboos, and transgress into spaces of forbiddingness and still remain mothers, lovers, wives, and friends.

In Goynar Baksho (2013), Aparna Sen is able to empower women not by rebellion, but by moral power, economic empowerment, and ethical decision-making in a society that is highly patriarchal. Against the backdrop of post-Partition Bengal, and spilling over to the Bangladesh Liberation War, the film questions female subjectivity to inheritance, desire, and social responsibility. The adventure of Somalata is more transformative in empowerment. She starts out as submissive and marginal, but as the story progresses, she dares to become economically independent by selling the jewellery and setting up a sari shop, since aristocratic masculinity equates idleness with honor. The fact that she is an entrepreneur is a challenge to gendered labor practices and the way she redefines the notion of surviving with dignity and not shame. Chaitali is a symbol of the modern educated woman who is politically aware that her family background does not limit her. In Paromitar Ek Din (2000), Aparna Sen depicts the empowerment of women, not by challenge, but by emotional fortitude and rebellion against societal constraints. The movie focuses on such a close relationship between Paromita and her mother-in-law, Sanaka, re-creating female relationships as they are not established in the family. Paromita breaks the rules of patriarchy that break connections after a divorce by kindness instead of convention. Sen introduces empowerment as empathy, moral choice, and the ability of women to have quality relationships regardless of whether they are married or not, and whether they are socially approved or not.
Following the 1979 Revolution, stringent Islamic rules relegated women to the periphery of the film industry, or to nonexistence, and the films produced during the early post-revolution period had little to offer other than women in modest, homemaking, self-sacrificing roles, a period termed as the structured absence and then the background presence of women. Since the 1990s, social change and the reformist political movement have facilitated the new era of women's representation, with male characters able to err, complain, and demand self-determination, drawing nearer to parity with men on screen. This change is broadly interpreted as similar to the real self-realization process of the Iranian women. Vietnamese and Palestinian cinema highlight how the female fighter and militant woman became a leading role in the anti-colonial movement of the 1960s-70s in the so-called revolutionary cinema. She represented a country that was torn apart by occupation and war, encom-

passing both armed opposition and daily martyrdom.

Once again, women's empowerment in Asian and Western cinema is another multidimensional cross of cultural, historical, and societal factors, where the similarities in feminist discussions and regional specifics can be identified. Whereas Western culture tends to focus on individualism and the feminist movement in particular body art, the Asian one displays the assortment of culture and social conventions, which result in different approaches toward the demonstration of female agency and their struggles. These developments in cinematic representations are determined by both the international discourse of feminism and the cultural backgrounds of a particular region. The examination of feminist issues in Western cinema tends to follow the course of second-wave feminism, according to which women are becoming more actively presented, derailing the narrative patterns associated with male domination. It is said that such movies as Fried Green Tomatoes are seminal in this sense, as women are asserting their independence. More modern Western movies, including Maleficent (2014) and The Secret of Women (2014), are examples of female power, experience, and will, usually within geopolitical settings, including those that influenced the Iraqi and American stories. The term women's empowerment is defined as the opposition to the stigmatization of female vulnerability, as in the case of films such as Charlie's Angels, which deliberately develops the relationships of female empowerment in an attempt to confront the contemporary social environment and break the existing stereotypes of gender roles. In the case of the Spanish film industry, gender equality policies have been practiced, but still remain deep-seated biases of a historical nature, like those of the dictatorship of Franco, which still encumbers the efforts of the female contributors in the film industry. Crazy Rich Asians (2018) has garnered commercial success due to its all-Asian cast and has been called a breakthrough in terms of Asian American films and the presentation of Western and Eastern values presented in the movie. In Asian cinema, one can see the regional strategies of women's empowerment. Documentaries such as Iranian Women Unveiled used in Iranian cinema consciously uses the strength of empowered images of women activists in exile over the dominant patriarchal images found in other Iranian films. Malayalam cinema and South Asian cinema, in general, have become a medium through which gender violence is discussed and no longer portrays women in submissive positions, but rather as resistant and active. As a whole, and especially Bollywood, Indian cinema has traditionally restricted women to stereotypical figures such as good mothers or self-sacrificing wives, although in recent decades this has been changing to more progressive and active roles, and this has impacted young people. The films of Southeast Asia also play a large part in the debate on women's empowerment. Marlina, the Murderer in Four Acts and Memoria are examples of Indonesian movies that examine the female refusal to accept the subjugation of power and women-related violence. The movie Layangan Putus is an act of a wife fighting against the infidelity of her husband, the social demands, and her way to breaking them.

In both areas, the contribution of women filmmakers is important. Moroccan drama

series In Moroccan drama series, the most important attempts of female filmmakers are to maneuver the complicated relationships of challenging and adhering to traditional gender norms to include subtle and empowering representations of women, although these attempts are sometimes faced with the stereotyping of religion and popular culture. In the same manner, in African cinema, female directors are transformational characters in terms of portraying the stories and experiences of African women on-screen and off-screen. The short film genres also give queer Asian cinema a special platform, where women filmmakers could find a transnational outlet to work on each other and re-invent the idea of the person auteur.

At its core, cinema is not a series of images or the place of performance; rather, it is the living language, which could transform human experience into an emotion. In this language, women have been one of the most important powers, not due to gender, but due to the emotional depth, sensitivity, and realism that they add to the narration. Women are the souls of a story, and they form its emotional heart and provide the heartbeat to all the feelings that are going to be shown on the screen. Cinema breathes, listens, and remembers through the presence of a film.

Emotional truth is a burden brimming in women in cinema. Being represented as mothers, lovers, rebels, workers, or dreamers, female characters make the audience relate to the inner world of a story. Their words, unspoken words, fights, and even strengths make stories go beyond spectacle and into the realm of the lived experience. Action and plot might be the impetus behind a film, but emotion is what makes a film memorable, and, in many cases, it is women who serve as the conduit through which that emotion is channeled. They anthropomorphize conflict, make violence seem softer, and enhance the meaning that makes stories seem living and not acting.
The role of women in cinema is more than acting, however. The philosophy of women as directors, writers, editors, and producers is based on observation, empathy, and subtlety in shaping stories. They tend to experiment with the theme of relationships, identity, loss, and hope with sensitivity that is sensitive to the real-life details. In such a way, they break down stereotypical stories and bring back some sense of balance, reminding the film industry that people are not one-dimensional. They are creative in their vision, which means that stories are not only entertaining, but they also challenge, heal, and motivate.

However, there should never be a debate of male versus female dominance in cinema itself. Cinema is the cinema that is above such binaries. It is a philosophy of life- an art form, a reflection of the harmony of the universe, where all things are valued and have significance. Nature lives better because of equilibrium, so is the case in cinema whereby all voices, energies, and perspectives co-exist. Women play no role as a counterpart to that of men, but rather form an inseparable component of a greater whole of humanity in its beauty and fullness. The essence of cinema is its power to show life as it is, and life is impossible without equality, connection, and mutual importance. The presence of women as equal creative and narrative power makes cinema richer, truer, and more universal. Their existence makes sure that tales of power never uphold power in

isolation, but also vulnerability, compassion, and resilience.

In the end, a great film is not determined by gender, but rather the richness of its soul. Cinema becomes the breathing philosophy when all the components of the universe, both women and men, are equated in significance. It turns out to be an imitation of life itself, with emotion having a heartbeat, stories having a meaning, and humanity expressing itself most accurately.

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The Evolution of Central Asian Cinema: A Focus on the Film History of Kazakhstan

Nagma Khanam

My interest in central Asian cinema emerged from a long-standing appreciation of its unique emotional depth and aesthetic sensibility, which inspired me to explore the subject further. Between vast steppes, deserts and mountains and the fading Soviet legacy, Central Asian cinema emerged as more than a regional practice it became a subtle language of identity, memory and survival. Long overshadowed by dominant film industries, the cinemas of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan nonetheless developed distinct visual and narrative traditions shaped by nomadic heritage, political transition and everyday human experience. Despite its marginal position in world cinema discourse, Central Asian cinema has developed a profound and distinctive cinematic language.

To understand the history of Central Asian cinema, it is first necessary for us to know its early foundations and development. Russian filmmakers played a pivotal role in the development of Central Asian cinema. From the 1920s onwards, they traveled to the region to direct the earliest narrative films. Their involvement continued throughout the Second World War, during which major Soviet film studios were evacuated to the southern republics, and extended into the early 1950s, when national cinematic professionals had yet to be trained. Thus, one could assert that the foundations of cinema in the region were laid by Russian cinematographers.
Central Asian film history can be divided into three main periods: The Soviet era (1919–1987), the post-Soviet "New Wave" (1988–1992), and the modern independent era. It reflects a unique blend of nomadic and mountain cultures, Soviet-era state-controlled propaganda, and later a poetic, auteur-driven cinema emerging after independence.

During the "Soviet period", early documentary and propaganda filmmaking laid the foundation, while WWII evacuations of major studios to Central Asia helped train local filmmakers. By the 1960s–80s, "poetic cinema" emerged, focusing on identity, folklore, and cultural expression within censorship limits. Filmmakers in Central Asia face extreme limitations including strict censorship, lack of alternatives to state or diplomatic funding, limited budgets, lack of access to film education, ineligibility for most foreign film funds and the need for English Language skills in order to participate in international markets. Buit in this Soviet Period Central Asian cinema, two main tendencies emerged: one that highlighted local cultures as exotic for Soviet audiences, seen in films like The Minaret of Death (1925), The Leper (1928), and The Last Bey (1930); and another that aimed to educate Central Asian audiences by promoting socialist values, as in The Muslim Woman (1925) and The Second Wife (1927). The tension between these approaches persisted throughout the Soviet

era, especially during the 1920s. The role of Russian filmmakers in early regional production is also key to understanding the center–periphery power dynamics discussed by Cloe Drieu.



A Look into the Soviet Past of the Central Asian Cinema with Cloe Drieu- Voices on Central Asia

The post-Soviet New Wave brought international recognition, particularly from Kazakhstan, with films exploring alienation and socio-economic transition during the collapse of the USSR. The term 'New Wave' was first used during the Moscow International Film Festival in 1989 as a label for recent Kazakh films. Ludmila Pruner offered her estimation of the new Kazakh films: The cosmopolitan air of the New Wave was the product of the fusion of Asian values with the Russian aspiration towards a western lifestyle. The 'New Wave' essentially emerged from a course of Kazakh students which Sergei Soloviev had selected at the Film Institute (VGIK), including Rashid Nugmanov, Serik Aprymov, Ardak Amirkulov, Amanjol Aituarov, Talgat Temenov and Darejan Omirbaev, who had other aspirations than joining Western culture, but reflected the momentous change in Soviet society and its political and cultural collapse. Nugmanov's The Needle created a new hero for Soviet audiences, as explored by Vitaly Chernetsky in his chapter in this volume.

In the modern era, Central Asian cinema has significantly transformed since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The film industries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have undergone institutional restructuring, leading to the development of distinct national cinematic identities alongside shared regional characteristics. In the immediate post-Soviet period, the industry faced major challenges, including reduced state funding, weak production infrastructure, and limited distribution systems. However, this period also encouraged the growth of independent cinema and greater artistic experimentation. Kazakhstan achieved the highest international recognition, particularly through directors such as Darejan Omirbaev, whose works explore themes of identity, alienation, and post-Soviet social change. Kyrgyz cinema developed a strong presence in international festivals with low-budget, auteur-driven films focusing on rural life and social transformation, while Uzbekistan has increasingly emphasized national identity alongside expanding commercial production. In the contemporary era, digital technologies and social media have further reshaped the cinematic landscape by enabling mobile-based production and online distribution, significantly broadening access and allowing new filmmakers to reach global

audiences outside traditional film institutions. Recent scholarship also emphasizes archival research, female representation, and the use of regional cultural archetypes in shaping post-Soviet cinematic narratives.

As **Kazakhstan** has made the most significant contribution to the development of cinema in Central Asia, and I personally have a strong preference for Kazakh cinema. I have focused my discussion on the film industry of Kazakhstan and several of its prominent directors. In addition to its cultural and historical importance, Kazakh cinema has drawn my particular interest for its distinctive artistic style and thematic depth. Through internationally recognized films and directors, Kazakhstan has played a leading role in shaping the cinematic landscape of the region.

Kazakhstan:

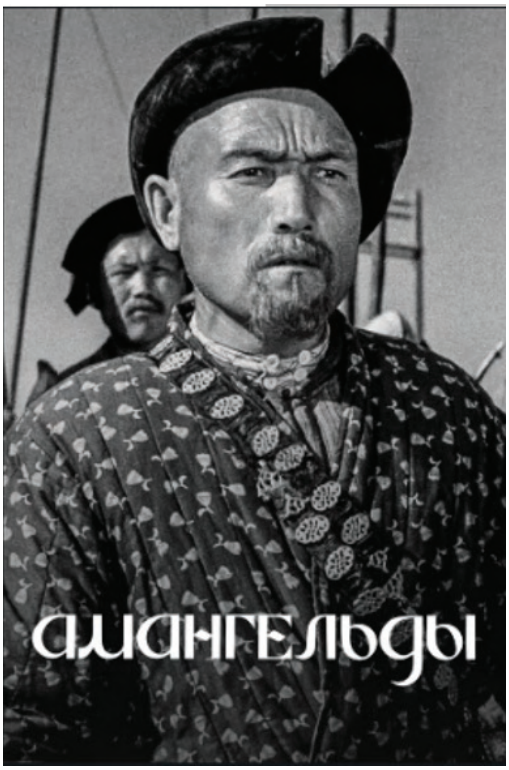
Kazakhstan has made a significant contribution to the development of cinema, both within Central Asia and on the global stage. Its film industry has evolved from a Soviet-era production base into an independent cinematic voice known for artistic storytelling, strong realism, and international recognition. During the Soviet period, Kazakhstan developed its early film foundation through state-supported production, especially documentary filmmaking. This era helped establish technical skills and a tradition of socially focused storytelling. The country's main studio, Kazakh film Studio, became the center of film production and played a key role in shaping national cinema identity. Kazakhstan has built a unique cinematic identity through films that focus on culture, history, human emotions, and social change. Kazakh cinema is often known for its realistic storytelling, artistic visuals, and deep connection to national identity. Many films reflect the struggles of post-Soviet society, traditional nomadic culture, and the relationship between people and nature.

1920s: The first steps of Kazakh cinema: The origins of Kazakh cinema date back to 1925, when the first documentary film, "The Fifth Anniversary of the Kazakh ASSR," was made. In 1928, the All-Russian Trust "Vostok" was established in Moscow under the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR. In 1929, in Kazakhstan, based on the Vostokkino trust, director Viktor Turin shot the legendary film Turksib. In 1930, the first Kazakh feature films, Songs of the Steppes and Jut, appeared at Vostokkino, starring the first Kazakh actors, Serke Kozhamkulov and Hakim Davletbekov. Their participation was a significant event for the nascent Kazakh cinema.



Turksib Film

1930s Founding of the film studio and first films: In 1934, the first specialized film studio in Kazakhstan, Alma-Ata Film Studio, was established. By 1936, it had begun producing documentary films on important national events. In 1938, the first Kazakh feature film, Amangeldy, was produced, marking the beginning of national cinema in Kazakhstan. This film played an important role in the development of the Kazakh film industry and created new opportunities for actors, directors, and screenwriters.



Amangeldy Film

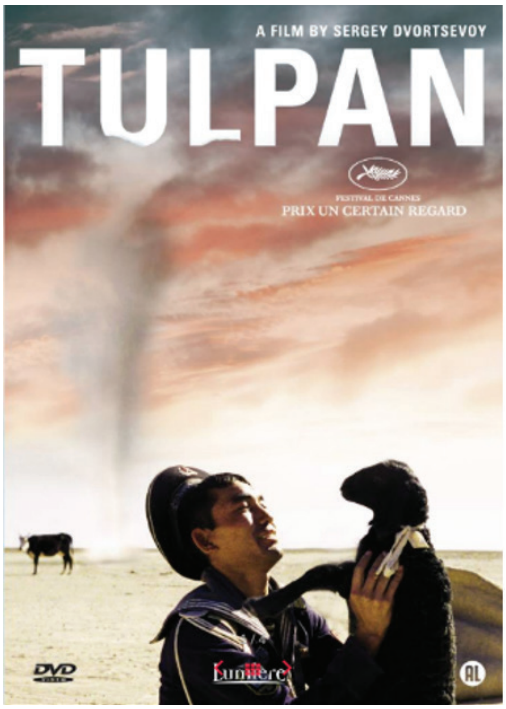
In 1960, the Kazakh film studio was renamed Kazakhfilm, marking a new stage in its development. It produced over 50 documentaries that were shown across the Soviet Union. In 1963, the Union of Cinematographers of Kazakhstan was founded under Shaken Aimanov, and the state film committee (Goskino) was also established. In 1969, the film Angel in a Turban received an award at a Central Asia and Kazakhstan film festival. During this time, Kazakh animation also began to develop. A group led by Amen Khaidarov secretly produced the first Kazakh animated film, which became successful and won an award, helping establish an official animation studio.

In 1970, the film "Kyz-Zhibek" directed by Sultan-Akhmet Khodzhikov was released. It is one of the most important films in the history of Kazakh cinema and became part of the country's cultural heritage by presenting the traditions and customs of the Kazakh people on screen. After gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan's cinema experienced both challenges and transformation. Despite financial difficulties in the 1990s, filmmakers began exploring more diverse themes, including history, identity, social change, and rural life. This period marked the rise of a distinct Kazakh national cinema, separate from Soviet influence. Kazakhstan has also produced internationally recognized filmmakers who helped bring its cinema to global audiences.

From 2002 to 2020, Kazakh film Studio produced 477 films, including 120 feature, 210 documentaries, 84 short, and 63 animated films. Films from Kazakhstan regularly participate in A-class international film festivals and receive prestigious awards. Sergei Dvortsevoy is one of the most important figures, known for realistic and human-centered films such as Tulpan, which received awards at major international festivals. The film tells the story of a young man named Asa, who dreams of becoming a shepherd in the Kazakh steppe.

However, according to tradition, he must marry before achieving his goal. Through Asa's journey, the film explores themes of loneliness, hope, survival, and rural life in Kazakhstan.

What makes Tulpan special is its realistic portrayal of Kazakh culture and everyday life. The film uses simple storytelling and natural landscapes to create strong emotional impact. It represents how Kazakh cinema values cultural authenticity and human emotion more than commercial entertainment.



Tulpan Film

Another influential director, Timur Bekmambetov, gained global fame for his innovative visual style and for successfully working in both Kazakh and Hollywood cinemas. Kazakh actors and filmmakers have also achieved recognition at major international festivals. For example, Samal Yeslyamova won the Best Actress award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018, highlighting Kazakhstan's growing presence in world cinema. Today, Kazakhstan's film industry is known for its artistic depth, cultural authenticity, and increasing participation in global film festivals. Its contribution lies in developing a strong national cinema identity while also producing filmmakers and films that resonate with international audiences.

The Development of Kazakh cinema has been shaped by the contributions of several influential directors. Through their diverse cinematic styles and themes, filmmakers have played a crucial role in establishing Kazakhstan's presence in both regional and international cinemas. Overall, Kazakhstan's film industry plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage and expressing national identity. Through films like Tulpan, Kazakh cinema continues to gain international recognition for its emotional depth and artistic storytelling.

Shaken Aimanov: was born on February 15, 1914 in Bayan-Aul, Russian Empire [now Bayanaul, Pavlodar Oblast, Kazakhstan] is widely regarded as the father of Kazakh cinema and one of the most influential figures in the history of Kazakhstan's film industry. Aimanov began his career as a theater actor before moving into filmmaking, where he became a pioneering director, actor, and producer. During the Soviet era, Shaken Aimanov played a key role in shaping the identity of Kazakh cinema. In 1954, he became the head of the film studio later known as Kazakhfilm. Under his leadership, the studio expanded its production of films reflecting Kazakh culture, traditions, and everyday life. As a director, he worked across multiple genres,

including comedy, drama, historical, and detective films, making a significant contribution to the development of a distinct national style of Kazakh cinema.



Shaken Aimanov

Sergei Dvortsevoy: is a Kazakh film director known for his realistic documentary-style filmmaking. He gained international recognition through documentaries such as Bread Day and Tropical Rain, which portray everyday life with strong emotional depth. He later directed the feature film Tulpan (2008), which won the Un Certain Regard Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and brought global attention to Kazakh cinema. His work has significantly contributed to promoting Kazakh cinema internationally and inspiring realistic, human-centered storytelling in the industry.



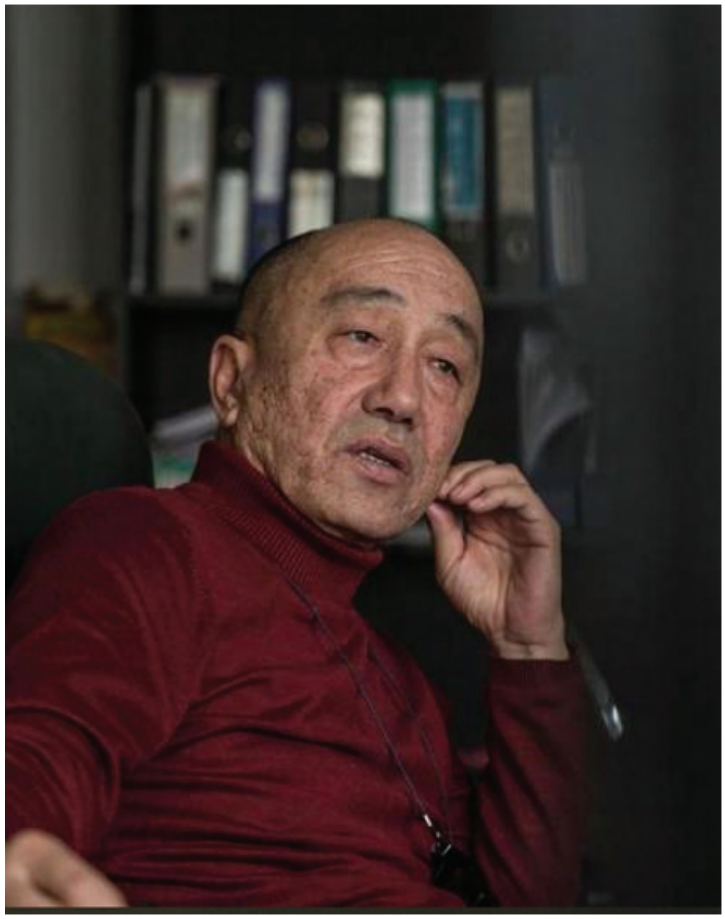
Sergei Dvortsevoy

Darezhan Omirbayev: is an award-winning Kazakh writer and film director born in 1958. He studied applied mathematics and later cinema in Moscow and worked as a film critic before becoming a filmmaker. His films have been featured at major international festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Locarno, Toronto, Busan, Rotterdam, and Tokyo. His debut film Kairat (1992) and Cardiogram (1995) won several international awards. Several of his films, including Student, The Road, and Killer, were selected for Cannes' Un Certain Regard section. His film Poet (2021) premiered at Berlinale, and he won Best Director at the Tokyo Film Festival.

Akan Satayev: is a Kazakh film director, producer, screenwriter, and actor born in 1971 in Karaganda. He grew up in a family of actors and later graduated from the Kazakh National Academy of Arts. Early in his career, he acted in films and worked in advertising before moving into directing. He founded the film company Sataifilm and gained success with his debut film Racketeer (2007). He later directed notable films such as Districts and The Road to

Mother in 2016. He also established the Astana Film Fund to support young filmmakers and led Kazakhfilm, Kazakhstan's major film studio, from 2020 to 2022.

Some Film Studio Name:



Darezhan Omirbayev

Key film industry organizations: It was established under Enactment No. 113 of the film Government of Kazakhstan on March 15, 2019, for the implementation of the Law on Cinematography.

*Shaken Aimanov Kazakh film JSC: the main domestic film studio.

*Private film studios: Based on pitching applications submitted to SNCCS, approximately 100–120 private companies and studios currently operate in Kazakhstan.

Public associations (PAs):

Union of Cinematographers of Kazakhstan was established in 1963.

Independent Association of Kazakhstan Cinematographers was founded in 2014.

Kazakhstan Association of Film Critics was established in 2015.

National Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded in 2016.

Annual film festivals and fora:

Eurasia International Film Festival was founded in 1998.

Almaty Film Festival was founded in 2018 and is held with the support of Almaty City Akimat. Festival was first held in 2016 as a domestic short film festival.

Finally, I would like to state that, Central Asian cinema highlights the region's evolving cultural identity and its growing contribution to global film discourse. Within this context, Kazakhstan emerges as a particularly significant case, demonstrating a dynamic cinematic tradition shaped by historical development, socio-political transformations, and artistic innovation. The works of Kazakh filmmakers have played a decisive role in



Akan Satayev

strengthening the national film industry while simultaneously enhancing its visibility on the international stage. Overall, Kazakh cinema stands as a vital component of Central Asian film history, reflecting both regional distinctiveness and universal cinematic values.

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Iranian Cinema: A Journey of Art, Realism, and Global Recognition

Jannatul Ferdous

The Journey of Iranian Cinema

Iranian cinema first came under international attention for its prerevolutionary art cinema known as the Iranian New Wave and more widely for its postrevolutionary cinematic movement called the New Iranian Cinema. However, Iran has had a longstanding history of cinema that began in 1900, with the introduction of film technology by the Qajar court photographer Ibrahim Khan Sani al-Saltaneh Akkasbashi. The development of cinema in Iran is inextricably linked to the development of modernity and the nation-state. The cinema in Iran was an important site where modernity (tajadud) and the nation (mellat) were respectively constructed, contested, and negotiated throughout the long 20th century and into the new millennium. The history of Iranian cinema is punctuated by the two revolutions in 20th-century Iran, namely the constitutional revolution of 1905–1911 and the later Islamic Revolution in 1979. Both of these events left an indelible mark on Iran and Iranian cinema, but none more so than the Islamic Revolution. In the second Pahlavi era and just before the 1979 revolution, along with the popular commercial cinema called filmfarsi ("Persian film"), Iranian cinema witnessed the development of art-house cinema or the Iranian New Wave (mowj-e now) as a reaction to this popular cinema, which was influenced by the aesthetics of Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave. But it is largely with the New Iranian Cinema of the postrevolutionary era that Iranian cinema received worldwide critical attention, wining regular awards at prestigious film festivals around the globe. After the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, new guidelines were established by the state apparatus to ensure that films produced in Iran were made according to the logic of an Islamic "system of modesty" (hejab in its broadest sense). Paradoxically, these censorship guidelines forced Iranian filmmakers to develop a new filmic grammar, which in a constant negotiation with state censors, contributed to a new visual and aural film form that is distinctive to Iranian cinema. In this way, the history of cinema in Iran can be divided into four distinct periods, from the Qajar era to the first Pahlavi period (1900–1941), the second Pahlavi era (1942–1979), the postrevolutionary era with the Islamization of Iranian cinema (1980–1988), and the emergence of the New Iranian Cinema (1990s and early 2000s). In the early 21st century, there is a subtle but visible shift away from the formal and narrative strategies of the New Iranian Cinema. It is too early at this stage to categorize the formal logic and aesthetics of this new iteration of Iranian cinema, as we are in the midst of its development, but if the New Iranian Cinema was recognizable under the sign of its master practitioner, Abbas Kiarostami (d. 2016), the new trend in Iranian cinema is perhaps under the visible influence of the two-time Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi.

The Iranian New Wave: Revolutionizing World Cinema

The Iranian New Wave emerged as one of the most influential cinematic movements of the late twentieth century, earning international recognition for its innovative storytelling, philosophical depth, and distinctive visual style. Unlike mainstream commercial cinema, the movement embraced realism, simplicity, and human-centered narratives, offering audiences a profound exploration of everyday life and universal human experiences.

One of the defining characteristics of the Iranian New Wave was its ability to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. Filmmakers frequently incorporated non-professional actors, real-life locations, and documentary-style techniques into their narratives, creating films that felt both authentic and poetic. Rather than relying on spectacle or dramatic action, these films focused on ordinary individuals, moral dilemmas, and subtle emotional experiences. Children often occupied central roles within these narratives, serving as powerful lenses through which broader social, cultural, and philosophical themes could be explored.

Among the most celebrated figures of the movement was Abbas Kiarostami, whose work became synonymous with the international success of Iranian cinema. Through a unique combination of realism, symbolism, and philosophical inquiry, Kiarostami created films that resonated with audiences across cultural boundaries. His acclaimed works, including Where Is My Friend's House? And Life Goes On, Through the Olive Trees, Taste of Cherry, and The Wind Will Carry Us, exemplified the movement's commitment to poetic realism and contemplative storytelling.

A landmark achievement of the Iranian New Wave was Kiarostami's Close-Up, a film that challenged conventional cinematic boundaries by reconstructing a real-life event with the actual individuals involved. By merging documentary and fictional elements, the film questioned traditional notions of truth, identity, and representation. This innovative approach not only expanded the possibilities of cinematic storytelling but also influenced filmmakers far beyond Iran's borders.

The international success of the Iranian New Wave transformed global perceptions of Iranian cinema. Critics and scholars praised its artistic originality, humanistic vision, and ability to communicate complex ideas through seemingly simple narratives. The movement demonstrated that cinema could achieve profound emotional and intellectual impact without large budgets or elaborate production techniques. Through its innovative aesthetic and universal themes, the Iranian New Wave secured a lasting place in the history of world cinema and continues to inspire filmmakers and audiences around the globe.

Three Masters of Iranian Films: Kiarostami, Panahi, Farhadi:

Abbas Kiarostami – Cinema of Minimalism and Philosophy

Abbas Kiarostami was one of Iran’s most influential filmmakers, celebrated for his poetic realism and his innovative blending of documentary and fiction. Throughout a career spanning more than four decades, he explored profound philosophical questions through seemingly simple stories, often using nonprofessional actors, improvisation, and everyday settings.



Abbas-Kiarostami -Where reality meets poetry

Born in Tehran in 1940, Kiarostami studied painting and graphic arts at the University of Tehran. After working in advertising and illustrating children's books, he joined the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in 1969, where he began making films.

His early works, including Bread and Alley and The Traveler, established his distinctive style, combining documentary-like realism with natural performances. International recognition came with the celebrated Koker Trilogy, beginning with Where Is the Friend's House? and continuing through And Life Goes on and Through the Olive Trees. These films explored the relationship between cinema and reality, a theme that became central to his work.

One of his most acclaimed films, Close-Up, dramatizes the true story of a man who impersonated filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Remarkably, the real participants portrayed themselves, creating a groundbreaking fusion of documentary and fiction.

Kiarostami achieved worldwide acclaim with Taste of Cherry, a philosophical drama about a man searching for someone to bury him after his planned suicide. The film won the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, cementing his status as one of world cinema's leading auteurs.

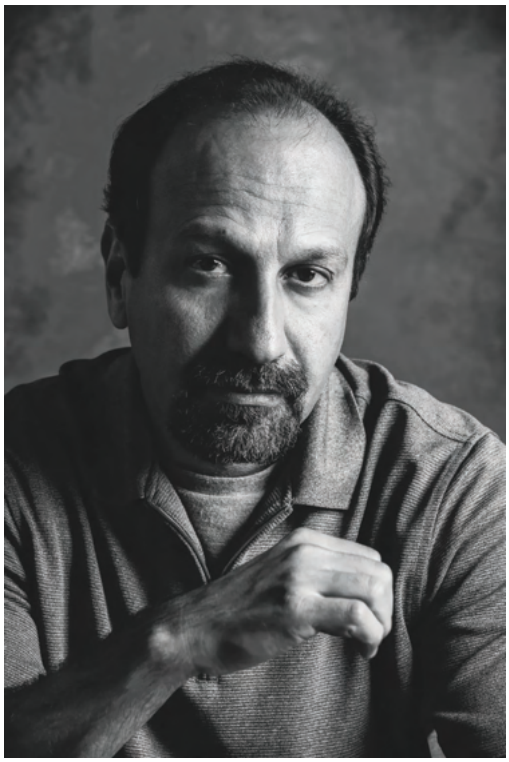
Later works such as The Wind Will Carry Us, Certified Copy, and Like Someone in Love continued his exploration of identity, perception, and human connection. He also embraced digital filmmaking, directing documentaries such as ABC Africa, which examined the lives of Ugandan children affected by AIDS.

Today, Kiarostami is regarded as one of the most important filmmakers in the history of cinema. His films are celebrated for their minimalism, philosophical depth, and unique ability to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, inviting viewers to actively participate in interpreting what they see.

Some of his most celebrated films include The Traveler (1974), Where Is the Friend's House? (1987), Close-Up (1990), And Life Goes On (1992), Through the Olive Trees (1994), Taste of Cherry (1997), The Wind Will Carry Us (1999), Certified Copy (2010), and Like Someone in Love (2012).

Asghar Farhadi – Master of Moral Complexity

Asghar Farhadi is an Iranian film director, screenwriter, and producer widely regarded as one of the most important contemporary filmmakers in world cinema. Born in Homayoun Shahr in 1972, he studied dramatic arts and theatre direction at the



Asghar Farhadi - A filmmaker who finds profound drama in everyday life.

University of Tehran and later at Tarbiat Modares University. He began his career making short films before moving into television and feature filmmaking. His early works, including Dancing in the Dust, The Beautiful City, and Fireworks Wednesday, revealed his interest in realistic storytelling and social tensions within Iranian society.

Farhadi gained international recognition with About Elly, but his global breakthrough came with A Separation, which won the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film and made him the first Iranian filmmaker to win a competitive Oscar. He later achieved further acclaim with The Past, The Salesman, and A Hero. His films are known for their social realism, moral complexity, and nuanced portrayal of family relationships, class divisions, and ethical dilemmas. Rather than presenting clear heroes or villains, Farhadi places ordinary people in situations where truth, responsibility, and survival collide, inviting audiences to question their own assumptions about justice and morality.

Some of his most acclaimed films include Dancing in the Dust (2003), The Beautiful City (2004), Fireworks Wednesday (2006), About Elly (2009), A Separation (2011), The Past (2013), The Salesman (2016), and A Hero (2021). Through these works, Farhadi has established himself as one of contemporary cinema's most respected storytellers, celebrated for his realistic narratives, psychological depth, and profound exploration of human behavior.

Jafar Panahi – Cinema of Resistance and Reality

Jafar Panahi is an Iranian film director, screenwriter, and editor associated with the Iranian New Wave cinema, known for his realist and socially critical films that focus on everyday life in Iran and the challenges faced by ordinary people. Born in Mianeh in 1960 into a working-class Azerbaijani family, he developed an early interest in filmmaking and later studied at the College of Cinema and Television in Tehran. During the Iran–Iraq War, he worked as a military cinematographer, an experience that shaped his visual style and understanding of human struggle.

He began his career at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, where he met Abbas Kiarostami and served as his assistant on Through the Olive Trees (1994). Panahi gained international recognition with his debut feature The White Balloon, which



Asghar Farhadi- A fearless voice in world cinema

won the Caméra d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. He followed this with critically acclaimed films such as The Mirror, The Circle, and Crimson Gold, which explored social inequality, gender restrictions, and institutional pressure in Iranian society.

His later film Offside, about women attempting to attend a football match despite restrictions, further strengthened his reputation for politically engaged storytelling. From 2011 onward, he created a series of innovative works blending fiction and documentary, including This Is Not a Film, Closed Curtain, Taxi Tehran, 3 Faces, and No Bears, all reflecting on censorship, identity, and artistic freedom.

Panahi's cinema is known for its realism, moral depth, and focus on human dignity, often portraying ordinary people in situations shaped by social and political constraints. Despite significant restrictions, his work has remained influential and internationally celebrated for its courage and innovation.

Some of Jafar Panahi's most notable films include The White Balloon (1995), The Mirror (1997), The Circle (2000), Crimson Gold (2003), Offside (2006), This Is Not a Film (2011), Closed Curtain (2013), Taxi Tehran (2015), 3 Faces (2018), and No Bears (2022).

How Iranian Cinema Tells Stories: Minimalism and Moral Complexity

Iranian cinema is known for its minimalist storytelling style, where simple everyday situations are used to explore deeper emotional and philosophical themes. Instead of complex plots or visual spectacle, many films focus on ordinary moments such as family conflicts, childhood experiences, or moral dilemmas that gradually reveal wider social meanings.

A key feature of this approach is realism. Filmmakers often use non-professional actors, real locations, and naturalistic dialogue to create authenticity. Storytelling is frequently carried through silence, visual detail, and subtle gestures, encouraging viewers to interpret meaning beyond what is directly shown.

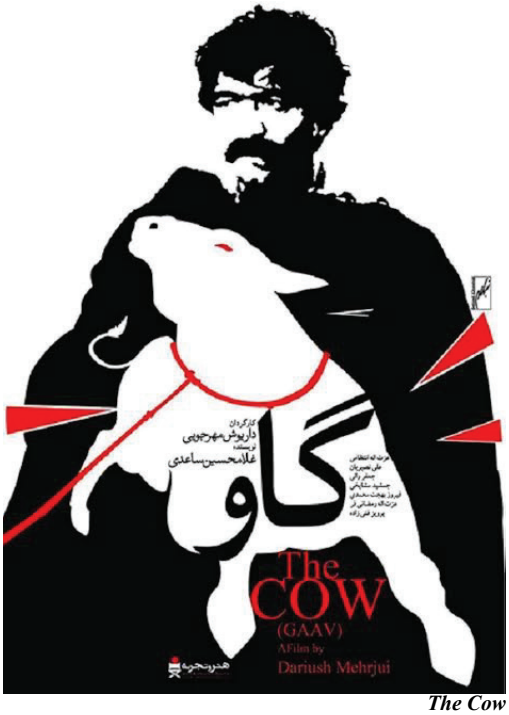
Another defining element is its distinctive visual style and color tone. Iranian films often use natural lighting, muted or earthy color palettes, and restrained cinematography to enhance realism and emotional depth. This visual simplicity strengthens the sense of everyday life, while also giving the films a poetic and reflective atmosphere.

Iranian cinema is also marked by moral complexity. Rather than clear heroes and villains, characters are placed in situations where right and wrong are ambiguous. Directors like Asghar Farhadi explore conflicting perspectives and ethical tensions, while Abbas Kiarostami uses narrative ambiguity to question reality itself. Jafar Panahi, meanwhile, often incorporates metafictional elements shaped by censorship, turning storytelling into a form of reflection and resistance.

Overall, Iranian cinema transforms simple narratives into layered explorations of human experience, combining minimalism, realism, and subtle visual aesthetics to create emotionally rich and thought-provoking films.

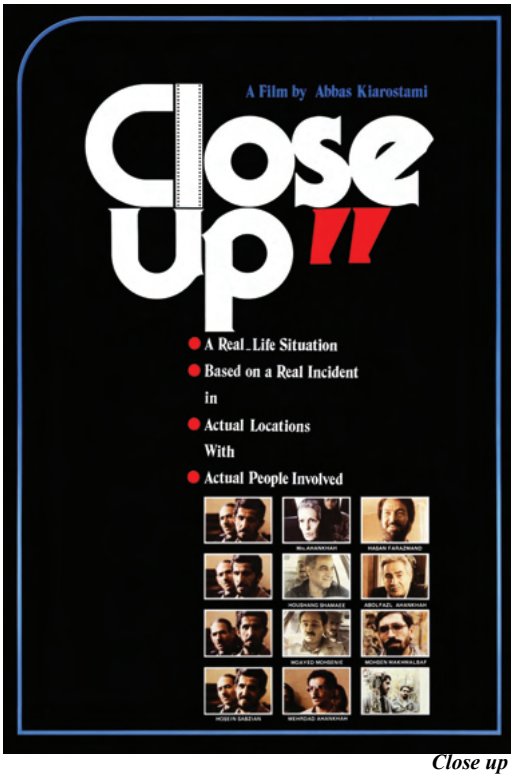
The Cow (1969)
Director: Dariush Mehrjui

Widely regarded as the film that launched the Iranian New Wave, The Cow tells the story of Hassan, a villager whose beloved cow dies while he is away. Unable to cope with the loss, he gradually begins to believe that he himself is the cow. The film combines social realism, symbolism, and psychological depth to portray rural poverty, identity, and collective responsibility. Its success at international festivals helped introduce Iranian cinema to global audiences. Why it matters: Often considered the foundation stone of modern Iranian art cinema.



The Cow

Close-Up (1990)
Director: Abbas Kiarostami



Close up

Based on a true story, Close-Up reconstructs the case of a man who impersonated famous filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Kiarostami blends documentary footage

with reenactments performed by the real participants, creating a groundbreaking exploration of identity, cinema, truth, and illusion. The film is frequently cited among the greatest films ever made. Why it matters: Revolutionized the boundary between documentary and fiction.

Children of Heaven (1997)
Director: Majid Majidi



Children of Heaven

A simple yet deeply moving story about a brother and sister who share a single pair of shoes after losing one pair. Through a child's perspective, the film portrays poverty, family bonds, dignity, and hope. It became the first Iranian film nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Why it matters: Demonstrated how universal emotions can emerge from everyday life.

A Separation (2011)
Director: Asghar Farhadi

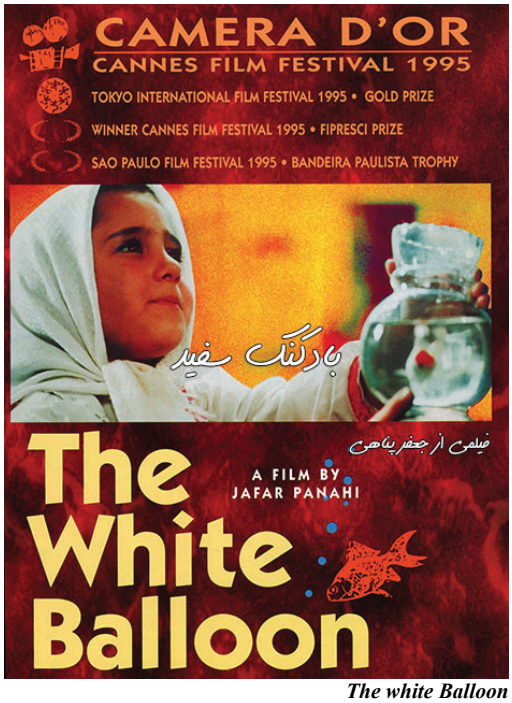


A Separation

A complex family drama centered on a married couple facing divorce, social pressures, and moral dilemmas. Farhadi masterfully explores class, religion, justice, and truth through an intimate narrative. Why it matters: Won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and introduced a new generation of Iranian cinema to global audiences.

The White Balloon (1995)
Director: Jafar Panahi

A young girl tries to buy a goldfish for the Persian New Year but loses her money along the way. The film captures urban Iranian life with remarkable warmth and realism. Why it matters: Announced



The white Balloon

Panahi as one of Iran's most important filmmakers.

Iranian Cinema on the World Stage

Iranian cinema is widely recognized as one of the world's most vital and influential artistic cinemas. Over the past five decades, Iranian cinema has evolved from a national artistic movement into a globally celebrated cinematic force. Filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi, Jafar Panahi, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and Asghar Farhadi have garnered acclaim at major international festivals, including Cannes, Venice, Berlin, and the Academy Awards.

What distinguishes Iranian cinema is its ability to tell deeply local stories that resonate universally. Through themes of family, childhood, morality, identity, and social justice, Iranian filmmakers have created works that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. Their minimalist style, poetic realism, and humanistic approach have influenced filmmakers and audiences around the world.

Today, Iranian cinema remains a testament to the power of storytelling, proving that profound cinematic experiences can emerge from simplicity, empathy, and an unwavering commitment to artistic expression. Its legacy continues to inspire global cinema and secure its place among the most significant film traditions in the world.

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Cinema Iranica – The International Reception of Iranian Cinema

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Beyond the Veil, Beyond the Frame: The Female Gaze in Iranian Women's Filmmaking

Ayrin Sadia

To write about Iranian women's cinema is to enter a room already crowded with assumptions. For many international viewers, the veil arrives before the film does. It becomes the first image, the first explanation, sometimes even the whole argument. A veiled woman appears on screen, and the viewer may feel that the story has already been decoded: oppression, silence, restriction, resistance.

For decades, international media and festival audiences have approached Iranian cinema through that familiar visual shorthand. The veil appears, and an entire narrative seems to unfold automatically restriction, silence, resistance, oppression. The image has become so dominant that it frequently arrives before the films themselves, shaping expectations long before a character speaks or a story begins.

However, Iranian women filmmakers have been disturbing that easy reading for decades. They don't deny the fact of gender control, they make it visible in far more subtle and unsettling ways in their cinema. The veil is there, but so are staircases, classrooms, buses, kitchens, bicycles, mirrors, letters, deserts, city pavements, prison memories, and packed family rooms, where a woman may say hardly a word, but her moral weight is nonetheless significant. These movies challenge us to examine things more closely. Not just in what is being displayed or exhibited, but in what has been displaced, withdrawn, interrupted or spoken in an indirect manner. The female gaze is a good starting point for this kind of work. However, the female gaze is more complicated in the Iranian context, as it is different from the male gaze. It's not just about putting women behind the camera. Instead, it is an ethics of looking which is a different way of engaging characters, bodies, memories and spaces that values complexity over spectacle, experience over consumption. The female gaze in this instance is an ethical and formal position. It questions about the subjectivity of looking at women in cinema without devouring them. It queries the possibility that a movie could trigger fear, desire, fatigue, rage, tenderness, boredom and resistance, without making those moments into slogans.

They're not just documenting oppression, but they're making cinema a place where women can be viewed beyond the symbols that are placed on them. Their movies pose other questions. What does freedom mean when it can't always be verbally expressed? What happens to desire when we try to control it? In what ways might resistance be manifested in cases where it is not possible to face the aggressor directly? How can cinema look at women and not see them as objects, victims or metaphors, that is, the most important question. Over nearly six decades, Iranian women have created one of the most unique cinematographic languages in the history of cinema. In their work against the constraints of politics, society, and censorship, they have produced intimate, political, poetic and confrontational films, local and universal

films, and films that remain accessible yet unfamiliar. Their cinema is more than just what it represents, it is how it shows us to see.

In the wake of Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Mulvey, 1975), feminist film theory has explored the way that dominant cinema frequently positions women as objects of visual pleasure for an assumed male viewer. Iranian women's cinema comes into that debate with a unique historical and political background. The body of Iranian women has been subject to intensive control in post-revolutionary Iran, both on the legal and the religious plane, as well as through family norms and film censorship. Physical intimacies have been hard to express directly. Public rules of representation have been imposed on domestic space as well. But out of this limitation come the visual codes of implication: the off-screen space, the charged silence, symbolic objects, gesture beyond gesture, elliptical editing.

That is not "romanticising" censorship. Constraint is not a blessing. However, an understanding of the way that Iranian filmmakers have defied the constraints with exceptional cleverness is essential. Their films tend to defy not through loud screaming, but through a shift in the grammar of attention.

One of the most compelling and horrifying works in the world and Iranian documentary film is **Forough Farrokhzad's film,The House Is Black (1963)** is a natural starting point. The movie takes place in a leper colony and, at face value, might have been a look at the suffering bodies from afar. Farrokhzad doesn't take that path. Her camera doesn't airit its subjects, or beautify their suffering as a pleasant sight. It is not so far off that dignity cannot be born. Ill faces turn back. Children recite lessons. Individuals pray, wash, walk and wait. The scripture, poetry and observation of the film's voice-over is both spiritual and intensely uncomfortable.



Forough Farrokhzad's ethical gaze in The House Is Black

Farrokhzad's significance for Iranian women's directing is not only because she was a woman director in an era when the position was uncommon, but also because of her ability to produce such a film, a work that was unusual for Iranian women in that time. It's just a way of her viewing. She knew that the camera could hurt. She also knew that it can help to bring back into the world of beauty and worth those who society has exiled from it. **The House Is Black** is a book about the female gaze not being soft. It is discipline. Not looking away, but not turning someone's suffering into a spectacle.

Following the Revolution of 1979, Iranian film began a new era, characterized by a formal code of representation as well as unusual formal innovation. As Hamid Naficy (2012) explains, post-revolutionary Iranian cinema was a cinema of national regulation, global circulation, allegory, childhood, rural space, and everyday

realism, in which the meanings of allegory, childhood, rural space, and everyday realism were rarely expressed directly. Women filmmakers entered this environment not as pretty appendages but as some of the most probing voices. Rakhshan Bani-Etemad has a pivotal role in this history. Bani-Etemad is one of Iran's great social realist filmmakers whose work has focused on the themes of class, labour, addiction, motherhood, poverty, corruption, and morality of survival. Her women are not floating, faceless, "Iranian womanhood." They work, they are mothers, lovers, political subjects, and economic actors. Gender is never divorced from class in movies like **Nargess (1992), The Blue-Veiled (1995), Under the Skin of the City (2001) and Tales (2014).** A wife's or mother's lack of freedom is built up by housing insecurity, unemployment, government red tape, social stigma, and the necessity to maintain a household when social systems are collapsing.

Bani-Etemad's technique matters. She is a realist, not a decorative one. The internal space, mobility by hand, the noise on the streets, the small space and the mixing of social worlds make one think that private life is constantly being squeezed by public crisis. She's particularly strong in portraying mothers not as sacred icons but as fatigued strategists. For her, the mother is in the cinema a mother is love, but also labour, calculation, sometimes a defeat. This is a feminist rejection of women's romance. It restores woman to her dual-ness.

Memory, testimony, and the punishment of female selfhood are another register brought by Tahmineh Milani. In The **Hidden Half (2001)**, a woman's political past reappears in her writing and her memory, challenging the surface of respectability that is her marriage. The film's organization is very critical. The woman's story isn't gossips, confessions or even scandal. It becomes evidence. Milani provides flashbacks to break out of the present and explores what occurs when a woman's past desires, beliefs and political commitments refuse to remain in the past. Milani's cinema can be more straightforward than Bani-Etemad's, sometimes more confrontational. It has made her controversial, but it's also what gives her films its charge. She tells women that they have histories before they married, before they had children, before they were recognized as women. They do not come into existence at the time a man decides to learn them. They have pasts. They have a political memory. Their



Women, labour, and social realism in Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's cinema

emotions are greater than the box they have placed themselves in.

Samira Makhmalbaf infused a new visual force into Iranian women's cinema. Her first film, **The Apple (1998)** was a teenage production shown at the Cannes festival, Un Certain Regard. The film is a real-life drama of two girls trapped by their father, with a hazy line between documentary and fiction. The girls play versions of themselves in the middle of the group. They aren't clumsy, they're not careless, they're awkward because they don't know how to be free.



The burden of education in Samira Makhmalbaf's Blackboards

The title "apple" can't get simpler than: desire, enticement, wisdom, mundane joy. However, Makhmalbaf's treatment is sensitive. She doesn't make the girls examples of oppression. She observes them exploring the world in little ways – looking, touching, walking, hesitating. Her extended visual vocabulary is explored in **Blackboards (2000)** which claimed Jury Prize at Cannes. Teachers walk with blackboards, through a landscape of war, displacement and uncertainty. The blackboard is now lesson, burden, shelter, shield and failed promise. It is not just a metaphor, it has poundage. It bends the body. One of the most colourful feminist allegories in Iranian cinema is Marzieh Meshkini's **The Day I Became a Woman (2000).** It is broken down into three episodes that take the viewer through childhood, adulthood, and old age. In the first episode, a young girl is informed that she's now a grown woman when she turns nine. The horribleness of the moment is that it is so normal. Adults don't speak evil. They talk as though they were telling you about the world. In one moment, the girl is just a kid playing, and the next, she's a social concern.

The second episode's bicycle sequence is a classic that will never be forgotten. A man tries to block the way of a woman on a bicycle. There is no safety in her sea, but only openness. The bicycle is the speed, breath, disobedience. For some time, freedom is no longer an ideal. It's the beat of the legs and the pedals. The final installment, where a grand old lady purchases her household goods denied her during life, is stranger and sadder. A bed, appliances, furniture, a postponed life, are all added to the beach. Is she free now? Perhaps. Is it too late? Also perhaps. Meshkini allows for that paradox.



Movement as resistance in Marzieh Meshkini's The Day I Became a Woman

Niki Karimi's cinema focuses on feelings of urban loneliness and the experience of space for women. Before becoming a director, Karimi has been an actress worldwide. **One Night (2005)** follows a young woman as she traverses Tehran when she's unable to return home. At night the city is a threat and an opportunity. The drama is subdued, if not hushed, composed of moments of contact, moments of pause, moments of psychology; moments of being a woman in public space. Night is adventure, crime or romantic escapade, or existential wandering, for many male-centred films set in cities.In many male-dominated city films, night is adventure, crime, romance or existential wandering. A woman's night has calculation. At each corner, there is a question: Is this safe? Who is watching? What are the implications of the assumption?



Urban uncertainty in Niki Karimi's One Night

Mania Akbari's **20 Fingers (2004)** takes the drama out of film. The movie shows a man and a woman talking about marriage, sex, pregnancy, divorce, fidelity and social expectation, sometimes in a small space. The digital image is unprocessed. The frame is tight. There's not much cushion. What makes Akbari's radicalism unique is that he leaves space for discussion to be a field of conflict. She does not accept the courteous deferral that is generally accepted in international speeches and discussions about Iranian women. Her work questions directly, who owns a woman's body, the husband, the family, the law, the nation or the woman herself? The Female Gaze isn't always tender. This should be thrown out the window. Sometimes it is tender; sometimes it is awkward, hard to sit with, sometimes it is sexually frank, sometimes it is impatient, sometimes is it furious. Cinema is Akbari's affair, and it makes that discomfort inescapable.

The diaspora has opened up other avenues to Iranian women's cinema. Winner of the Silver Lion for Best Director at Venice 2009, Shirin Neshat's film **(Women Without Men)** looks at Iranian history through



Intimacy and confrontation in Mania Akbari's 20 Fingers

the lens of exile, visual art and memory. The film, set in the context of the 1953 coup, brings together a number of women in an impossible but real garden. Stylized, even dreamlike to Bani-Etemad's grounded realism, Neshat's cinema can seem at times. But there is also an other reality that exists in that distance. Exile alters the look. It accentuates the sense of desire, but memory becomes composition (water, trees, shadows, bodies, walking) from history to dream.

In addition, Sepideh Farsi's films defy the notion that Iranian women filmmakers must only address the private affairs of the home. The animated film The **Siren (2023),** which takes place during the Iran-Iraq War, demonstrates the female gaze's ability to gaze upon the war, the cities, the boys, the ruins, the displacement and the national trauma. Women are often asked to comment on "women issues" – but war and history are "men's issues" aren't they? They do not. Farsi uses animation to distance herself from trauma, as well as give memory a flexible, visual form.

Maryam Tafakory makes films that're like essays and she takes the conversation right into the archive. Her film **Irani Bag from (2020)** looks at bags. How they help people touch each other in movies from Iran after the revolution. This might seem like a thing until you notice how often things in Iranian movies carry a lot of emotional weight because people cannot always touch each other. A handbag or a glass or a door or something that someone passes to someone these things become like substitutes for



The chador as genre icon in Ana Lily Amirpour's A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night



Objects as displaced intimacy in Maryam Tafakory's Irani Bag

being close to someone. Maryam Tafakorys work is really important because she looks at censorship from the inside of how films are made. She wants to know what Iranian movies have learned to say in a way and what they have lost by doing it that way.

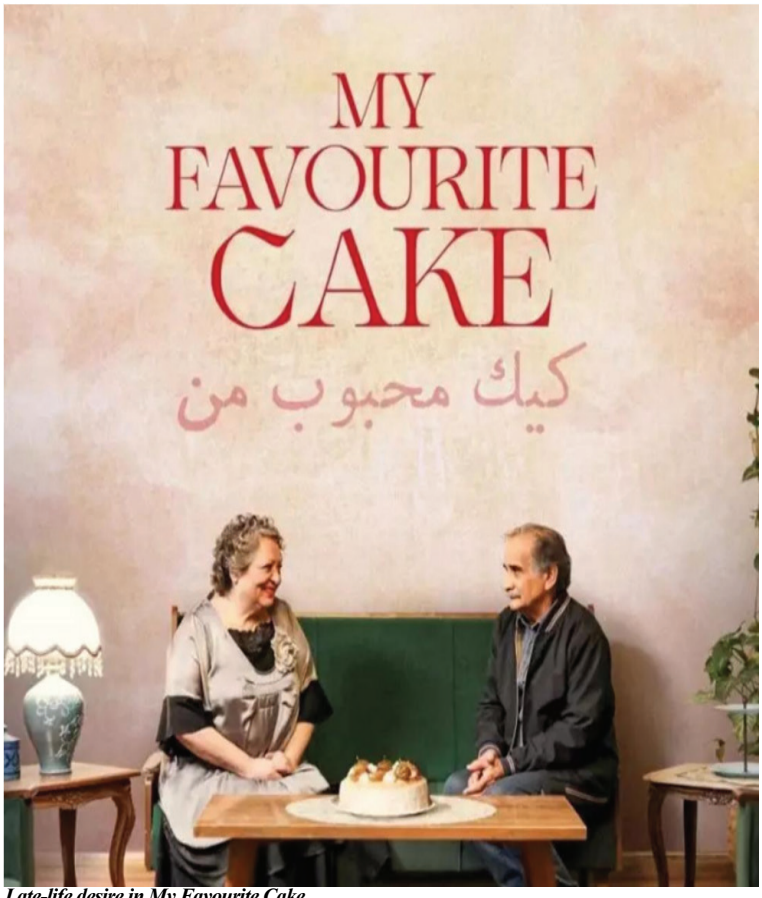
Maryam Keshavarz's movies Circumstance from 2011 and The Persian Version from 2023 bring a lot of things into the conversation like humor and sexuality and music and family fights and the contradictions of living in another country. Maryam Keshavarz does not want to show that Iranian womens stories are always sad. She thinks that womens lives can be funny and embarrassing and full of desire and style and fights with their mothers and queer feelings. All of these things become part of what we know about women. A womans life is not about suffering. It is also, about making a mess and being happy and making choices and having secret desires and just trying to survive in silly ways.

Ana Lily Amirpour's movie **A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (2014)** brings things into movies that are about genres. This film is in black and white. People often call it an Iranian vampire western. It is about a made up place called Bad City where a girl who wears a chador and is a vampire goes after men who're not good. The picture of this girl is really famous because it changes what people think about the chador. Usually people think the chador is something that restricts women. In this movie it is something that makes the girl strong and scary.

This is important for people who watch movies at film festivals. Women who make



The chador as genre icon in Ana Lily Amirpour's A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night



Late-life desire in My Favourite Cake

movies from Iran should not just be seen as people who talk about politics. They are also people who like to play with movie forms make people laugh, create genres, write essays make poetry and try new things. Their movies might be about the things that happen to them but that is not all they are about. If we only see their movies as stories about women who are suffering then we are doing the thing that has been done to them before. We are making them into objects again. Iranian women filmmakers like Ana Lily Amirpour make movies that're like A Girl Walks Home Alone, at Night. These movies are special because they are made by women who have a lot of talent and ideas. They should be seen as artists not as women who are talking about politics.

Recent works make the stakes more clear. My Favourite Cake (2024) co-directed by Maryam Moghaddam and Behtash Sanaeeha, focuses on what an older woman wants a topic that is still seen as unusual in movies. Movies usually show women as beautiful and older women as dignified but they rarely show older women as desirable. By looking at romance in age, personal happiness, dancing, food, friendship and the bodys right to be happy the film questions both government control and usual movie themes. Everyday life becomes an issue because it has been made illegal.

Across these filmmakers some techniques are commonly used. What is happening, off-screen is very important. Iranian Women's cinema often makes us feel the weight of what cannot be shown: physical contact, danger, rules, desire, memories, the body and the past. Silence is not always empty or meaningless. It can mean fear, refusal, being tired or a plan. Windows, doors, cars, hallways, mirrors and doorways keep appearing because they are not just backgrounds. They show how movement is limited.

The things we see every day can have an impact on us. For example an apple, a bicycle, a blackboard, a veil, a handbag, a mirror or a letter. Each of these things can be a place where our personal life and the rules of society meet. These things are not just pretty to look at. They are important because they show us how power can be found in objects and how women use these objects to be seen and heard.

Women moving around is also very important. Women walk, ride bicycles, travel, wander around cities leave their homes go back to their rooms cross from one place to another and think about memories. When women move it is never a simple thing. A girl walking into the street, a woman riding a bicycle even though people tell her not to, a mother traveling across the city to go to work or a woman who has had to leave her home imagining the place she used to live. These actions are, like making a point. They show that the space where women are allowed to be is not always the same. It is something that people argue about.

The way people talk about men and women in these movies is not about men versus women. That is too easy. Men in Iranian women's cinema are not always bad guys. They can be weak, scared, loving, silly trapped or hurt by the things they help keep in place. When feminist cinema is at its best it does not just turn hate. It looks at power. How it stays alive through family love, money problems, shame, religion, rules and habits.

To really understand what is going on we need to look beyond the veil. This means we do not ignore things like the veil. We do not stop there either. The veil is one part of the picture but Iranian women who make movies have gone past the limits set by people who want to censor them by old customs and by people who want to simplify things. Their movies remind us that films can fight back not by what they say but by how they look. A camera can be in charge. It can also be a friend. It can show everything. It can also keep things private. It can turn a woman into a symbol, or it can wait long enough for her to become a person.

Waiting is a thing. So is paying attention. When Iranian women filmmakers look at things in an meaningful way they show the world images that are really important: a face looking back from a mirror, a mother in a room full of people a girl trying to figure out the streets a woman riding a bicycle and not stopping, a vampire wearing a chador and walking around at night an older woman wanting something she has not wanted in a long time.

Iranian women filmmakers have done something by not ignoring the fact that men have more control, over women but by showing more of what is going on around it. They have gone past what we normally see by showing that there is always more to look at. There is always another way to look another moment, another thing to notice another woman walking down the street and not giving up. For women filmmakers the idea that looking carefully at things is a powerful act is where it all starts.

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More Than Directors

Emad Alvi Farabi

There are filmmakers whose films become successful. Then there are filmmakers who become successful because they make films. And then, perhaps once in a generation, there are filmmakers



who dedicate their entire existence to cinema itself, not to fame, not to awards, not even to commercial success, but to the preservation of an art form that has survived more than a century by constantly reinventing itself.

For me, Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve belong to that last category.

The internet often loves to turn everything into a competition. Every few months, another debate resurfaces- *Nolan or Villeneuve? Oppenheimer or Dune? Interstellar or Arrival?* As if cinema were a football match where only one side could possibly win. I have never understood this obsession with comparison. Because the more I read about these two men, the more interviews I watch, the more behind-the-scenes documentaries I consume, and the more I revisit their films, the less interested I become in choosing between them. What fascinates me instead is something far more important: the extraordinary discipline with which they have devoted their lives to cinema.

Not just filmmaking. Cinema….. I think there is a difference.

Anyone can direct a film. Modern technology has made filmmaking more accessible than ever before. Cameras are cheaper. Visual effects are infinitely more powerful. Artificial intelligence can generate images in seconds. Editing software has become democratized. Yet somehow, in an era where making movies has become easier than ever, truly cinematic experiences have become increasingly rare. That is precisely why Nolan and Villeneuve matter. Ironically, they are often described as directors obsessed with technology. Nothing could be further from the truth. They do not worship technology. They simply refuse to let technology replace craftsmanship.



Christopher Nolan has spent decades defending photochemical film, not because he is nostalgic, but because he genuinely believes it remains the most reliable and expressive image-capturing medium ever invented. In interviews stretching back more than a decade, he has repeatedly argued that film is not an outdated technology waiting to be replaced; it is already an incredibly mature technology that still possesses qualities digital cameras struggle to replicate. Even during periods when studios aggressively pushed filmmakers toward digital acquisition because it was cheaper and more convenient, Nolan continued shooting on film, often becoming one of the loudest advocates for preserving film laboratories, projection systems and large-format exhibition.

Many people misunderstood this. They assumed Nolan hated digital. He never did. He simply believed that every technological decision should serve the story rather than production convenience. That philosophy quietly echoes throughout his entire career.

Memento was never revolutionary because its timeline ran backwards. It was revolutionary because Nolan discovered that the audience could experience memory loss instead of merely watching someone suffer from it. The Prestige was never really about magicians. It was about obsession consuming identity. Inception was less interested in dreams than in the architecture of guilt. Interstellar disguised itself as science fiction while secretly becoming one of the most intimate films about father-



hood ever produced. Dunkirk fragmented time into three simultaneous rhythms because conventional chronology could never reproduce the psychological experience of survival. Even Tenet, perhaps his most divisive work, was another attempt to ask whether cinema itself could manipulate time in ways no other artistic medium could. Time has always been Nolan's true protagonist. Not Batman. Not Cooper. Not Cobb. Not Oppenheimer. Time.

Yet what continues to amaze me is that behind these impossibly ambitious ideas stands a filmmaker whose working methods are remarkably old-fashioned.

sion before the camera ever rolls. That level of preparation explains why even his largest productions often move with surprising efficiency.

When discussing Christopher Nolan's career, it is impossible not to mention one other person, Emma Thomas. To audiences, Nolan is the face of his films. But behind the scenes, for more than two decades, Emma Thomas has been an inseparable force behind the kind of large-scale cinema he has consistently been able to create. Not merely as his wife, but as a producer, she has spent years building an environment in which creative decisions



Crew members frequently describe Nolan's sets as astonishingly calm. There is very little chaos. There are very few unnecessary takes. He famously prefers shooting with a single camera whenever possible, believing that one carefully composed perspective forces everyone on set to make clearer creative decisions.

He dislikes covering scenes with multiple cameras simply because it provides more options in the editing room. Instead, every setup is designed with extraordinary preci-



are given every opportunity to become reality.

One of Nolan's greatest strengths is his ability to imagine the impossible. But between imagination and reality lie budgets, schedules, logistics, studio expectations, risks, and hundreds of practical challenges. Emma Thomas operates in precisely that space. If Nolan dreams the impossible, her role is to construct the production framework that allows those dreams to exist in the real world. That is also where the foundation of their partnership lies. It was never the relationship between a "star director" and a "star producer." They began working together long before Hollywood knew either of their names. Their collaboration was built on mutual trust, years of understanding one another, and a shared philosophy toward filmmaking.

In many ways, one word is enough to explain Christopher Nolan's entire career. Trust.

Not only Emma Thomas, but his actors trust him. His cinematographers trust him. His production designers, editors, visual effects supervisors, every department trusts that whenever Nolan makes a decision that initially sounds strange or even impossible, there is a clear artistic purpose behind it. That is precisely why his collaborators are willing to commit themselves to ideas that, at first glance, seem almost impossible to execute.

The Trinity Test sequence in Oppenheimer is perhaps the clearest example of that trust.

When it became known that Nolan intended to recreate the Trinity Test without



relying entirely on CGI in one of the biggest studio productions of 2023, many assumed it was nothing more than a publicity stunt. After all, from a technical standpoint, CGI would have been the easier, safer, and more conventional solution.

But Nolan's intention was never to reject technology. Rather, he wanted to capture as much of the event as possible through real, physical elements. He believes that the way real light spreads, the way real fire behaves, the density of smoke, the unpredictability of wind, and the physical reactions created by an actual explosion are subtleties that the human eye perceives instinctively. Audiences may not always be able to explain why a particular image feels more authentic, but their brains recognize the difference long before they consciously do.

That is why technology, for Nolan, is never the destination; it is merely a tool. If a scene can achieve its intended emotional impact through practical methods, he will always prefer that approach. And if digital technology genuinely serves the story

better, he embraces that with equal enthusiasm. For him, the question has never been "CGI or practical effects?" The only question has always been: Which approach will allow the audience to experience this moment as truth?



Working alongside cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema, Nolan explored countless practical solutions before ever considering digital ones. Instead of asking visual effects artists to create an explosion entirely inside a computer, the team spent months experimenting with real elements such as fire, smoke, light, miniature photography, large-scale practical effects and different optical techniques. They tested how light behaved when passing through glass, how particles moved through the air, and how different chemical reactions could create unusual textures on camera. Every experiment was guided by the same question: How can this feel real? Not necessarily scientifically perfect, but emotionally believable.

Nolan knew that no practical effect could truly recreate the scale of a nuclear explosion. That was never his intention. The Trinity Test in Oppenheimer was designed to show how the event felt through Oppenheimer's eyes rather than to function as a scientific reconstruction. For that reason, practical photography became far more valuable than absolute realism. Real fire casts unpredictable light. Real smoke moves differently every single time. Real explosions create tiny imperfections that our eyes recognize instinctively, even if we cannot explain why they feel more convincing than something created entirely inside a computer.

Visual effects were still an important part of the process. They helped remove equipment, extend environments, combine multiple elements and polish the final image. But they were never asked to replace reality completely. Instead, they supported what had already been captured in front of the camera. That difference is at the heart of Nolan's filmmaking philosophy. Technology is not the enemy of practical filmmaking, nor is practical filmmaking a rejection of technology. For Nolan, the two work best when they support one another. The goal is never to prove that a scene was created without CGI. The goal is



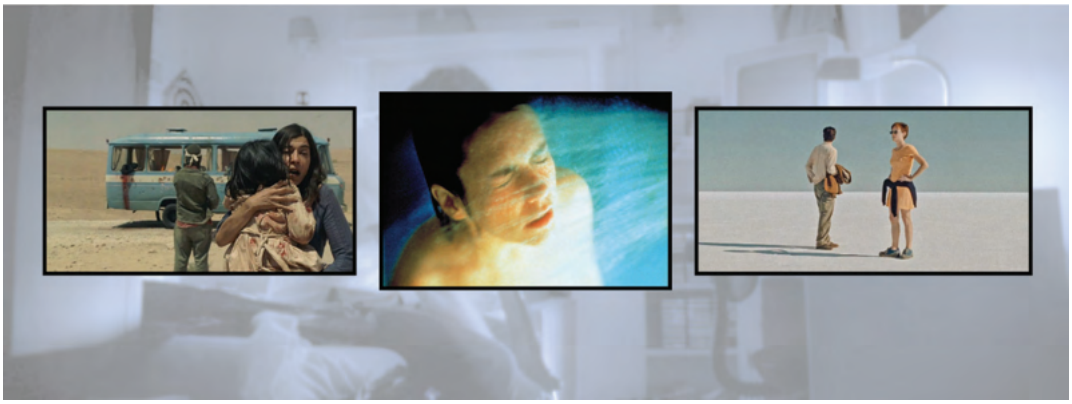
to create an image that feels honest, immersive and emotionally true. When practical craftsmanship and modern technology work together instead of competing with each other, cinema becomes far more powerful than either approach could achieve alone.

Denis Villeneuve arrived at similar conclusions from an entirely different road.
Long before Hollywood recognized his name, he was already one of Canada's most respected filmmakers. His early career was shaped not by billion-dollar franchises but by intimate French-language cinema that demanded patience rather than spectacle.

brought the sensibilities of European art cinema into the studio system.

Roger Deakins immediately recognized something unusual. Villeneuve was never chasing beautiful images merely for aesthetic pleasure. He wanted images that carried emotional gravity.

During their collaborations on Prisoners, Sicario and Blade Runner 2049, Deakins often emphasized natural and practical light, restrained camera movement and visual simplicity;- not because they were fashionable choices, but because they intensified emotional tension. Villeneuve admired that philosophy deeply. Rather



Films like August 32nd on Earth, Maelström, Polytechnique and Incendies revealed an artist fascinated by silence, memory, trauma and moral ambiguity long before he was ever trusted with science fiction.



Hollywood did not create Denis Villeneuve. Hollywood simply discovered him. That distinction matters. Because when Villeneuve eventually crossed into English-language filmmaking with Prisoners, he did not arrive trying to imitate American blockbusters. Instead, he

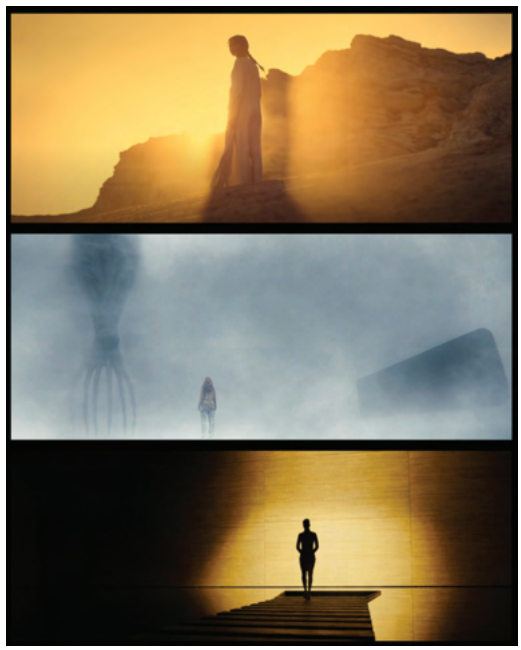
than overwhelming audiences with constant movement, they allowed stillness to become cinematic.

Watching Sicario today, I am still struck by how much fear can exist inside silence. Not dialogue. Not music. Silence.

The border sequence at dusk has become legendary among cinematographers not because of technical complexity alone, but because Villeneuve understood something increasingly forgotten in blockbuster filmmaking: tension is created by anticipation, not explanation. That lesson would later evolve into Arrival and eventually into Dune.

One of the things I admire most about Denis Villeneuve is that he has never stopped talking about cinema as a visual art. In many interviews over the years, he has said that films are at their best when images and sound tell the story before dialogue does. He believes that cinema should not depend too much on characters explaining everything with words. Unfortunately, many modern films have become heavily dependent on exposition, where characters spend too much time telling the audience what is happening instead of letting them experience it. Villeneuve often reminds us that the greatest moments in film history are rarely remembered because of a line of dialogue. We remember them because of an image, a piece of music, a moment of silence, or simply because of the way they made us feel.

Once you understand this philosophy, many of Villeneuve's creative decisions begin to make perfect sense. It explains the slow, dreamlike rhythm of Arrival. It explains why the film Blade Runner 2049 takes its time to tell the story. It also explains why Dune is never in a hurry. There are many moments where the film simply watches the wind move across the endless desert, follows a character walking through the sand, or allows the audience to sit with the silence of Arrakis. At first, these moments may seem slow or even unnecessary. But they are not empty at all. They are an important part of the story. Villeneuve wants the audience to feel the scale, the loneliness and the mystery of that world before the characters even begin to explain it.



This is also one of the reasons why he insisted on filming large parts of Dune in the real deserts of Jordan and Abu Dhabi instead of depending entirely on virtual production. Of course, the real locations looked beautiful, but that was not the only reason. Villeneuve wanted the actors to experience the desert for themselves. He wanted them to feel the heat, the endless

horizon, the silence and the overwhelming scale of the landscape, because that is exactly what their characters were supposed to feel on Arrakis. During the production of Dune, he accepted the use of multiple shooting units for the first time in his career. It was not because he suddenly preferred making bigger productions. It was simply because Dune had become too large for one director to physically oversee every shot on his own. Even then, he remained closely involved in every important creative decision, making sure that every part of the film reflected the same vision.



Another thing that continues to impress me about both Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve is how rarely they talk about success. They almost never spend their interviews discussing awards, box office numbers or critical praise. Those things seem to matter far less to them than people often imagine. Instead, whenever they speak, the conversation almost always turns toward their collaborators, the filmmaking process, preparation, discipline and responsibility. The more I listen to them, the more I realize that neither of them believes great films are created by one brilliant person. A director may lead the vision, but a film is built by hundreds of artists, technicians and craftspeople who all have to believe in the same idea and work toward the same goal.

Perhaps that is why both Nolan and Villeneuve have spent years building long-term creative partnerships instead of simply hiring new crews for every project. They understand that trust cannot be created overnight. It grows over years of working together, solving problems together and learning how each person thinks. That is why we so often see the same names appearing again and again in their films. It is not just loyalty, it is the result of years of shared experience and complete creative trust.

One thing I have noticed about both Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve is that they rarely build a film with a completely new team. Instead, they spend years building long-term creative partnerships with people they trust. Over time, these collaborators become more than just crew members- they become an important part of the director's creative process.

Christopher Nolan's creative team has become almost legendary over the years. Emma Thomas has been by his side as

producer since the very beginning of his career. Hoyte van Hoytema has helped create the visual identity of his recent films. Jennifer Lame has brought emotional rhythm to his stories through editing. Ludwig Göransson has introduced a new musical language to Nolan's films, while Nathan Crowley has designed some of the most memorable worlds seen in modern cinema. Before them came Wally Pfister, Lee Smith and Hans Zimmer, whose work shaped many of Nolan's earlier masterpieces.

These are not just professional relationships that happen from one project to another. They are creative partnerships built over many years of working together, solving problems together and learning to trust one another. Everyone is free to share ideas, challenge decisions and even disagree, because they all care about one thing more than anything else, making the best film possible.

Denis Villeneuve has followed the same path throughout his career. Roger Deakins, Joe Walker, Patrice Vermette, Greig Fraser, Hans Zimmer, Paul Lambert and Jacqueline West have all become regular collaborators. If you look closely at Villeneuve's filmography, you will notice the same names appearing again and again. That is not a coincidence. Villeneuve believes that every department contributes equally to storytelling. Whether someone is working on cinematography, production design, editing, costume design, sound or visual effects, every artist plays an important role in shaping the final experience. No department exists simply to support another. They all work together to tell the same story.

This philosophy becomes especially clear when we look at the way Nolan and Villeneuve think about cinematography. For many directors, the screenplay comes first, and the camera is planned later. But for these two filmmakers, the camera becomes part of the storytelling long before production begins. They do not simply ask where the camera should be placed. They ask why the camera should be there in the first place.

Hoyte van Hoytema has spoken many times about his conversations with Nolan during pre-production. These discussions often begin months before filming starts. They are not only about lenses, camera movements or technical equipment. They begin with emotion. What should the audience feel in this moment? How close



should the camera be? Should it move, or should it remain completely still? Every creative decision must first make emotional sense before it makes technical sense.

That is why the camera in a Nolan film almost never calls attention to itself. It is not there to impress the audience with flashy movements or complicated techniques. Instead, it quietly becomes part of the story. Ironically, Nolan's films are famous for their spectacular visuals precisely because most viewers never stop to think about the camera while watching them. They are too busy experiencing the story itself.

The docking sequence in Interstellar is a perfect example. From a technical point of view, it is one of the most impressive scenes Nolan has ever filmed. It combines rotating spacecraft, miniature models, practical lighting, visual effects and one of Hans Zimmer's most unforgettable pieces of music. Yet very few people leave the theatre talking about the engineering behind the sequence or the camera equipment that made it possible. What they remember is the feeling. They remember the tension, the fear, the hope and finally the relief. That emotional experience did not happen by accident. Every technical decision was made to serve that emotion
Hoyte van Hoytema has often explained that Nolan always tries to make things as real as possible before turning to digital solutions. Instead of creating everything later with visual effects, the team first looks for practical ways to build believable environments. Large spacecraft interiors were physically constructed. Cockpits were designed to rotate. Lighting changed naturally inside the set so actors could react to real conditions instead of imagining them in front of a green screen. Visual effects were still used throughout the film, but they were designed to support reality rather than replace it.



I think this says a lot about Nolan's philosophy as a filmmaker.

He is not against visual effects. He simply believes that the best visual effect is usually the one the audience never notices. Legendary visual effects artist Dennis Muren once said that visual effects have truly succeeded when people stop thinking about visual effects altogether. Looking at Nolan's films, it often feels as though he has built his entire career around that idea.

The same philosophy can also be seen in Denis Villeneuve's films, although he expresses it in a different way. Cinematographer Greig Fraser has often explained that while making Dune, the team was not trying to create a perfect-looking desert. Instead, they were trying to capture a real one. They could have filled the locations with huge artificial lights or depended more heavily on digital environments, but they often chose to wait instead. They waited for the clouds to move. They waited for the sunlight to fall at the right angle. Sometimes they simply waited for nature to give them the image they were looking for.

That patience became one of the film's greatest strengths.

A real desert has something that no studio or computer can fully recreate. It has an endless sense of scale. Standing in places like Wadi Rum in Jordan, the actors were not pretending to feel small, they actually felt small. Timothée Chalamet has spoken about how overwhelming the landscape felt during filming. Rebecca Ferguson described how physically demanding the environment became, while Javier Bardem often said that the desert itself felt like another actor in the film. Those emotions cannot simply be created inside a computer. The audience may not always realize why those scenes feel so believable,



but the actors' performances carry the weight of a real experience.

This is one of the biggest misunderstandings about filmmakers like Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve. Many people believe they are against modern technology. The truth is exactly the opposite. Both directors love technology. They work with some of the most advanced cameras, visual effects and sound systems available today. The difference is that they never allow technology to become more important than the story. For them, technology is a tool, not the destination.

Christopher Nolan's relationship with IMAX is probably the best example of this philosophy.

Today, many people think of IMAX simply as a bigger screen or a sharper image. But Nolan saw something much more valuable in it. He believed IMAX could make the audience feel physically present inside a film. The larger negative, the incredible level of detail, the depth of the image and the sense of immersion all gave him possibilities that traditional formats could not.

The problem was that IMAX cameras were never designed for fiction filmmaking.
They were originally built for documentaries. They were enormous, extremely heavy and incredibly loud. The cameras made so much mechanical noise that recording clean dialogue on set was often impossible. Their film magazines could only hold a few minutes of film before needing to be replaced, making long dramatic scenes difficult to shoot. Even moving the camera required specially designed equipment because of its size and weight. For many filmmakers, these limitations were enough to avoid IMAX altogether.

Nolan looked at the same problems and saw a challenge instead.

Over the years, he worked closely with IMAX engineers, Panavision technicians





and his cinematographers to make these cameras more practical for narrative filmmaking. The cameras became quieter. New camera housings and blimps helped reduce mechanical noise during dialogue scenes. Special rigs made the heavy cameras easier to move. As the technology improved, Nolan slowly began using IMAX not only for action sequences but also for emotional conversations and intimate character moments. By the time he made Oppenheimer, audiences were watching close-up dialogue scenes filmed with IMAX cameras, something that would have seemed almost impossible only a decade earlier.

That achievement is often overlooked. Nolan did not simply use IMAX. He helped expand what IMAX cameras could do. In many ways, he pushed the technology beyond the purpose for which it had originally been designed.

The same mindset can be seen in Blade Runner 2049. Instead of asking Roger Deakins to create a futuristic world through endless digital effects, Villeneuve focused on atmosphere. Dust filled the air. Smoke softened the light. Practical reflections covered the glass surfaces. Massive architectural spaces made the characters feel isolated, while slow and carefully controlled camera movements allowed the audience to absorb every detail. Nothing feels rushed. Nothing feels excessive.

One of the best examples is the unforgettable orange Las Vegas sequence. It remains one of the most beautiful scenes in modern science fiction, not because it is filled with visual effects, but because of its restraint. Roger Deakins has often said that good lighting should never draw attention to itself. The audience should feel it before they consciously notice it. Watching Blade Runner 2049, it becomes clear how deeply Villeneuve believes in that idea. Every frame is carefully designed, yet nothing feels artificial. Even silence seems to have its own light.

That same philosophy continues in the way both directors think about sound. Few filmmakers working today understand the emotional power of sound as deeply as Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve. They both know that music should not simply accompany a scene, it should become part of the storytelling itself.

That same philosophy continues in the way

both directors think about sound. Few filmmakers working today understand the emotional power of sound as deeply as Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve. For both of them, sound is never something that is added after the film is finished. It becomes part of the storytelling from the very beginning.

Hans Zimmer has often shared an interesting story about how he began composing the music for Interstellar. Nolan did not give him the complete screenplay. He did not explain the science behind the story or describe the space missions. Instead, he handed Zimmer a single page. It was a simple story about the relationship between a father and his child. That was all.

Zimmer later said that he composed the first themes based only on that emotional idea, without knowing he was actually writing music for a science fiction film. That decision changed everything. When we watch Interstellar, the music never feels like it is trying to make space look bigger or more spectacular. Instead, it reminds us that beneath all the science, black holes and distant planets, the film is really about love, separation and family. The music is emotional first, and scientific second.

Years later, Zimmer accepted Denis Villeneuve's invitation to compose the music for Dune. According to Zimmer himself, he turned down another major Hollywood project because he believed Dune was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He wanted the music to sound like nothing audiences had heard before. Instead of relying on a traditional orchestra, he spent months experimenting with unusual instruments, distorted voices, strange vocal performances and completely new sound textures. His goal was not simply to create beautiful music. He wanted audiences to hear Arrakis before they fully understood it. Even if you close your eyes while listening to the soundtrack, you can almost feel the heat, the wind and the endless desert. That is a remarkable achievement for any composer.

After working with Hans Zimmer for nearly two decades, Nolan surprised many people by choosing Ludwig Göransson to compose the music for Oppenheimer. Naturally, many wondered whether anyone could replace Zimmer's unique style. But Göransson never tried to imitate him. Instead, he created a completely different musical identity for the film.

The score of Oppenheimer is filled with tension rather than celebration. Fast-moving violins create a feeling that time is running out and history cannot be stopped. Instead of making the audience feel comfortable, the music keeps them restless. It reflects the pressure inside Oppenheimer's mind rather than the scale of the events happening around him. It is difficult to imagine another modern historical drama using music in such a psychological



way.
Another thing that both Nolan and Villeneuve understand extremely well is that sound is not only about music. Sometimes, silence can be just as powerful.

Think about Dunkirk. Much of the tension comes from sounds that never allow the audience to relax, the ticking watch, distant aircraft, engines, waves and constantly rising background tones. Even in quiet moments, the sound design creates a feeling that danger is always nearby.

Villeneuve uses silence differently. In Arrival, silence creates mystery. In Blade Runner 2049, it creates loneliness. In Dune, it makes Arrakis feel ancient and almost sacred. The silence in these films never feels empty. It has weight. It allows the audience to observe, to think and to absorb the world before another line of dialogue is spoken.

This is another reason why I find both filmmakers so fascinating. They trust the audience. They do not feel the need to explain every emotion through dialogue. They believe that a look, a sound, a piece of music or even a moment of complete silence can sometimes communicate more than an entire page of conversation.

The more I learn about Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve, the more I realize that they rarely speak about success in the way most people expect. Awards almost never become the focus of their interviews. Box office numbers are mentioned only when someone else brings them up. Even critical praise seems to matter less than the work itself.

Instead, whenever they sit down for a long conversation, they almost always begin talking about their collaborators. They speak about cinematographers, editors, composers, production designers, sound teams and visual effects artists. They talk about preparation, discipline, problem-solving and responsibility. Listening to them, it becomes clear that neither of them believes cinema is created by one brilliant individual. A director may guide the vision, but hundreds of people work together to bring that vision to life.

Perhaps that is why they have spent so many years building long-term creative partnerships instead of hiring completely new crews for every project. Trust cannot be built in a few weeks. It grows slowly through years of working together, facing difficult productions together and solving impossible problems together. Once that trust exists, everyone understands the same creative language without needing to explain every small decision.

I think this is one of the biggest reasons why both Nolan and Villeneuve continue to make films that feel so complete. Every department is moving in the same direction. The cinematography supports the production design. The production design supports the performances. The performances support the music. The music supports the editing. The editing supports the story. Nothing exists simply to look impressive on its own. Every part of the film is working toward the same emotional goal.

And perhaps that is what truly separates great filmmakers from great artists. A great filmmaker knows how to direct a film. A great artist knows how to bring hundreds of talented people together and inspire them to believe in one impossible idea. Looking at the careers of Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve, I honestly believe that

this may be one of their greatest achievements, not just the films they have made, but the creative cultures they have built around those films.

The more I read about Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve, the less interested I become in the technology they use. Instead, I become fascinated by the questions they ask before using it. Neither director begins with a camera, a visual effect or a new piece of software. They begin with a feeling. Technology enters the conversation only after that feeling has been clearly defined. Perhaps that is why their films continue to age so well. Cameras change. Software changes. Visual effects become more advanced every year. But human emotion has never needed an update.

Jennifer Lame's editing on Oppenheimer



deserves just as much appreciation as Christopher Nolan's direction. Editing a Nolan film is never an easy job because Nolan does not tell stories in a traditional way. Most films are edited to arrange events in chronological order so that the audience can easily follow what happens next. Nolan's films work differently.

His stories are built around ideas, emotions, memory and different perspectives rather than a simple timeline. Because of this, the editor's job is not just to put scenes together. The real challenge is to make sure the audience stays emotionally connected even when the story moves between different timelines and points of view. Jennifer Lame has explained that while editing Oppenheimer, the biggest challenge was not managing the film's complex structure, but keeping its emotional flow alive. Every transition had to feel natural, even though the story was constantly moving through different moments in time. That is why Oppenheimer never feels confusing just for the sake of being complicated. Instead, everything moves with a steady rhythm, allowing the audience to experience Oppenheimer's thoughts, memories and emotions almost as if they were happening inside his own mind.

Denis Villeneuve's longtime editor, Joe Walker, achieves something equally remarkable. If Oppenheimer shows how editing can organize complex ideas, Arrival shows how editing can control emotion. The emotional power of the film depends heavily on the way it is edited. If certain scenes had appeared only a few seconds earlier, the audience would have understood the mystery too soon, and the emotional impact would have been much weaker. If those same scenes had come a few seconds later, the rhythm of the film would have been lost. Walker never edits to impress the audience with fast cuts or flashy techniques. Every cut is made for a reason, and every transition arrives exactly when it should. His goal is not to make the audience notice the editing, but to make them feel the story naturally. Perhaps that is the greatest compliment an editor can receive when people remember the emotion of a film but never stop to think about the editing that created it.

One of the most interesting things about both Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve is their unbelievable level of preparation. The more you learn about how they work, the more you realize that very little is left to chance. Their productions often involve months of storyboard meetings, repeated visits to filming locations, technical rehearsals before the actors even arrive, and constant communication between every department. Nothing looks spontaneous because almost everything has already been carefully planned. Ironically, it is this level of preparation that allows real creative moments to happen naturally during filming.

Christopher Nolan has often said that preparation is more than good planning, it is also a responsibility. Every day lost during production costs a huge amount of money, affects hundreds of crew members, and puts pressure on everyone involved. Being well prepared is therefore a way of respecting the time, effort and commitment of the entire team. Denis Villeneuve expresses the same idea in a different way. He believes that preparation creates freedom. Once everyone fully understands the visual language of the film, they no longer have to worry about technical problems. Instead, they can focus completely on the performances, the emotions and the story. Neither filmmaker is chasing perfection. They are preparing themselves so well that when unexpected creative moments appear, they are ready to embrace them.

Perhaps this is why so many actors describe working with Nolan and Villeneuve as surprisingly calm experiences, even though their films are enormous productions. Behind-the-scenes documentaries often make chaos look exciting, but experienced filmmakers usually see chaos as a sign that something has gone wrong. A quiet film set usually means the opposite, it means everyone already knows exactly what they need to do. If you watch behind-the-scenes footage from Interstellar, Oppenheimer, Blade Runner 2049 or Dune, you will notice the same atmosphere. People are focused on their work. Nobody is trying to look like a genius. Nobody is trying to become the center of attention. Everyone is simply doing their job as well as they possibly can.

For me, this is one of the greatest lessons Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve offer to anyone who wants to make films. Great cinema is rarely created by a single brilliant idea. It is created through thousands of small decisions made over many years with patience, discipline and consistency. Every camera position, every lens choice, every cut, every moment of silence and every conversation between collaborators becomes part of the final experience. By the time audiences sit in a packed theatre and applaud the finished film, they are seeing only the final result. Behind those images are years of careful preparation, quiet dedication and countless invisible decisions that made the impossible feel completely real. That, perhaps, is the true magic of cinema.

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Animation in Cinema: Reaching beyond reality

Rajbir Ahmed

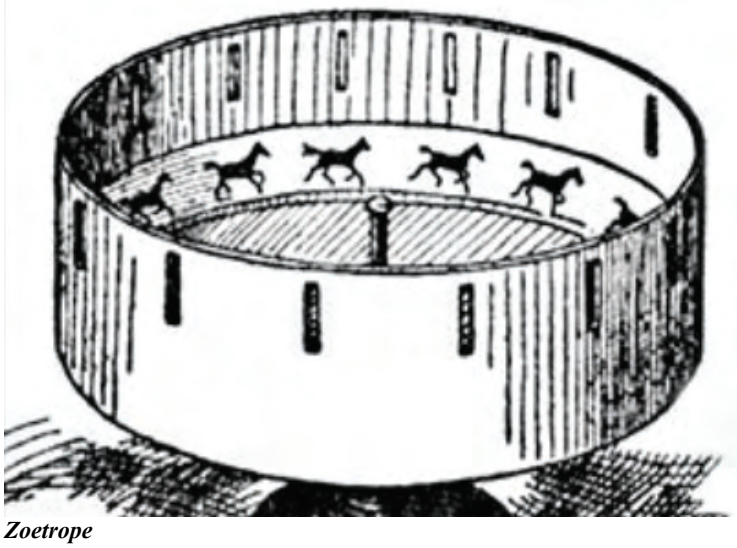
"Animation is not a genre, it is a medium capable of telling every kind of story imaginable."

Cinema has always been a medium of illusion. Since the first moving images flickered across a screen in the late nineteenth century, filmmakers have sought ways to transcend reality, allowing audiences to witness worlds beyond the limitations of the physical. Among all cinematic techniques, animation stands apart as perhaps the purest expression of this ambition. Unlike live-action filmmaking, which captures reality; animation constructs reality from the ground up, frame by frame, transforming imagination into motion.

Yet despite its artistic depth and technical sophistication, animation has often been relegated to the category of children's entertainment. This perception overlooks its rich history and extraordinary capacity for storytelling. From philosophical explorations of identity to political commentary, historical narratives, fantasy epics, and deeply personal dramas, animation has continually demonstrated that it is not confined by genre, audience, or subject matter. It is a cinematic language capable of expressing ideas that often exceed the possibilities of live-action filmmaking.

The Birth of Moving Drawings

Long before digital technology transformed filmmaking, the foundations of animation were laid through scientific curiosity and optical experimentation. Devices such as the zoetrope, phenakistiscope, and praxinoscope demonstrated that a rapid succession of still images could create the illusion of continuous movement, a phenomenon now understood as persistence of vision.



Zoetrope

The Early Innovators (Émile Cohl & Winsor McCay)

The true cinematic breakthrough came in the early twentieth century with pioneering artists like Émile Cohl, whose film Fantasmagorie is widely regarded as one of the earliest fully animated motion pictures. Composed of thousands of

hand-drawn illustrations photographed individually, the film revealed animation's limitless creative potential. Another milestone arrived with Winsor McCay's Gertie the Dinosaur. Unlike earlier experimental works, Gertie possessed personality, emotion, and believable movement. McCay demonstrated that animated characters could become performers rather than mere moving illustrations, establishing principles of character animation that continue to influence artists today.

These early pioneers worked painstakingly by hand, often producing thousands of drawings for only a few minutes of screen time. Their innovations established animation as both a technical achievement and a new artistic discipline.



Walt Disney

The Golden Age: Animation Becomes Cinema

The arrival of synchronised sound transformed filmmaking, and animation was among the first cinematic forms to embrace this innovation. In 1928, Walt Disney released Steamboat Willie, introducing audiences to Mickey Mouse and demonstrating how synchronized music and sound effects could fundamentally enhance animated storytelling.

Disney's studio subsequently revolutionized the medium through technological innovation and artistic ambition. The introduction of Technicolor, the multiplane camera, sophisticated character acting, and increasingly realistic movement elevated animation to unprecedented levels of cinematic expression.

This period culminated in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, the world's first full-length cel-animated feature film. Many critics predicted its commercial failure, dismissing it as "Disney's Folly." Instead, it became one of cinema's greatest triumphs, proving that audiences would enthusiastically embrace feature-length animated storytelling.

Subsequent masterpieces such as Pinocchio and Fantasia further demonstrated animation's artistic sophistication. Particularly Fantasia, with its fusion of classical music and abstract visual design, blurred the boundaries between cinema, painting, dance, and orchestral performance.

Meanwhile, studios such as Max Fleischer's Fleischer Studios developed distinctive animation styles through innovations like rotoscop-



FLEISCHER STUDIOS INC.
A statement about the origins of
Betty Boop from Fleischer Studios

Fleischer Studios

ing, a process that traced live-action performances to achieve remarkably fluid movement.

The Golden Age firmly established animation as a respected cinematic art form rather than merely a novelty.

Television and the Era of Limited Animation

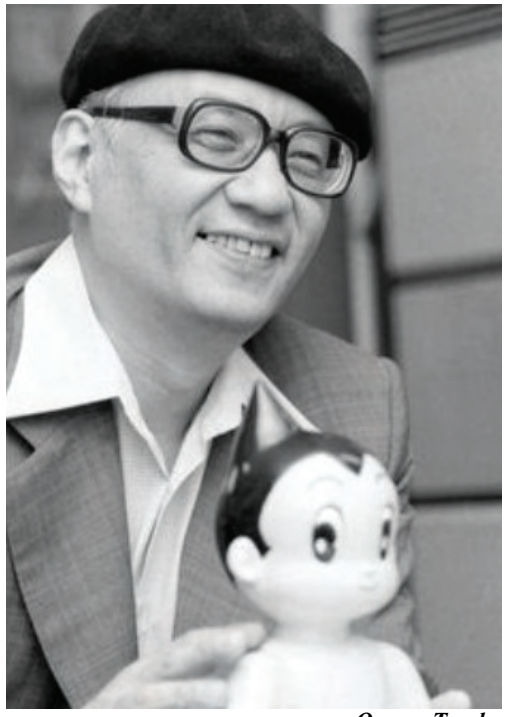
The rapid expansion of television dramatically altered animation production. Unlike theatrical shorts, television required large quantities of content produced under significantly tighter budgets and schedules. Studios such as Hanna-Barbera pioneered limited animation, reducing the number of drawings while emphasizing strong writing, memorable characters, and voice performances. Productions including The Flintstones and Scooby-Doo, Where Are You! became global cultural phenomena despite comparatively modest animation techniques. Although often criticized for sacrificing visual fluidity, limited animation democratized the medium by bringing animated storytelling into millions of homes, expanding its cultural reach far beyond cinema.



Hanna-Barbera

The Rise of Japanese Anime

While American animation during much of the twentieth century became strongly associated with family entertainment and



Osamu Tezuka

character-driven storytelling, Japan developed a distinctly different philosophy of animation one that treated the medium as a serious form of artistic and cinematic expression. Japanese animation, commonly known as anime, expanded the possibilities of animated storytelling by exploring complex themes such as identity, war, technology, human existence, environmental destruction, spirituality, and social transformation.

The foundations of modern anime were shaped significantly by Osamu Tezuka, often regard-

ed as the "father of modern manga and anime." Influenced by the cinematic techniques of Walt Disney and Western animation, Tezuka adapted these influences into a uniquely Japanese visual language. His approach introduced dynamic camera angles, expressive character designs, cinematic pacing, and emotionally complex narratives that moved beyond simple entertainment. Through works such as Astro Boy, Tezuka established many of the stylistic and storytelling conventions that would define anime for generations.

Unlike traditional Western animation models that often prioritized realism or comedic entertainment, Japanese animation embraced a broader range of genres and audiences. Anime developed stories aimed at children, teenagers, and adults alike, proving that animation could address mature themes with the same seriousness as literature and live-action cinema.

The global perception of animation changed dramatically with Akira, directed by Katsuhiro Otomo. Adapted from Otomo's own manga, the film became a landmark in world animation due to its extraordinary technical achievement, detailed futuristic environments, and ambitious narrative scope. Set in a dystopian Tokyo rebuilt after destruction, Akira explored themes of political corruption, military power, technological anxiety, youth rebellion, and the consequences of uncontrolled scientific advancement. Its highly detailed animation and cinematic approach challenged international audiences who still viewed animation primarily as children's entertainment, proving that animated films could engage with complex social and philosophical questions.

The artistic reputation of anime was further elevated through the work of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata, whose films through Studio Ghibli became internationally recognized for their emotional depth and visual beauty. Miyazaki's cinema is distinguished by its exploration of humanity's relationship with nature, the complexity of childhood, and the search for identity. Films such as Princess Mononoke examined environmental conflict and the tension



Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata

between industrial development and ecological balance, while Spirited Away transformed a coming-of-age story into a richly symbolic journey exploring identity, consumerism, and personal growth. The latter became the first Japanese animated film to win the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature, marking a historic moment for global recognition of anime.

Takahata offered a contrasting but equally influential approach, focusing on realism, human emotion, and everyday experiences. His film Grave of the Fireflies remains one of the most powerful anti-war films ever created, using animation to portray the devastating human consequences of conflict through the story of two children struggling for survival during the final days of World War II. The film demonstrated animation's ability to communicate tragedy, historical memory, and emotional realism with extraordinary impact.

Together, these works established anime as one of the most influential movements in global animation. Japanese animation demonstrated that the medium could be visually innovative, emotionally complex, and intellectually ambitious. Rather than simply creating imaginary worlds, anime used animation as a tool to examine society, philosophy, history, and the human condition, permanently changing the way audiences around the world understood animated cinema.

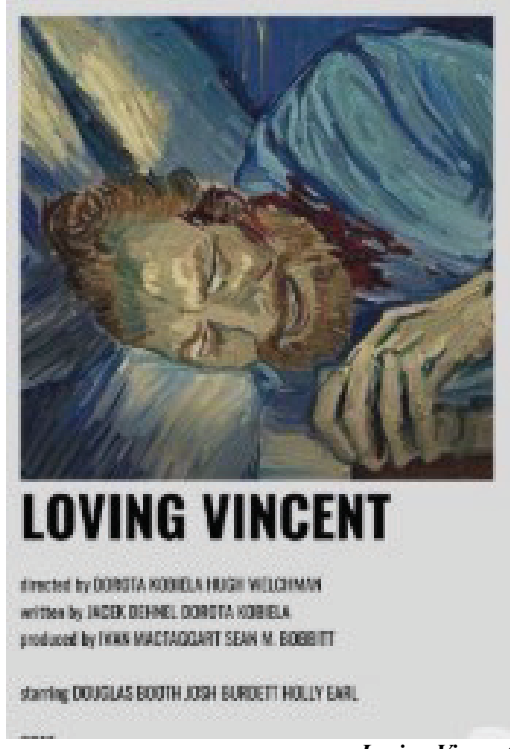
The Digital Revolution: CGI Redefines Possibility

In 1995, Pixar released Toy Story, the world's first fully computer-animated feature film. Beyond its technological achievement, Toy Story proved that compelling storytelling remained animation's greatest strength. Pixar subsequently established a remarkable tradition of emotionally resonant filmmaking through titles such as Finding Nemo and Up, whose celebrated opening sequence remains one of cinema's most moving portrayals of love and loss. Meanwhile, DreamWorks Animation challenged conventions with Shrek, employing satire, self-awareness, and contemporary humor to reinvent the fairy-tale genre.

Importantly, CGI did not replace traditional animation; instead, it expanded the artistic vocabulary available to filmmakers.

Contemporary Animation: Blending Art and Technology

Modern animation no longer follows a single visual tradition. Instead, contemporary filmmakers freely combine



Loving Vincent

hand-drawn aesthetics, three-dimensional rendering, painterly textures, motion graphics, and digital compositing to create highly distinctive visual identities.

A landmark example is Loving Vincent, one of the most ambitious artistic achievements in animation history. Directed by Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman, the film became the world's first fully oil-painted feature film. Every frame, over 65,000 in total, was hand-painted in the style of Vincent van Gogh by a team of more than one hundred trained artists before being digitally photographed. Rather than using digital filters to imitate Van Gogh's paintings, the filmmakers recreated his brushwork through traditional oil painting, transforming fine art into moving cinema. Beyond its extraordinary technical accomplishment, Loving Vincent demonstrated that animation could function as an extension of classical visual art, proving that the medium is capable of preserving and reinterpreting artistic heritage in innovative ways.

Equally significant is Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, whose fusion of comic-book illustration, graphic design, and computer animation redefined mainstream visual storytelling. Rather than striving for photorealism, the film celebrated stylization, demonstrating that artistic expression can be more compelling than technical imitation.

Animation Beyond Hollywood

Although Hollywood remains the most commercially influential force in animation, some of the medium's most innovative and culturally significant works have emerged from around the world. International filmmakers have embraced animation as a powerful means of preserving cultural heritage, exploring social issues, and experimenting with distinctive visual styles.

French animation has long been celebrated for its artistic originality. The Red Turtle, directed by Michaël Dudok de Wit and co-produced with Studio Ghibli, demonstrates the emotional power of visual storytelling through its dialogue-free narrative and contemplative themes. Likewise, The Triplets of Belleville, directed by Sylvain Chomet, exemplifies this tradition through its minimal dialogue, expressive character animation, and uniquely stylized hand-drawn aesthetic.

China's The Legend of Hei showcases the country's growing influence in contemporary animation by blending traditional Chinese philosophy and folklore with fluid, modern animation techniques. Similarly, India's Hanuman introduced mythological storytelling to new generations through animation, highlighting the medium's cultural and educational value.

Contemporary international animation also continues to expand the boundaries between fiction, documentary, memory, and personal history. A significant example is My Grandmother is a Skydiver (2025) by Polina Piddubna, a poetic animated documentary that explores intergenerational memory, identity, displacement, and the lasting impact of historical and contemporary conflicts. The 13-minute film follows a deeply personal journey connecting a granddaughter in 2022 Ukraine with the story of her grandmother Alfiya, who lived in Central Asia during the 1960s and trained as a parachutist while working as a midwife. Through animation, Piddubna transforms family history into a reflection

on inherited trauma, cultural memory, and resilience across generations.

My Grandmother is a Skydiver was screened in the Women Filmmakers Section of the 24th Dhaka International Film Festival (2026), alongside a diverse selection of international films, reflecting the festival's continued engagement with emerging filmmakers and innovative approaches to cinematic storytelling. Its inclusion demonstrates how global film festivals increasingly recognize animation not only as entertainment but also as a serious artistic medium capable of addressing complex social, political, and personal subjects.



My Grandmother is a Skydiver

The Emerging Landscape of Animation in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's animation industry remains relatively young, yet it has shown encouraging signs of growth over the past decade. Independent studios, educational institutions, advertising agencies, and digital artists have increasingly embraced animation as both a creative and commercial medium.

Animated content now appears regularly in television advertising, educational programming, public awareness campaigns, and digital marketing. Short animated films and experimental works have also begun appearing at local film festivals, reflecting the growing ambitions of Bangladeshi filmmakers.

With expanding access to affordable digital production software, online education, and international collaboration, Bangladesh possesses considerable potential to cultivate a distinctive animation culture rooted in local folklore, literature, history, and contemporary social realities. As the nation's film industry continues to evolve, animation offers an opportunity to tell uniquely Bangladeshi stories that resonate with audiences both domestically and internationally.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Animation

Artificial intelligence, machine learning, real-time rendering engines, virtual reality, and immersive media are redefining the possibilities of animated filmmaking. These technologies promise greater efficiency and creative flexibility, but they do not diminish the importance of artistic imagination.

Animation has always evolved alongside technological innovation, from pencil sketches photographed individually to sophisticated digital pipelines but every major advancement has served the same purpose: enabling storytellers to communicate ideas, emotions, and experiences that would otherwise remain invisible.

The future of animation will not belong solely to the most advanced technology. It will belong to artists capable of using technology in service of meaningful storytelling.

Conclusion

More than a century after its earliest experiments, animation remains one of cinema's most dynamic and transformative forms of artistic expression. It has survived technological revolutions, changing audience expectations, and shifting industrial landscapes while continually reinventing itself. From the hand-drawn elegance of early pioneers to the digital innovations of contemporary studios, animation has consistently expanded the boundaries of cinematic possibility. It has proven that emotion can emerge from lines on paper, that philosophy can inhabit fantasy, and that imagination can become as tangible as reality itself. Perhaps the greatest achievement of animation lies in its ability to remind audiences that cinema is not merely about reproducing the world as it exists, but about envisioning the world as it could be. Every animated frame represents an act of creation, crafted first in the imagination and then brought to life through artistry, patience, and innovation.

Animation, ultimately, is not simply the art of making drawings move. It is the art of making ideas, emotions, and dreams shareable.

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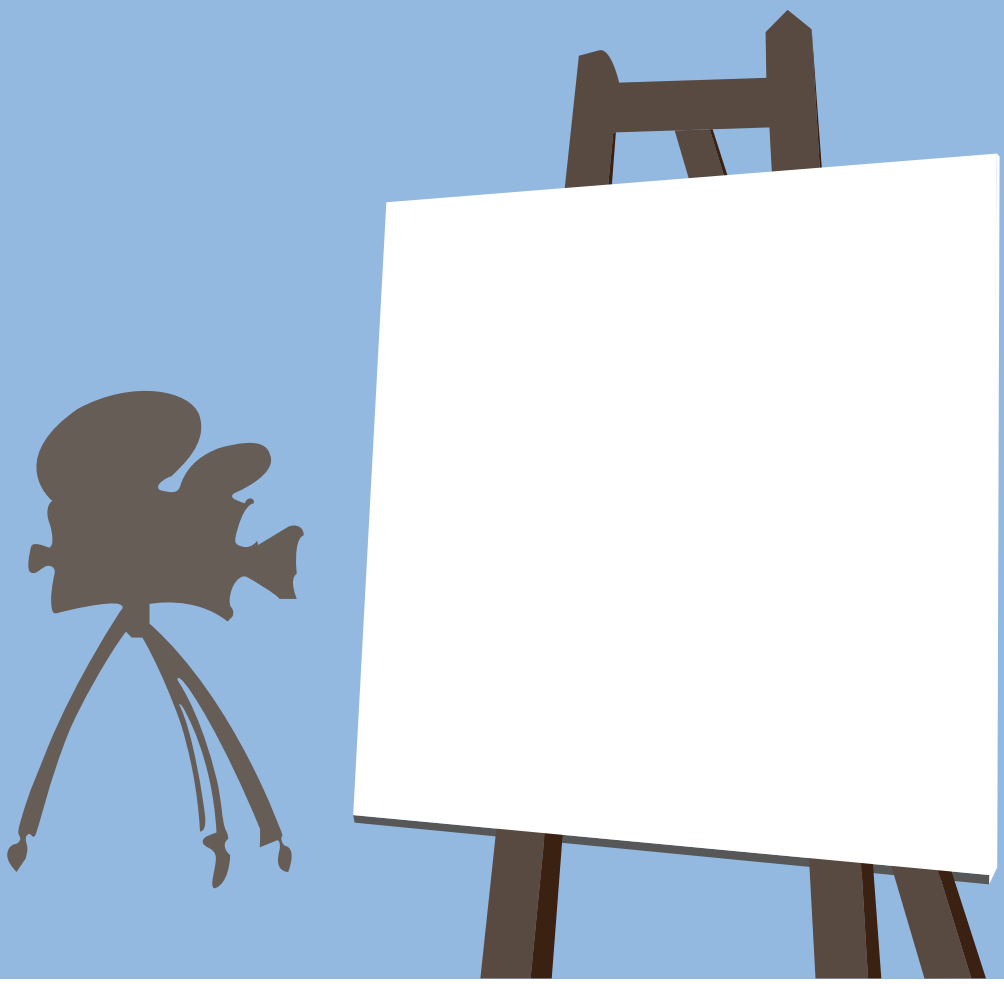
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Maestro Behind the Screen



The Poetry of Ordinary Lives: Why François Truffaut Continues to Teach Me How to See

Afifa Akter

Some filmmakers astonish us with spectacle. Others impress us with philosophical complexity. A few redefine the language of cinema itself. But there are only a handful of directors whose films quietly alter the way we look at people. François Truffaut belongs to that rare group.

The first time I encountered Truffaut's cinema, I was not struck by elaborate camera movements or dazzling visual compositions. Instead, I noticed something far more profound his extraordinary patience in observing human beings. His films never rush to explain people, nor do they judge them. They simply watch. They listen. They allow emotions to unfold naturally, as they do in life itself.



That quiet attentiveness is what keeps drawing me back to Truffaut. While many directors seek dramatic conflicts or



larger-than-life heroes, Truffaut finds cinema in everyday existence in a child's lie, an awkward silence between lovers, a stolen glance, or the loneliness hidden beneath an ordinary smile. His stories remind us that life's smallest moments often carry its deepest truths.

Perhaps that is why his films have never aged. They continue to feel alive because human emotions never become obsolete.

The Boy Who Found a Home in Cinema

François Truffaut's life was, in many ways, a story that could have become one of his own films. Born in Paris in 1932, he experienced a troubled childhood marked by neglect, instability, and rebellion. He frequently skipped school, wandered through the streets of Paris, and found refuge in movie theatres. Cinema became his sanctuary long before it became his profession.

His difficult relationship with authority would later shape the emotional core of The 400 Blows. Antoine Doinel, the film's

unforgettable protagonist, is not merely a fictional character but a reflection of Truffaut's own adolescence. Like Antoine, Truffaut struggled to fit into institutions that seemed incapable of understanding sensitive young minds.

Before directing films, he became one of France's most influential film critics at Cahiers du Cinéma. Alongside André Bazin, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Éric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette, Truffaut questioned everything that French cinema had become.

In 1954, he published one of the most controversial essays in film history, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema." In it, he criticized the polished but lifeless "Tradition of Quality" dominating French filmmaking. Truffaut argued that directors should not merely illustrate scripts; they should express their own vision through cinema.

This revolutionary belief eventually became known as Auteur Theory the idea that the director is the true author of a film.

What fascinates me most is that Truffaut never remained a critic hiding behind words. He transformed his criticism into creation. He proved his ideas through filmmaking rather than argument.

Very few critics possess that courage.

The French New Wave: Cinema Learns to Breathe

When The 400 Blows premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959, cinema changed forever.

Alongside Godard's Breathless, Alain Resnais' Hiroshima mon amour, and Claude Chabrol's early works, Truffaut helped ignite what would become the French New Wave (La Nouvelle Vague) one of the most influential movements in film history.

The movement rejected studio artificiality. Instead, filmmakers embraced real locations, handheld cameras, natural light, non-professional actors, fragmented narratives, and deeply personal storytelling. They believed cinema should feel spontaneous rather than manufactured.

Yet even within this revolutionary movement, Truffaut occupied a unique position.

Godard challenged cinema intellectually.

Resnais explored memory.







Rohmer examined morality.

Truffaut observed people.

His revolution was emotional rather than theoretical.

The 400 Blows: Childhood Without Illusion

If I had to choose one film that defines Truffaut, it would undoubtedly be The 400 Blows.

There have been countless films about childhood, but few understand children with such honesty.

Antoine Doinel is neither an innocent victim nor a juvenile delinquent. He lies to his parents. He skips school. He steals a typewriter. He runs away. Yet we never stop caring for him because Truffaut refuses to reduce childhood to moral categories.

Children are not miniature adults.

Nor are they angels.

They are simply human beings trying to understand a confusing world.

One of the film's greatest achievements is its refusal to manipulate emotion. There are no sentimental speeches or exaggerated dramatic scenes. Instead, Truffaut quietly observes how institutions family, school,



and juvenile detention gradually fail a boy who desperately needs understanding rather than punishment.

Then comes one of cinema's most unforgettable endings.

Antoine reaches the sea, turns toward the camera, and the image freezes.

The freeze frame has become iconic, not because of its technical innovation alone, but because of its emotional uncertainty. We are left asking questions rather than receiving answers.

Will Antoine finally find freedom?

Or has he merely arrived at another beginning?
Like life itself, the film refuses certainty.

Love as Beautiful Chaos: Jules and Jim

If The 400 Blows explores childhood, Jules and Jim explores adulthood with equal honesty.The film is often described as a love triangle.I think that description is far too simple.At its heart, Jules and Jim is about the impossibility of possessing another human being.

Catherine remains one of cinema's most fascinating women not because she is mysterious in a conventional sense, but because she refuses to remain emotionally consistent. She loves passionately, changes unpredictably, seeks freedom, fears stability, and makes choices that often hurt both herself and those around her.

Truffaut never condemns her.

Nor does he romanticize her.

He simply accepts contradiction as an inevitable part of being human.

That willingness to embrace emotional inconsistency distinguishes Truffaut from many filmmakers. His characters frequently desire incompatible things. They crave intimacy while fearing commitment. They seek freedom yet long for permanence.



In Truffaut's world, contradictions are not narrative flaws.

They are human nature.

The Antoine Doinel Cycle: Growing Up on Screen

One of Truffaut's most remarkable achievements is the Antoine Doinel series, where actor Jean-Pierre Léaud played the same character across five films over two decades: The 400 Blows, Antoine and Colette, Stolen Kisses, Bed and Board, and Love on the Run.

Few directors have followed a fictional character across so many stages of life.

Watching Doinel grow older feels strangely intimate, almost documentary-like. We witness not only a character's development but also the passage of time itself. Love, marriage, disappointment, work, parenthood, failure every ordinary milestone becomes worthy of cinematic attention.

It is one of the most beautiful long-term character studies ever created.

Day for Night: A Love Letter to Filmmaking

Among all Truffaut's films, Day for Night perhaps feels closest to every filmmaker's heart.The film takes us behind the scenes of a movie production, revealing filmmaking not as glamour but as controlled chaos.

Actors fall in love.

Crew members make mistakes.





Schedules collapse.

Equipment fails.

Personal tragedies interrupt professional commitments.

And yet, somehow, the film gets made.

Truffaut himself appears as the director Ferrand, gently guiding a crew through endless uncertainty. Rather than celebrating directors as geniuses, Day for Night celebrates collaboration. Cinema emerges not from individual brilliance alone but from collective patience, compromise, and perseverance.

As someone who studies and practices filmmaking, I find this perspective deeply moving. It reminds me that every finished film is a miracle built upon countless invisible acts of labor.Small Films, Immense Emotions.Although The 400 Blows and Jules and Jim often dominate discussions of Truffaut, his filmography is astonishingly diverse.Shoot the Piano Player combines crime, romance, and comedy with playful experimentation. The Soft Skin quietly dissects adultery and emotional emptiness. The Wild Child reflects on education, language, and civilization through the true story of a feral boy. The Story of Adèle H.explores obsessive love with heartbreaking psychological depth. The Green Room meditates on grief and memory, while The Last Metro, set during Nazi-occupied Paris, beautifully intertwines resistance, theatre, and love.

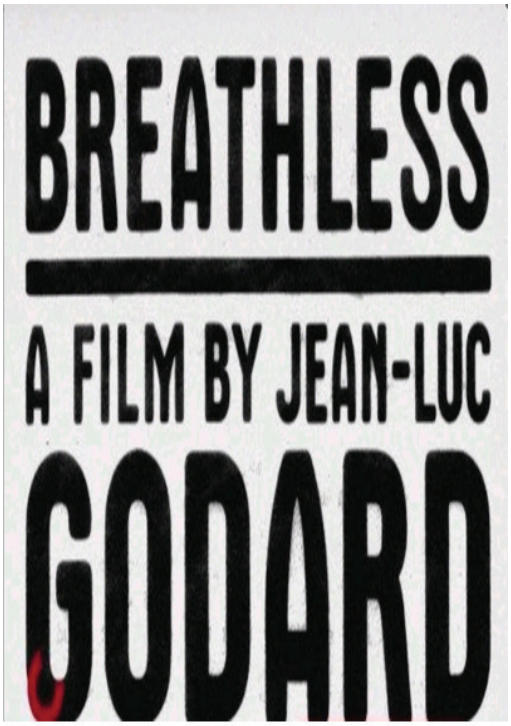
Each film belongs to a different genre, yet all are unmistakably Truffaut because they share the same curiosity about human emotion.

The Invisible Hand Behind Breathless

Whenever the French New Wave is discussed, Jean-Luc Godard's Breathless naturally occupies a central place. Yet many people overlook Truffaut's contribution.

The original story idea for Breathless came from Truffaut, who shared it with Godard





before the latter transformed it into one of cinema's most influential films.

This collaboration reminds us that the French New Wave was never driven by isolated geniuses competing against one another. It was a creative community where ideas moved freely between friends, critics, and filmmakers.

Truffaut's fingerprints can often be found even on films he did not direct.

Godard and Truffaut: Two Visions of Cinema

Film history often places Truffaut and Godard side by side, but their artistic temperaments could hardly be more different.

Godard constantly reminds us that we are watching a constructed film. He interrupts narratives, quotes philosophy, breaks



cinematic rules, and invites intellectual debate.

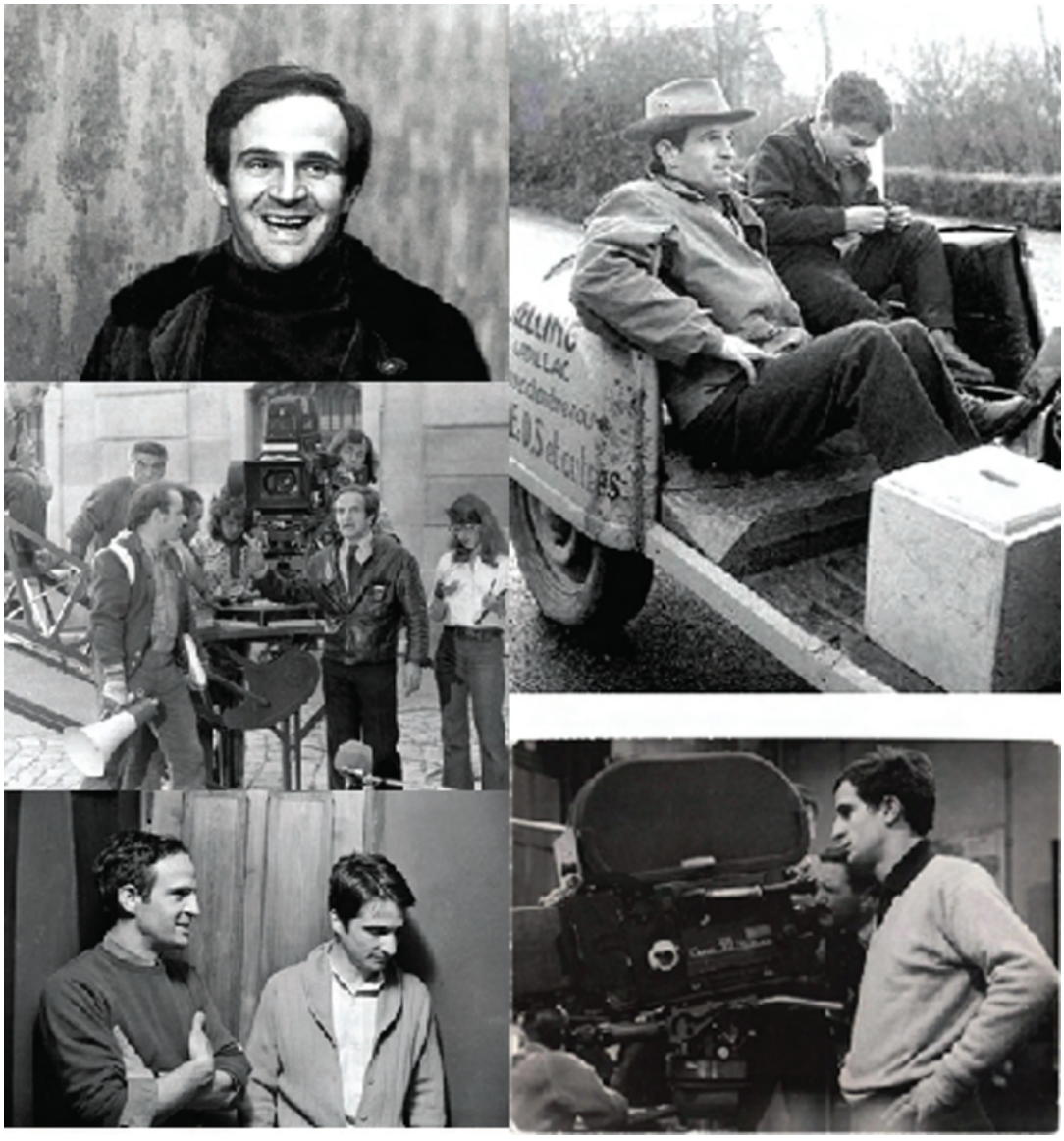
Truffaut, on the other hand, wants us to forget theory and simply care about people.

Godard asks us to think.

Truffaut asks us to feel.

Neither approach is superior, but I find myself returning more often to Truffaut because his films remain emotionally





generous. His formal innovations never overshadow the lives unfolding before the camera. Style always serves character.

Cinema as an Act of Observation

The greatest lesson Truffaut has taught me is that filmmaking begins with observation.

His camera notices things most films ignore:

A child pretending not to cry.

A lover hesitating before speaking.

A nervous hand resting on a table.

An unfinished sentence.

A brief silence.

These moments rarely advance the plot, yet they reveal everything about a character.

Watching Truffaut has changed the way I look at people in everyday life. I have become more attentive to gestures, pauses, contradictions, and fleeting expressions. His films remind me that cinema is not merely about recording events it is about noticing the invisible emotions hidden within ordinary behaviour.

That, perhaps, is his greatest gift.

Why François Truffaut Still Matters?

Today's cinema is often dominated by spectacle, franchises, visual effects, and relentless narrative momentum. Stories move faster than ever, but they do not always linger in memory.

Truffaut offers another possibility.

He reminds us that a conversation can be as dramatic as an explosion, that a child's loneliness can be more powerful than a superhero's victory, and that the most meaningful stories often unfold quietly.

His films encourage patience.

They encourage empathy.

Above all, they encourage curiosity about other human beings.

And perhaps there is no greater purpose for cinema than that.

The Filmmaker Who Taught Cinema to Observe

I love François Truffaut not because he made flawless films, but because he made profoundly human ones.

He transformed his own childhood into universal memory. He proved that autobiography could become art without becoming self-indulgent. He demonstrated that cinema could be intellectually rich without sacrificing emotional warmth. Above all, he showed that the ordinary is never truly ordinary when observed with honesty and compassion.

Whenever I return to Truffaut, I am reminded that filmmaking does not begin with cameras, technology, or even stories. It begins with paying attention to people, to memories, to imperfections, and to the fragile emotions that quietly shape our lives.

Many directors changed the language of cinema.

François Truffaut changed the way cinema looks at human beings.

And that is why, more than four decades after his passing, his films continue to breathe with remarkable tenderness inviting each new generation not merely to watch life, but to truly see it.

Afifa Akter

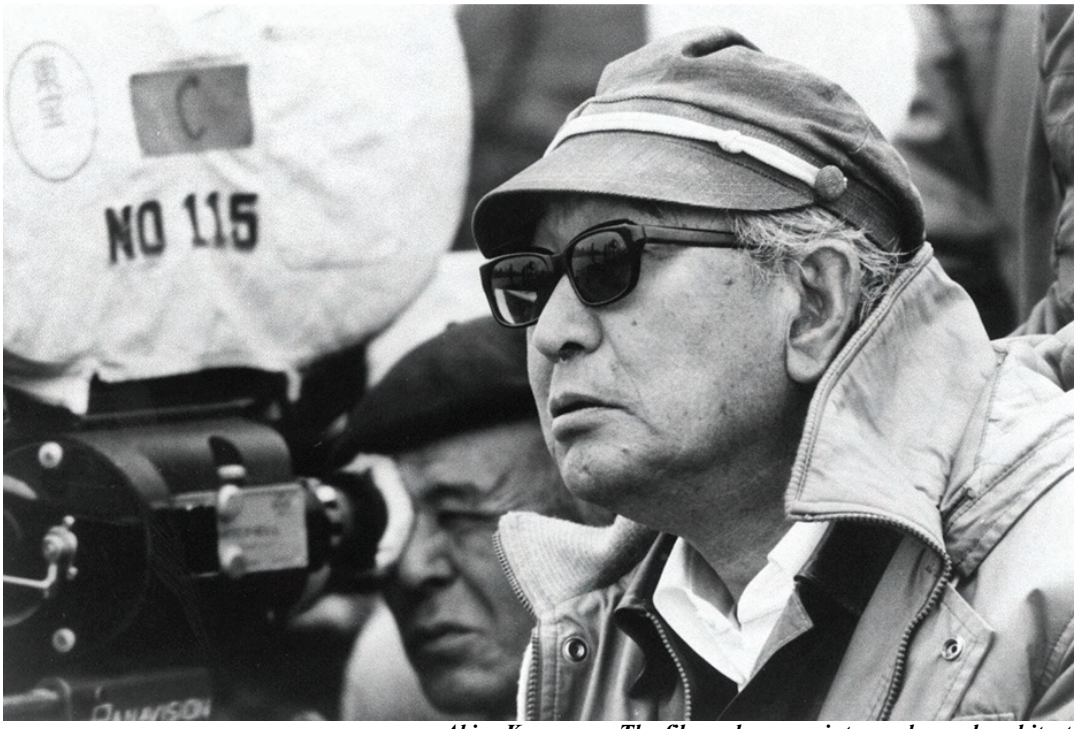
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Beyond Rashomon: How Akira Kurosawa Reimagined Human Nature Through Cinema

Ayrin Sadia

Akira Kurosawa is one of those filmmakers who has made a big impact on the way movies are made. A sudden cut in the middle of action, a rain-soaked duel, a group of morally uncertain men gathered around a crisis, a warrior framed against wind and dust, a story told from more than one unreliable viewpoint ,these are not simply Kurosawa's signatures. They have become part of how modern cinema thinks.



Akira Kurosawa: The filmmaker as painter and moral architect

His movies are enjoyed by people from cultures because they are not just about Japan. They are about things that people everywhere can understand, like feeling guilty or trying to do the thing. They are deeply rooted in Japanese history, literature, theatre, and post-war social anxiety, but they also speak in a language of moral pressure that viewers everywhere understand. Akira Kurosawa's characters often have to make choices that show what they are really like than what they say. For example a samurai can be brave and silly at the time. A person who works in an office can find out who they really are when they are faced with death. A king can get everything he wants. Then he cannot see what is

really important. Kurosawa's movies are big and exciting. They usually start with a person who is struggling with their conscience.

For international festival audiences, Kurosawa matters not only because he made masterpieces such as Rashomon, Seven Samurai, Ikiru, Throne of Blood, Yojimbo, Ran, and Dreams. He matters because he changed the relationship between national cinema and world cinema. After Rashomon received international recognition in the early 1950s, many Western viewers encountered Japanese cinema as a major artistic force for the first time. Yet Kurosawa's global success was not a simple story of "East meeting West." It was more restless than that. He took in a lot of influences like the works of Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and Gorky and American movies and Japanese Noh theater, silent film ,painting and popular storytelling.Then he made them his own and hared them with the world.

A Painter Who Found Cinema

Kurosawa was a man who loved cinema. He was born in Tokyo in 1910. His family was shaped by both samurai ancestry and modern education. His father was a military instructor who encouraged and exposure to Western culture, including cinema. His older brother Heigo worked as a benshi, a live narrator for silent films, and helped introduce the young Kurosawa to the expressive power of images before sound fully transformed film culture. That early experience matters. Kurosawa's cinema, even when dialogue is strong, often thinks visually first.

Before Kurosawa made movies he wanted to be a painter. He studied art. Was very serious about it. Even though he did not become a painter he still thought like one. The way he made his movie scenes looked like paintings. People were placed at angles. The sky looked heavy with rain. Faces were arranged to show what people were thinking. In some of his movies like Kagemusha, Ran and Dreams you can really see that he was a painter. Colour was not for show. It helped to set the mood and show how people were feeling.

Kurosawa started working in movies in the 1930s. He was a director at a place called Photo Chemical Laboratories. This place later became part of Toho. He learned how to make movies by doing different jobs. He wrote scripts, edited and staged scenes. He also learned about being on time and working hard. This taught him more than thinking he was a genius. His first movies came out during a hard time, in Japan. There was a war. Then the country was occupied. Movie makers had to be careful what they said. Kurosawa's movies were shaped by these times.. He did not make movies just to escape. He made them to show how people act when things get tough.

Kurosawa's cinema was very special. It was shaped by the things that happened to him. He used cinema to look at how people behave. He wanted to show how people act when history is happening around them and his cinema was a way for him to understand the world. Kurosawa was a man who loved cinema. He used it to tell us about the world.

Truth in Ruins: Rashomon and the Birth of a Global Question

If one movie made Akira Kurosawa famous around the world it was Rashomon, which came out in 1950. The story of Rashomon is really simple: a crime



Truth in ruins: Rashomon and the instability of perception

happens in the forest a samurai dies a woman is hurt a bandit is. People tell different stories about what happened. What makes Rashomon so powerful is that it does not give us a clear answer about what really happened. Each person who tells their story reveals more about themselves like what they're afraid of, what they want and what they think about themselves than about what actually happened.

Rashomon had an impact on people all over the world. It introduced people to Japanese movies and helped create a new interest in movies from other parts of the world not just the West. Rashomon also gave us a phrase: the "Rashomon Effect." Now people use this term in fields, like psychology, law, journalism, history and even in everyday conversations to talk about situations where different people have different versions of the same event.

Sometimes this phrase makes Rashomon seem simpler than it really is. Rashomon is not about people remembering things differently. It is about how storytelling can be unstable and uncertain. Kurosawa is not saying that truth is a matter of opinion. That would be too easy. The movie is more complicated because each persons story is like a performance. People do not just lie to others they also lie to themselves. The last part of the movie, where we see a baby left alone at a ruined gate shows us that even when truth is uncertain we can still be kind to each other. This is a idea that Kurosawa comes back to again and again: the world can be a place but it is still important to try to do the right thing because that is what makes our actions meaningful.

The way Rashomon looks is also very innovative. The scenes in the forest use sunlight, shadows, movement and camera shots that follow the characters to create a world where nothing seems certain. The camera is not just recording what people say; it is also part of the uncertainty. Kurosawa's editing is like a rhythm that sometimes stops suddenly which makes the viewer feel the uncertainty of truth, than just understanding it in their head.

Action as Ethics: Seven Samurai and the Architecture of Movement

With Seven Samurai (1954), Kurosawa transformed the action film. The story is familiar because it has been done again and again: a poor village hires warriors to protect it from bandits. What makes Seven Samurai great is not just the story. It is how Kurosawa builds people and places and weather and movement into a way of thinking about what's right and wrong.

The samurai in Seven Samurai are not just heroes. They are hungry and proud and funny and hurt. Some of them are not needed anymore. The villagers are not just victims either. They are scared and secretive and practical and sometimes mean. Kurosawa likes to show people as they really're. He knows that when people work together to survive it is messy. Being a hero is not about being perfect it is about doing something even when you're scared or mad or do not get along.

Seven Samurai is still amazing to watch. Kurosawa used cameras to film the action scenes and it makes them feel real and strong. The big fight in the rain is not a



Action as ethics in Seven Samurai

bunch of confusion it is confusion that makes sense. The mud and horses and people and spears and water and tired faces all move together in a way that other action films have tried to copy. Seven Samurai does not separate how people feel from what they're doing. When someone gets hurt it feels real because Kurosawa showed us where they belong in the village.

Seven Samurai has had an influence on films all around the world. Its structure is used in The Magnificent Seven and war films and superhero films and many other stories about a group of people on a mission. Many films that copy Seven Samurai miss the sad parts. Seven Samurai is exciting. It is also about how things change. The warriors win,and do not get to be part of the future. The peasants go back, to planting rice. The samurai are left standing near the graves at the end.

The Quiet Heroism of Ikiru

If Seven Samurai shows heroism through working Ikiru (1952) shows it through quiet actions. The film is about Kanji Watanabe, a government clerk. He learns he has an illness and starts to think about his life. There are no battles, no swords, no amazing views. There is a desk, a stamp, an office, a playground and a man who is dying.

Ikiru might be Kurosawa's film. It shows tragedy in a life that was not lived fully. Watanabe has not done things. He has just been absent from his life. A famous scene shows him sitting on a swing in the snow singing softly. He had just helped build a playground for kids. This is one of the moments in cinema. It makes you feel something. It is not fake. Kurosawa makes you feel this way by showing how small Watanabe's actions seem,. How big they are for him.



Quiet redemption in Ikiru

The film also shows Kurosawa's interest in storytelling. After Watanabe dies the story changes. It becomes about what his friends and coworkers think about him. They talk about what he did at the end of his life. They admire him. They also do not understand him. Then they go back, to their lives. Kurosawa's criticism is clear: institutions can ignore big moral actions unless people keep making a difference.

Shakespeare in Fog, Blood, and Ash

Kurosawa takes Shakespeares stories. Makes them his own. He does not just copy the stories he changes them into something. In Throne of Blood (1957) his version of Macbeth the story is set in Japan and uses a lot of Noh theatre. This movie is not a film version of a Shakespeare play it is a scary movie about people who want power and about empty feelings.

Toshiro Mifune plays Washizu. He does not talk about his feelings as much as Macbeth does.. His body shows how he is feeling: his eyes get wide he stands up straight and he moves quickly. Isuzu Yamada plays Lady Asaji. She is scary because she seems almost like a ghost. The fog in the movie is like fate. The forest seems to be moving and judging the characters. The scene where Washizu dies, with arrows flying everywhere is one of the violent and scary scenes in the movie.

Thirty years later Kurosawa made another movie, Ran, which is based on King Lear. This time the story is much bigger and sadder. Kurosawa was older. He looked at



Shakespeare in fog: Throne of Blood

the story in a different way thinking about power, family and betrayal. Ran is not a story about a powerful man who loses everything because of his pride. It is a movie about a world where people are always fighting and hurting each other. The battle scenes in the movie are amazing. Kurosawa does not make them look exciting or fun. Instead he shows how sad and scary war is. Armies move across the land, like waves castles burn down and people die quietly. In this movie beautiful things and scary things are all mixed together.

Weather, Movement, and the Living Frame

I think one reason Kurosawa's films still feel so alive is that his frames are always changing. You have wind, rain, smoke, dust, fire, snow and people moving around all the time. Weather in Kurosawa's films is not about setting the mood. It is a way to show how people are feeling.

For example in Rashomon the sunlight coming through the trees makes it hard to see what is real. In Seven Samurai the rain makes the battle really tough and exhausting. In Throne of Blood the fog makes everything uncertain. In Yojimbo (1961) the dust and wind make the town seem crueller. In Ran the clouds and fire make human plans seem small compared to the world around us. Kurosawa's films show that cinema is not just about what people are doing, but also about what is happening around them.

The way Kurosawa edits his films is also really interesting. He uses wipes, axial cuts and dynamic transitions to keep the story moving. His action scenes are easy to follow because he thinks about where everything's in space but they are also powerful because he cuts the scene to match how people are feeling. When you watch his films you know where everyone is, what is at stake and how the movement of people changes the way you think about the scene.

Kurosawa also likes to show how people interact with each other in his compositions. He arranges the characters in a way that shows their relationships away. You can see who is in charge who is following, who is scared and who is not doing what they are supposed to do. The way people are placed in the frame shows their power, fear, loyalty and betrayal. Kurosawa's films think about how people move and stand in relation to each other. People, in his films do not just stand there they show how they feel through where they're how they are moving.

The Outsider with a Sword: *Yojimbo* and Genre Reinvention

Yojimbo really shows off Kurosawa's talent for making movies in different genres. The movie is about a ronin who walks into a town where two gangs are fighting each other. He plays both sides against each other. This movie is funny mean and looks really good. Mifune does a job acting like a tough guy who does not care about anything. He scratches himself shrugs his shoulders gets into fights and looks at people like they are stupid. The main character is not a person but he has some rules that he follows even if he does not want to admit it.

The movie Yojimbo has had an impact on other movies like Sergio Leones A Fistful of Dollars which used the same ideas to make a western movie.. Yojimbo is more than just a movie that other people copied.



The outsider with a sword: Yojimbo and genre reinvention

It is Kurosawa thinking about how violence's like a show. The town is like a stage where people are watching each other, posing, threatening and waiting for someone to make a move. The ronin is really good at understanding how people act and what they want. He stays alive because he can see the weaknesses in people. Yojimbo is a movie that shows Kurosawa's skill, at making movies that are exciting and thought-provoking.

Setbacks, Silence, and Return

Kurosawa's career was not always easy. He had a lot of success in the 1950s and early 1960s. Then he had some problems. He had money troubles. The film industry was changing. There were times when he felt really unsure about what to do. His movie Dodeska-den, which came out in 1970 was his film in color but it did not do well. This made Kurosawa's career problems even worse. In 1971 Kurosawa tried to hurt himself. When we talk about Kurosawa we have to include these times. They are a part of what happens when a filmmaker has ideas but it is hard to make them work with the way things are done.

Then Kurosawa made a comeback. It was really something. He made a movie called Dersu Uzala in 1975 in the Soviet Union. It won a big award. Kagemusha, which came out in 1980 was helped by people like George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola. It made Kurosawa famous again. Ran was another movie that showed Kurosawa was still a filmmaker even if his style was a little different now. It was more sad and serious.

In 1990 Kurosawa got an award from the Academy. George Lucas and Steven Spielberg gave it to him. It was like they were saying thank you to Kurosawa for being such a filmmaker. Lucas has talked about how he liked Kurosawa's movie ,the Hidden Fortress and how it helped him make Star Wars.. Kurosawa's influence goes beyond just borrowing ideas. It is the way he moved the camera and the way he



Late grandeur and historical ruin in Ran

told stories. He was good at making movies that were fun to watch. Also looked really good.

Martin Scorsese also likes Kurosawa's work. Scorsese was even in one of Kurosawa's movies called Dreams, which came out in 1990. Dreams is a little uneven. That is okay. It is like Kurosawa is showing us his photo album and talking about what he is afraid of and what he hopes for. It is a filmmaker looking back, at his life and wondering what it all means.

Humanism Without Innocence

People call Kurosawa a humanist. That is a good way to describe him if we think about it carefully. His humanism is not simple. He does not think that people are good by nature or that doing the thing is easy. His movies show a lot of things like selfishness and cruelty and people lying to themselves.. Kurosawa always comes back to the idea that we can make good choices. A man can do something before he dies like building a playground. A thief can help people in a village. A person who sees something happen can choose to be kind. A king can realize late that having power costs a lot and realizing this too late is a sad thing to know.

This is why people over the world still like Kurosawa. He does not make us feel good, with answers. He shows us the parts of life. His movies ask what we do when things go wrong when we do not know what is true when wanting power hurts the people we love when the systems that are supposed to help us do not work and when it seems like violence is the way. The answer is never easy.. We always need to think about these questions.



Kurosawa, Lucas, and Spielberg: global recognition at the Academy Awards

Legacy: The World Still Moves in Kurosawa's Weather

Although Akira Kurosawa passed away in 1998, his influence on world cinema remains as powerful as ever. Contemporary filmmakers continue to study his techniques, storytelling methods, and cinematic language. Directors of action films admire his dynamic choreography and visual storytelling, while independent and festival filmmakers continue to draw inspiration from the philosophical depth and humanistic themes of his work. Elements that Kurosawa pioneered such as ensemble narratives, morally complex heroes, striking visual compositions, and emotionally charged climaxes have become fundamental tools of modern filmmaking.

His influence extends across an extraordinary range of genres, including Westerns, science fiction, crime films, war dramas, animation, and blockbuster cinema. Rather than simply inspiring individual filmmakers, Kurosawa transformed the grammar of cinema itself, shaping the way stories are written, filmed, edited, and experienced by audiences worldwide.

The enduring relevance of Kurosawa's films lies not only in their artistic brilliance but also in their timeless exploration of human nature. Rashomon continues to challenge audiences because questions of truth, memory, and perspective remain unresolved in our own society. Ikiru still resonates because people continue to struggle against bureaucracy, loneliness, and the search for meaning. Seven Samurai remains emotionally powerful because courage, sacrifice, and collective responsibility are values that every generation must rediscover. Throne of Blood and Ran continue to disturb viewers by exposing the destructive consequences of ambition, greed, and the abuse of political power. Even Dreams, created late in Kurosawa's life, demonstrates his lifelong curiosity about cinema's ability to express memory, imagination, morality, and the relationship between humanity and nature.

Perhaps Kurosawa's greatest achievement is that his films are never merely stories meant for entertainment. They function as profound studies of human behaviour under pressure. His characters reveal how individuals respond to fear, injustice, love, guilt, responsibility, and hope. Through unforgettable images and emotionally complex narratives, Kurosawa invites audiences to question their own beliefs, confront moral ambiguity, and reflect on the choices that define human existence.
More than a quarter of a century after his death, Akira Kurosawa's cinema continues to transcend cultural and national boundaries. Regardless of language, age, or cinematic preference, audiences around the world continue to find themselves reflected in his stories. His films remind us that while technology, politics, and societies



may change, the fundamental questions of what it means to be human remain remarkably constant. This enduring universality is the reason Kurosawa is not simply remembered as one of the greatest filmmakers in history, but as one of cinema's most insightful philosophers of human nature.

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Anurag Basu: Where Silence Speaks

Baishaki Somadder

Let us begin with a question.

When does a Bollywood director truly become an artist? Is it when his films earn hundreds of crores? When critics shower him with stars and accolades? Or is it when audiences walk out of the theatre carrying an unfamiliar feeling as if something subtle yet profound has shifted inside them?



Anurag Basu

Anurag Basu belongs to that rare second category of filmmakers. His films do not end when the screen fades to black. They continue inside the viewer, lingering quietly for weeks, months, sometimes years. His characters disappear from the frame, yet remain alive in memory. It is this mystery of endurance this ability to haunt the emotional landscape of an audience that lies at the heart of his cinema.

The Making of an Artist

Born on May 8, 1970, in Bhilai, Anurag Basu grew up in a Bengali household immersed in theatre and performance. His father, Subrata Bose, and mother, Deepshikha Bose, were both award-winning theatre practitioners who ran a theatre group called Abhiyan. As a result, the language of performance, the choreography of light and shadow, and the transformation of human emotion into visual expression were not lessons he learned later in life they were part of the air he breathed.

Although he studied Physics at University of Mumbai and once dreamed of studying cinematography at Film and Television Institute of India, fate had other plans. Opportunities in television arrived before

formal film education could. Beginning as an assistant director on the television serial Tara, Basu quickly rose to become its director.

Television became his first laboratory of human emotions. There he learned the delicate mathematics of storytelling: how much of a character must be revealed before audiences claim them as their own, and how silence can often speak more eloquently than dialogue. These lessons would later become the foundation of his cinematic voice.

A Journey That Refused Simplicity

Anurag Basu entered feature filmmaking in 2003 with Kucch To Hai. The film was not a major commercial triumph, but it opened a door. One year later, Murder blew that door off its hinges.

Starring Emraan Hashmi and Mallika Sherawat, the film became a box-office sensation and established Basu as one of Bollywood's most promising directors.

Yet just as success arrived, life presented him with a cruel test.

The same year, he was diagnosed with blood cancer.

A filmmaker who had only begun tasting success suddenly found himself confronting mortality. Hospital rooms replaced film sets. Treatments replaced premieres. The battle was long, uncertain, and intensely personal. But Basu survived.

Film theorists have long debated how deeply a filmmaker's life enters their work. In Basu's case, the answer seems unmistakable. A person who has looked death in the eye rarely sees life the same way again. His later films carry a heightened awareness of life's fragility. Every joyful moment feels like a celebration. Every goodbye carries the ache of impermanence.

The shadow of mortality does not darken his cinema; it illuminates it.

The Architecture of His Storytelling



Life in a... Metro Directed by Anurag Basu

What first distinguishes Anurag Basu's cinematic language is his mastery of narrative complexity. He rarely tells stories in a straight line. His films weave together multiple lives, timelines, and emotional trajectories, allowing them to intersect in unexpected ways.

The finest example is perhaps Life in a Metro.

The film follows nine lives moving through the vast machinery of Mumbai. Each character carries private wounds, private desires, and private loneliness. A failing marriage, a forbidden attraction, the isolation of urban existence, the search for intimacy in a city overflowing with people these stories rarely touch directly, yet they constantly echo one another.

Basu transforms urban alienation into something poetic. Through a screenplay of remarkable sensitivity and music by Pritam, the city itself becomes a living organism, connecting strangers through invisible emotional currents.

In Basu's universe, events do not define characters; choices do. His protagonists are never passive victims of circumstance. They stumble, decide, regret, and choose again. Their destinies emerge from the accumulation of these decisions. This philosophical outlook elevates his work beyond mere entertainment.

Barfi!: Learning the Language of Silence

If there is one film that best captures Anurag Basu's artistic maturity, it is undoubtedly Barfi!.

At its centre is a young man who cannot hear and cannot speak. By placing such a character at the heart of a mainstream Bollywood film, Basu took an extraordinary creative risk. The result is a film where emotion matters more than dialogue and where silence becomes its own language.

The history of cinema contains a rich silent tradition from Charlie Chaplin to Buster Keaton. Those pioneers understood that the human face could speak louder than words. Barfi! lovingly recalls that heritage.

Ranbir Kapoor delivers one of the most physically expressive performances of modern Indian cinema. Priyanka Chopra Jonas brings remarkable depth and dignity to her autistic character, while Ileana D'Cruz anchors the narrative with emotional tenderness.

Together, they create something rare: a film that feels less like a story being told and



Barfi Directed by Anurag Basu

more like a memory being remembered.

The cinematography by Ravi Varman transforms Darjeeling into far more than a location. It becomes an emotional landscape. The mist-covered hills, winding roads, weathered architecture, and fading tram tracks create a world where time appears to move differently a place where love can exist without words.

Its nonlinear structure mirrors memory itself. Past and present flow into one another until the final pieces click into place. The resulting emotional release feels almost cathartic, as though the audience has completed a puzzle of the heart rather than the mind.

When Music Becomes Dialogue

To discuss Anurag Basu without discussing music would be impossible.

In his films, songs are not interruptions. They are storytelling.

In Gangster, the haunting voice of KK becomes the emotional bloodstream of the narrative. The loneliness, yearning, and self-destruction of Kangana Ranaut's character are expressed as much through music as through performance.

In *Life in a Metro*, songs become confessions. They articulate everything the characters cannot say aloud.

In *Barfi!*, instrumental compositions carry emotional information that dialogue could never adequately convey.

For Basu, music is not accompaniment. It is another language.

This philosophy reached its most ambitious form in Jagga Jasoos.
Large sections of the film unfold through songs rather than conventional dialogue. Information, character development, and emotional transitions emerge musically. Though the film struggled commercially, it remains one of the boldest experiments attempted in mainstream Hindi cinema.

Working once again with Ranbir Kapoor, Basu demonstrated something crucial: he has never been interested in the safest road.

Ludo: Finding Order in Chaos

Released on Netflix in 2020, Ludo stands as Basu's most significant work of the streaming era.

The film follows four separate narratives connected by fate, coincidence, and the invisible threads that bind human lives together. Like coloured pieces moving across a Ludo board, the characters played by Pankaj Tripathi, Abhishek Bachchan,



Ludo Directed by Anurag Basu



Gangster Directed by Anurag Basu

Rajkummar Rao, and Aditya Roy Kapur travel along separate paths before converging.

Ludo is not an anthology; it is a mosaic.

Each story stands independently, yet none is complete alone. Like pieces of a larger design, they gain meaning through connection.

Particularly memorable is Abhishek Bachchan's character, Bittu a former gangster trying to reclaim a life that has moved on without him. His wife has remarried. His daughter barely knows him. He is a man trapped between who he was and who he wishes to become.

In Bittu's story, we find one of Basu's recurring beliefs: that even after immense loss, people remain capable of love, redemption, and renewal.

The Invisible Thread

The easiest way to identify an auteur is to look for the invisible thread connecting all their work.

In Anurag Basu's cinema, those threads are unmistakable.

Nearly every film revolves around losing and finding. People lose lovers, families, dreams, identities, or themselves. The narrative then becomes a journey toward rediscovery.

He consistently tells stories of imperfect love. His lovers are flawed. They make mistakes, hurt each other, seek forgiveness, and stumble again. Their imperfections make them believable.

Comedy and tragedy coexist in his films exactly as they do in life. No moment is purely joyful. No sorrow is entirely without humour. Human existence, in Basu's hands, becomes a delicate dance between laughter and heartbreak.

Most importantly, he gravitates toward people living at society's margins. The disabled protagonist of Barfi!, the emotionally damaged heroine of Gangster, the wounded souls of Ludo—these are not conventional heroes. Yet Basu places them at the centre of the frame and asks us to see their humanity.

The Visual Poetry of Everyday Life

Anurag Basu's visual style deserves attention in its own right.

His colour palettes are expressive without becoming artificial. Barfi! glows with warm nostalgia, while Ludo embraces a vibrant, almost comic-book energy, reflecting its heightened reality.

His camera frequently moves close to his characters not merely to their faces, but to trembling hands, moist eyes, folded shirts, and tiny gestures often ignored by conventional cinema.

These details carry emotional weight.

Audiences may forget dialogue, but they remember a smile from Barfi. They remember a glance from Kangana Ranaut's character in Gangster. They remember the feeling of a moment long after they forget its words.

Legacy and Contribution

Anurag Basu occupies a rare space within Hindi cinema.

Between commercial spectacle and austere realism, he has carved out a third path one rooted in emotional authenticity, artistic sincerity, and deep humanism.

His career offers an important lesson to younger filmmakers: courage matters.

He never concealed the commercial disappointment of Jagga Jasoos. He never apologized for taking risks. Instead, he continued moving forward. That willingness to value artistic honesty over guaranteed success places him among filmmakers whose loyalty lies first with storytelling.

His cinema repeatedly asks a question that every serious artist must eventually confront:

Is a story created merely to be sold, or is it created to be felt?

Not an Ending, but a Beginning

Finishing an Anurag Basu film often feels less like completing a movie and more like concluding a long conversation.

A conversation in which the filmmaker never forces conclusions, yet leaves behind countless thoughts, emotions, and questions.

Few directors age as gracefully with time. Films like Barfi! and Life in a Metro remain as moving today as when they first appeared, and they will likely continue speaking to audiences decades from now. That timelessness is perhaps the truest measure of artistic achievement.

Having survived cancer, Basu understands the fragility of life in a way few people do. That understanding shines through every frame he creates. It acts like an invisible light one that transforms stories into reflections on existence itself.

When the cinema screen goes dark, most stories end. But Anurag Basu's stories do not. They continue quietly, invisibly, and persistently living on inside the audience, in the language of silence.

Baishaki Somadder

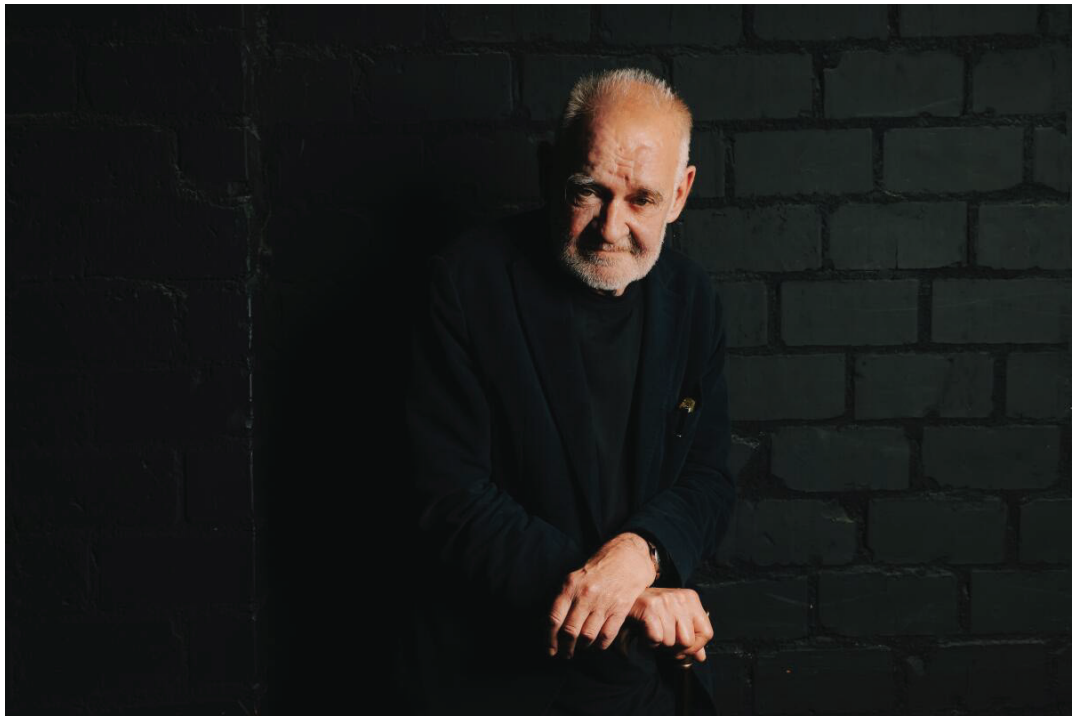
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Béla Tarr: Rain, Ruins, and the Burden of Life

Bidhan Rebeiro

For Béla Tarr, the human being is central: broken, twisted, crushed human beings trapped within the web of instinct and desire. Yet his consideration of humanity is never detached from environment, nor separated from politics. Rather, through sound and image, sometimes in black and white, sometimes illuminated through colour, he creates a devastating account of the tragic condition of human beings within man-made politics and environments. In that cinematic universe, people lose joy and delight. They lose the path toward transcendence. Therefore they sit silently beside windows, from where the outside world can still be seen, from where a little nourishment for survival may still be gathered, from where one may still imagine that perhaps somewhere out there a paradise exists. For the same reason, Tarr's people repeatedly look toward the Gypsies, those wandering communities who have broken out of all boundaries and set themselves upon the roads of the world, people without homes, without state-imposed borders, roaming freely like migratory birds. Tarr's characters gaze toward that freedom like thirsty chatak birds, even while remaining trapped within the pus and decay accumulated in their own lives.



Béla Tarr (1955–2026)



Béla Tarr (1955–2026)

The Hungarian filmmaker and philosopher of cinema Béla Tarr, who departed like a comet at the age of seventy on 6 January 2026, had himself arrived in life much like a comet. It was as though another unexpected star had suddenly risen, dazzling everyone and scorching the bloodshot gaze of authority. Béla Tarr was born on 21 July 1955 in Pécs, the mountainous southern Hungarian city near the Croatian border. He was born into a household already steeped in culture; both his father and mother worked in theatre. Because of this atmosphere, at only ten years of age Tarr appeared on Hungarian National Television in a televised adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich, playing the role of the protagonist's son. Later in life he would appear before the camera only twice more: in small cameo roles in Miklós Jancsó's Season of Monsters (1986) and Gábor Bódy's Dog's Night Song (1983). After that he never again appeared in front of the camera. He had found himself in directing.

The urge to direct and create films seized Béla Tarr from adolescence onward. On his fourteenth birthday, his father bought him an 8mm camera. That camera determined the entire trajectory of his life. It is astonishing to observe that instead of engaging in ordinary teenage activities, the young Tarr began painting stories of different lives onto celluloid with light. Had he not encountered those lives, perhaps he would have departed the world merely as an ordinary filmmaker. We might never have discovered the politically and philosophically conscious Béla Tarr.

At the age of sixteen he began associating with a somewhat radical leftist circle influenced by Maoism. Through them he encountered workers and labouring people, the very people contemporary intellectuals and artists constantly spoke about. Whether



Béla Tarr (1955–2026)

through their influence or through his own sympathy toward working people, Tarr began taking the camera gifted by his father into shipyards, factories, and even workers' slums. While filming the daily lives of shipyard workers, he encountered a group of Gypsy labourers. Throughout history, Gypsies have represented a bohemian spirit, flowing freely like rivers, but in Hungary that flow was being obstructed. Those people, whose blood carried the history of nomads, were in 1971 forced to write letters to János Kádár, First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, merely to seek permission to work abroad in Austria.

Tarr witnessed this reality while still only sixteen years old, holding his little 8mm camera. With that magical machine in his hand he began interviewing Gypsies and documenting the helplessness and crises of wandering people who possessed nothing to sell except their labour in order to survive. He was also aware that in contemporary Hungary, even leaving the country to visit relatives required government approval. The suffocating atmosphere of the state deeply disturbed the politically conscious Tarr. Therefore, together with two friends, he formed a filmmaking collective named the Dziga Vertov Group. Anyone familiar with film history knows the significance of the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov. With this three person group, the sixteen year old Tarr made a documentary titled Guest Workers.

Apparently the film no longer survives. Its subject matter resembled the lives of migrant labourers from northern Bangladesh who travel to Dhaka to pull rickshaws or work in shipbreaking yards in Chattogram. The documentary explored state interference in Gypsies' freedom to work and survive. Tarr was not content merely to make the film. He sent it to an obscure film festival where, unsurprisingly, it won first prize.

Tarr became so excited by the film that he turned himself into a travelling exhibitor.



Family Nest (1979)

Carrying both the projector and the film, he went from one workers' settlement to another. After labourers returned from exhausting factory shifts, screenings would be organised outside their barracks. These were not casual arrangements. Tarr carefully hung handwritten posters announcing the schedule so workers could make time to watch a film about themselves. The workers appreciated the gesture, but the Communist Party did not. Needless to say, both the subject matter of Tarr's film and its alternative mode of exhibition directly challenged state authority.

One day, while he was still attending school, the local Party office ordered him to appear before them, explain his activities, and arrange a screening of the film. Tarr obeyed the order. After watching the documentary, the officials said neither good nor bad things. They remained silent. Yet they did not hesitate to decide against him.

Within a year it became clear that the government had taken harsh measures against Tarr. His educational future was effectively destroyed. When, at the age of seventeen, he completed secondary school and attempted to enrol in university, he was told never again to speak of higher education. Every institution of higher learning in the country rejected him. What a cruel and unimaginable punishment. Simply for making a short documentary film, Béla Tarr was unjustly deprived of and expelled from higher education.

As a result, he was forced to join the workers whose lives he had documented. He took a job at a shipbuilding factory. After working there for two years, he realised that such intense physical labour was becoming unbearable at such a young age. Once again he attempted university admission, this time applying to the philosophy department of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Again fate turned against him. The examiners became angry at his answers during the admission process. Tarr argued that Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto was not merely a political commitment but even more profoundly a work of art, and that communism should be regarded not as an institutionalised political structure but as a movement. Naturally, under a leftist government, this made it impossible for him to enter university once again.

Eventually Tarr took a job as a caretaker at a cultural centre in a working-class district of Budapest. By then he had already entered the world of cinema through documentary filmmaking. Another obscure festival awarded one of his documentaries a top prize. Among the members of the jury were two important documentary filmmakers, István Dárday and Györgyi Szalai, both known for their semi-documentary, semi-fictional works. They invited Tarr to collaborate on their next project, Film Novel (1977).

Before reaching the age of twenty, Béla Tarr had completely dedicated himself to filmmaking. He was making short films and winning awards at festivals. One such film centred on the struggles of a woman named Irén Szajki, whom Tarr encountered in a workers' settlement on the outskirts of Budapest. When the area where she lived was acquired for a government project, Irén sought shelter in a state apartment complex. But later she was ordered to leave that apartment as well. She refused. Where else could she go? A conflict with the authorities followed. Eventually the city council decided to evict her with police assistance.



Almanac of Fall (1984)

Released in 1979, when Tarr was only twenty-two years old, Family Nest received acclaim not only in Hungary but abroad as well, winning the Grand Prize at the Mannheim International Film Festival. After such success it became impossible for educational institutions to continue rejecting him. Eventually he gained admission to a film school, and while studying there he began work on his next film, The Outsider (1980).

A person like Béla Tarr, born and raised within a culturally rich family, gifted a camera by his father, inspired in adolescence by political ideology, sympathetic toward the poor, workers, and nomadic communities, persecuted by the government for making films about them, and ultimately turning cinema into a weapon of protest and expression in youth, could hardly make ordinary films. One can easily imagine what kind of cinema such a man would create and what qualities his characters would possess.

In Family Nest, Irén becomes dependent on others, enduring her father-in-law's relentless false accusations and burning beneath her husband's betrayal and cold indifference. Unable to endure any longer, she goes to the municipal office seeking a small separate apartment where she might live with her daughter. She asks for at least a single room. The socialist government informs her that thousands of similar applications already await resolution and that her case will only be considered afterward. Whether she lives or dies in the meantime is of no concern to them.

Through characters like Irén, Tarr sought to embody the helplessness of ordinary people during the final years of Hungary's socialist regime. Employing a cinéma vérité style, shooting the characters from extremely close range and dividing scenes into fragmented shots, he exposed the real suffering of people trapped within a failing state system. The tight framing makes it seem as though life itself has become trapped inside a tiny apartment, with no



Damnation (1987)

room even to stretch one's limbs, let alone expand the spirit.
Thus Tarr tells the story of Irén, her husband Laci, and their extended family. After completing compulsory military service, Laci returns to their cramped Budapest apartment and discovers that his unemployed, drug-addicted brother János has brought home a Gypsy girl. Their father angrily scolds him, but nobody pays attention. Later the two brothers go outside and rape the Gypsy girl.

One may ask why the rape of a Gypsy girl becomes necessary in the narrative, why she must specifically be a wandering girl. The answer perhaps lies in the frustration born of failed attempts to escape the labyrinth. Laci and János know they have no alternative beyond their father's tiny apartment. János is already unemployed, and now Laci joins him in uncertainty. They know nothing of the future. Meanwhile their father constantly berates them, especially Irén. The atmosphere is poisonous. There seems no path of escape. Therefore they seek fleeting relief in the body of the wandering girl. It is a distorted and criminal attempt at freedom. Yet even then they find no liberation. They are drawn back into unrest. Thus Tarr ends his family narrative by depicting lives trapped within endless cycles of physical and social suffering.

The longing of confined beings toward free spirits such as the Gypsies continues in Tarr's next film, The Outsider (1981). The film centres on a young violinist named András who is trapped within his own music and wandering existence. He earns little money but maintains relationships with women and eventually marries a young woman named Kata. Their introduction takes place through András's brother. Around them are friends constantly discussing either companionship or income. Nobody possesses stability in family life or finances.

At one point an intoxicated old man sings a song referencing Gypsies, once again

expressing the desire to break free from boundaries. Among friends, András is nicknamed "Beethoven." He is talented but imprisoned within his own whims, and thus every relationship drifts away from him. Kata too withdraws from him. Life itself becomes a deception. Tarr again takes refuge in a Gypsy story.

One day a Gypsy walks along the road carrying a sack over his shoulder. A policeman stops him and asks what is inside. "Nothing, sir," the Gypsy replies, "just a crow." The policeman becomes suspicious and insists on inspecting the sack. When the Gypsy opens it, there is no crow inside, only a chicken. The Gypsy himself seems surprised and says, "Sir, that chicken isn't mine. You can take it."

Human beings never receive what they truly desire, and what they do receive they no longer want. Like the Gypsy story, András and Kata remain entangled in obtaining and rejecting one another. Although András eventually finds minor work at a factory, it cannot save his marriage. Their relationship collapses.

Tarr offers no indication that these broken lives will ever heal. He offered none in Family Nest either. In both films, his characters are surrendered to the cruelty of fate. Tarr's characters are profoundly ordinary. Their crises are the crises of average people. Although there is a certain monotony in their lives, Tarr transforms that monotony into something compelling. Not because those lives become soft or beautiful, but because audiences are drawn toward the endless struggle of people attempting to escape the suffocating confines of their daily existence.

In Almanac of Fall (1984), poor people are no longer at the centre. Instead the film revolves around a wealthy elderly woman. Yet the people surrounding her are spiritually impoverished. Her son János has no income of his own and squanders everything on addiction and women. He constantly pressures his mother for money. Their household becomes increasingly chaotic.

A maid named Anna lives in the house, and she represents the Gypsy spirit. At one point she says that nothing in her life has ever truly belonged to her, neither furniture nor people. She drifts endlessly from one place to another. Anna lives in the house with her poor lover, though previously she had brought another lover there as well. Such changes hardly matter within this enormous household.

Another parasitic figure also inhabits the house: a man named Heidy, the elderly woman's lover. His main role is to provide emotional support, yet he secretly steals and pawns her jewellery to pay his personal debts. This leads to violent conflict with János, who himself covets the jewellery.

But greed extends beyond objects. Anna too becomes the victim of János's lust and is raped. She tolerates everything because she has nowhere else to go. Even when the elderly woman tries to drive her out, Anna refuses to leave. Instead she attempts to secure her position by deepening her relationship with János.

The son's moral collapse, Anna's degradation, and Heidy's theft ultimately devastate the elderly woman psychologically. The entire house transforms into a hellish environment where everyone attempts to survive by wounding others. Yet nobody

finds liberation because none of them has anywhere else to go.

Through this bourgeois family, Tarr seems to connect their suffocating atmosphere to humanity itself. Human history is the history of people surviving by injuring one another, building civilisation through endless clashes and violence. They wage wars, kill and die, yet nobody leaves the field because leaving the world altogether would mean embracing death itself. Therefore: Que Sera, Sera. What will be, will be. The residents of the mansion dance while the song "Que Sera, Sera" plays, yet inwardly all of them know the brutal truth. The elderly woman understands how Anna has manipulated her son. Anna understands that survival demands cunning. All of them recognise that they need one another, though never without conflict. It is as though they are all moving inevitably toward death through unavoidable confrontation.

Sometimes love transcends death itself. Human beings ignore shame, humiliation, and danger in pursuit of their beloved. One such lover appears in Damnation (1988). Karrer, the protagonist, lives in solitude and falls desperately in love with a singer who performs in a bar called the Titanic.

Like passengers aboard the Titanic itself, Karrer boards a doomed vessel of love because the singer has a husband who constantly threatens him. Yet Karrer willingly surrenders himself to destruction. He arranges to send the husband out of town and spends time with the woman, but happiness still eludes him. Everything feels hollow and empty.

Only the rain remains real, falling diagonally from the sky like prison bars. Only the harsh barking of a lonely dog amidst ruins feels eternal. Thus the loveless Karrer merges with the rain itself, finding companionship in the dog's loneliness. As the camera slowly tracks through heaps of garbage, Karrer walks toward nowhere.

Six years later Tarr returned with an even deeper and longer film: Sátántangó (1994). Before the novel of the same name by Nobel-winning writer László Krasznahorkai was published, Tarr received the manuscript through literary critic Péter Balassa, who sensed its cinematic power. Sátántangó was Krasznahorkai's first novel. He and Tarr were nearly the same age, and the two contemporaries immediately recognised one another because they were sharing the same historical pain.

Before writing the novel, Krasznahorkai had already gained attention through short stories, but the unusual language and structure of Sátántangó affected Tarr so deeply that from that point onward he formed a permanent creative partnership with the writer.



Satantango (1994)

Therefore, after Almanac of Fall, Tarr abandoned his earlier habit of improvised dialogue. Inspired by Krasznahorkai's literary style and structure, he created an entirely distinct cinematic universe. Krasznahorkai co-wrote Damnation and later collaborated with Tarr again on The

Turin Horse (2011), Tarr's final film before retirement. Werckmeister Harmonies (2000) was adapted from Krasznahorkai's novel The Melancholy of Resistance (1989).

By transforming Krasznahorkai's Sátántangó into a seven-and-a-half-hour film, Tarr astonished the world. Krasznahorkai's long sentences became Tarr's long takes. The bleak and decaying world of abandoned people emerged onscreen in black-and-white austerity. Unlike the style of Family Nest or The Outsider, Sátántangó narrates the collapse of dreams through a nihilistic lens. It tells of false hope and a false saviour who is in reality nothing more than a government spy. Scene after scene constructs a devastating cycle that reflects the tragic circles of human existence itself.

Sátántangó begins with an approximately eight-minute black-and-white shot of cows wandering freely through muddy fields beneath a dark sky. Eventually they disappear into the distance. The cooperative farm has collapsed, and with it all morality. Several corrupt villagers conspire to steal communal funds. Among them are Futaki, Mr. Schmidt, and Mr. Kráner.

Meanwhile Mrs. Schmidt secretly sleeps with Futaki and later with others. A little girl named Estike buries coins in the ground believing that money trees will grow and rescue them from poverty. But her brother Sanyi steals the coins. In despair Estike poisons her pet cat and then herself.

Although the village is briefly shocked by these deaths, greed and conflict continue uninterrupted. Yet everyone becomes haunted by rumours that Irimiás and Petrina have returned.

The villagers had believed the two men dead. In reality they had been imprisoned. Now, released and sent back as government informants, they manipulate the villagers by promising to rebuild the collective farm. The villagers believe them and begin moving toward an uncertain future.

Only the village doctor remains behind, silently observing the world through his window. After spending time in hospital he returns to the village expecting to find everyone asleep. He does not realise that Irimiás has led everyone away like the Pied Piper. The doctor discovers that nobody remains except the echo of church bells.

Yet according to common knowledge, the church tower and bell had collapsed during the war. Is the sound supernatural? Has some heavenly message descended instead of thunder? The doctor ventures out through the cold and mud into the ruined church where he discovers a madman striking railway sleepers with an iron rod while endlessly shouting: "The Turks are coming! The Turks are coming!"

Terrified, the doctor returns home and boards up the window that had been his only connection to the outside world. Darkness engulfs the room and a vast emptiness descends upon us.

As in Tarr's other films, the window plays a crucial role. Like the Gypsy motif, it connects imprisoned beings with the world outside. Settled, trapped humanity stands in opposition to wandering nomadic existence.

Before Irimiás and Petrina depart for the village, a police captain asks whether they are Gypsies. When they reply no, he begins speaking about Pericles and the citizens of Athens, arguing that people simultaneously desire freedom and law, yet ultimately freedom must fall under legal authority. The captain becomes a representative of the Hungarian state itself. He sends Irimiás



The Turin Horse (2011)

and Petrina to observe the village on behalf of the authorities. By the end of the film we even see detailed reports describing the moral characteristics of the villagers.
The villagers consciously long for the restoration of the collective farm in order to survive, yet unconsciously they fear betrayal. Only Futaki vaguely understands the truth and therefore wishes to live independently, even if only as a caretaker.

But there is also the unconscious mind of society itself. Tarr explores this through the madman crying that the Turks are coming. The line evokes the historical memory of Ottoman rule in Hungary during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It suggests that domination and aggression may return at any moment, whether from foreign or domestic powers. The present constantly feels haunted by the past.

Perhaps this is why the doctor boards up his window. Perhaps he seeks to protect himself from an unknown terror.

In Sátántangó we encounter a world where no grand purpose for survival remains. The cooperative farm has collapsed. Society is filled with corruption and evil. The atmosphere resembles lines from Alexander Pushkin's poem Demons:

"The storm is vicious now, it's howling; The nervous horses snort, oh hark! It's he who dances in the distance, Alone his eyes burn in the dark…"
The ringing bells seem to announce evil itself, as though spirits are about to begin dancing. Humanity responds by shutting even the windows through which light enters, revealing an existential nihilism.

Yet the nihilism that Friedrich Nietzsche hoped humanity might overcome through affirmative thought is challenged by Tarr and Krasznahorkai in The Turin Horse (2011). The film depicts an old man attempting to control his horse during the period when Nietzsche himself lost his sanity. The old man lives in a barren landscape with only his daughter, a horse, a roof over their heads, a few potatoes, and a well.

Their existence revolves around these few possessions. Life becomes repetitive, monotonous, black-and-white, and suffocating. Outside, relentless natural disaster rages.

Nietzsche declared that God is dead. During the late nineteenth century, when people were losing faith in everything, Nietzsche perceived the rise of science and reason replacing divine authority. But in his final film Tarr seems to suggest that humanity, God, and nature are all responsible for the unbearable hostility of existence.

To embody this idea, Tarr introduces a group of Gypsies into the narrative. They

arrive after a long journey, exhausted and thirsty, hoping to drink water from the well. But the old man and his daughter drive them away. The following day the well dries up completely.
The father and daughter are stunned. Have they been punished for their cruelty toward the Gypsies? Has God withdrawn even water itself because of their inhumanity?

Although God is never explicitly mentioned, the film unfolds across six days, echoing the biblical story of creation. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. If creation was meant for the good of living beings, why then is existence so joyless? Why does the father repeatedly tell his daughter while eating potatoes, "Eat. We have to eat"? Life becomes reduced to mere endurance.

Another visitor arrives seeking alcohol and bringing news from the outside world, a world with which the father and daughter have no connection. Yet even that world is filled with suffering. There is no hope anywhere. Neither nature nor God offers refuge. There is no past and no future, only a colourless present.

Ultimately Béla Tarr's entire body of work points toward the profound relationship between humanity and geological transformation, what we now call the Anthropocene. Human civilisation, whether through capitalism, socialism, or dictatorship, has radically transformed the planet itself.

Therefore space and time become crucial elements in Tarr's cinema. Within these altered conditions, people continue struggling to survive or else surrender themselves to waiting for the final catastrophe.
Tarr is often called the master of "slow cinema," but the long, unblinking gaze of his camera frequently remains indifferent to action itself. It is as though he wishes audiences to experience events as uncanny coincidences, to enter the same conditions as the characters, to share their fate.
Like them, we too become trapped within an impenetrable labyrinth. Once born, there is no escape except death. Whether joyful or sorrowful, everything remains temporary. Only emptiness is eternal and unmoving.

Human beings are condemned to carry the immense burden of existence. Often we violently squeeze joy out of life itself, yet even that joy ultimately transforms into sadness. Throughout his career, Béla Tarr repeatedly returned to this philosophy across his nine feature films. It should also be noted that several of these works were co-directed by Ágnes Hranitzky, who was also Tarr's life partner.

What more can one say? Béla Tarr is one of the great filmmakers of our age.

Acknowledgements

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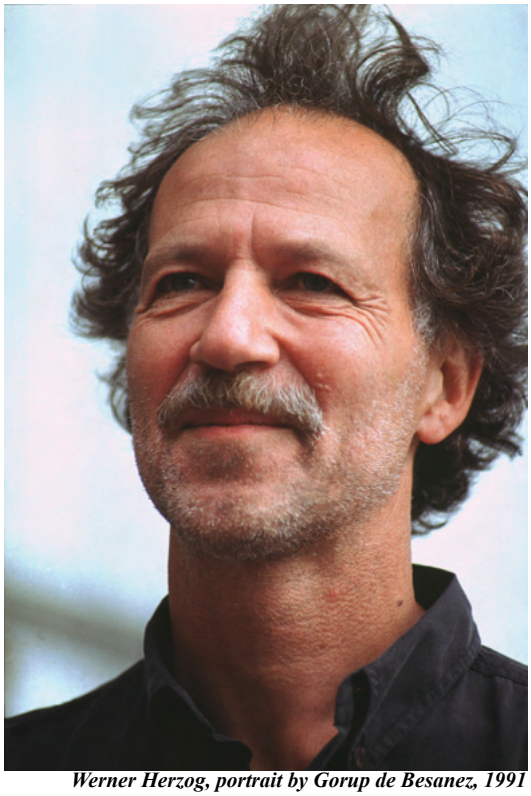
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Werner Herzog: The Last Conquistador of Cinema

Elena Rubashevska

There are directors whose filmographies can be approached through individual titles, and there are directors whose works resemble continents: fragmented territories united less by narrative continuity than by a shared climate, philosophy, and way of confronting the world. Werner Herzog belongs decisively to the latter category. To speak of Herzog only through separate films has always seemed strangely insufficient to me, almost misleading. His cinema is not merely a body of work but an ecosystem of obsessions, myths, landscapes, impossible ambitions, broken dreamers, conquistadors, mystics, fanatics, survivors, and fools who attempt to negotiate with indifferent reality (and usually lose).



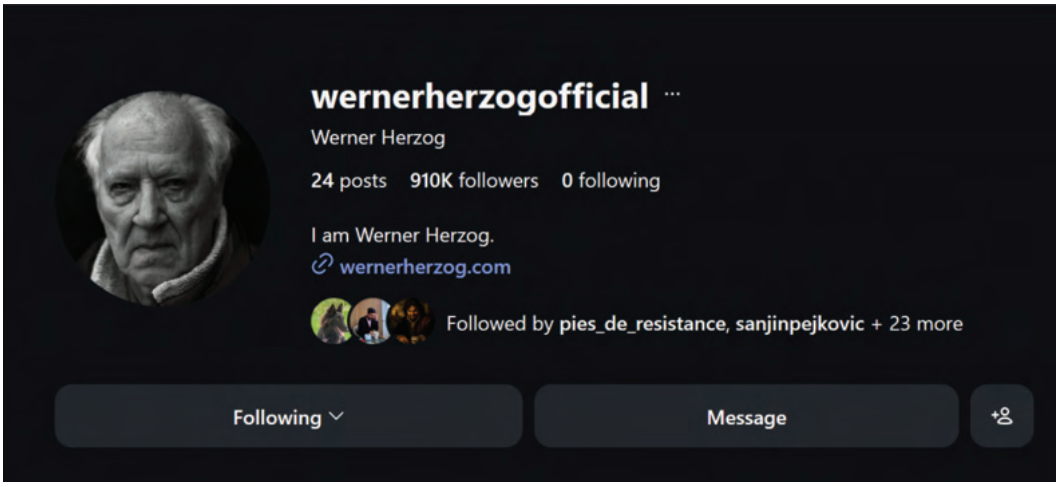
Werner Herzog, portrait by Gorup de Besanez, 1991

Perhaps this is why, whenever people unfamiliar with Herzog ask me where to begin, I hesitate. It is not because he lacks masterpieces. On the contrary, few directors possess such an overwhelming concentration of singular works. But no individual film can entirely explain the Herzog phenomenon. His documentaries, astonishing and diverse as they are, reveal only fragments of his worldview. One may admire the hypnotic abyss of Grizzly Man, the ecstatic madness of Cave of Forgotten Dreams, or the cosmic melancholy of Into the Inferno without fully understanding why Herzog became something larger than a celebrated filmmaker: a cult figure, a philosopher-adventurer, a cinematic myth who gradually transformed himself into one of the last great explorers of modern cinema.

And perhaps no work reveals this phenomenon more clearly than Fitzcarraldo (1982) together with Les Blank's documentary Burden of Dreams, which chronicles its disastrous and miraculous production. If I had to explain Herzog to someone through a single cinematic experience, I would not choose one film alone but this pairing: fiction and documentary mirroring one another until they become inseparable. As if one were watching cinema and its hallucination simultaneously.

It also feels impossible to return to Fitzcarraldo today without thinking about legacy. At 83, Herzog remains almost absurdly productive. Even now, he continues moving restlessly between documentaries, fiction features, books, lectures, voice acting, interviews, social media appearances, and increasingly self-aware mythmaking. News recently circulated that his new feature Bucking Fastard would not premiere at the Cannes Film Festival after Herzog reportedly refused to screen the film outside the Competition section, with the premiere now expected in Venice the same festival that hosted his recent documentary Ghost Elephants. Whether interpreted as stubbornness, pride, or consistency, the story feels strangely appropriate for Herzog: a filmmaker who has spent his entire career refusing negotiation with systems he considered spiritually insufficient.

There is irony in this too. Herzog has long understood his own mythology and actively collaborates in constructing it. The man who once ate his own shoe after losing a bet to Errol Morris, who delivered the immortal "Happy New Year, losers!" greeting, who turned his solemn Bavarian fatalism into an internet vernacular, is not naïve about his public image. He cultivates it while simultaneously mocking it. Even his Instagram account, which feels less like a celebrity profile than a transmission from another civilization, operates within this duality. One post may mockingly yet with a dead-serious face discuss advanced technology that could someday carry humanity toward Alpha Centauri; another may describe horrific jungle injuries with anthropological detachment; another may unexpectedly drift into cooking. Herzog moves through social media exactly as he moves through cinema: as an observer fascinated by extremes of existence.



Herzog's Instagram page, 2026

Yet behind the memes and anecdotes remains something increasingly rare: a figure who still appears genuinely driven by discovery. Herzog's curiosity seems impossible to extinguish. He seeks out not merely stories but people who exist at the edge of human experience: Timothy Treadwell communing disastrously with bears, scientists descending into volcanic abysses, pilots flying through deadly storms,

death row inmates, cave explorers, Antarctic divers, wandering visionaries, isolated mystics. Again and again, Herzog approaches such characters not as sociological specimens but as spiritual companions. His films are united by a persistent question: what compels certain people to continue advancing into danger, absurdity, obsession, or transcendence long after reason would advise retreat?

Fitzcarraldo may be the purest expression of this question because its protagonist and director gradually become indistinguishable.



Fitzcarraldo, 1982, film poster

Released in 1982, Fitzcarraldo tells the story of Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald, an Irish adventurer in Peru obsessed with bringing opera to the Amazon jungle. In order to finance his dream, Fitzcarraldo attempts to access a remote rubber territory by transporting an enormous steamship over a mountain between two rivers. The premise sounds almost surreal, somewhere between colonial fever dream and tragicomic parable. Yet Herzog films it with astonishing sincerity. Fitzcarraldo is absurd, but never ironic. Herzog believes in dreamers too deeply to mock them entirely.

Watching the film today remains a singular sensory experience. This is cinema that demands scale. The jungle does not function merely as setting but as overwhelming physical presence: humid, dense, hostile, hypnotic. Herzog's camera does not aestheticize nature into postcard beauty. The sound design is equally precise. Nothing feels exaggerated, yet everything accumulates toward grandeur. Fitzcarraldo never tries aggressively to impress the viewer, which paradoxically makes its ambition feel even larger.

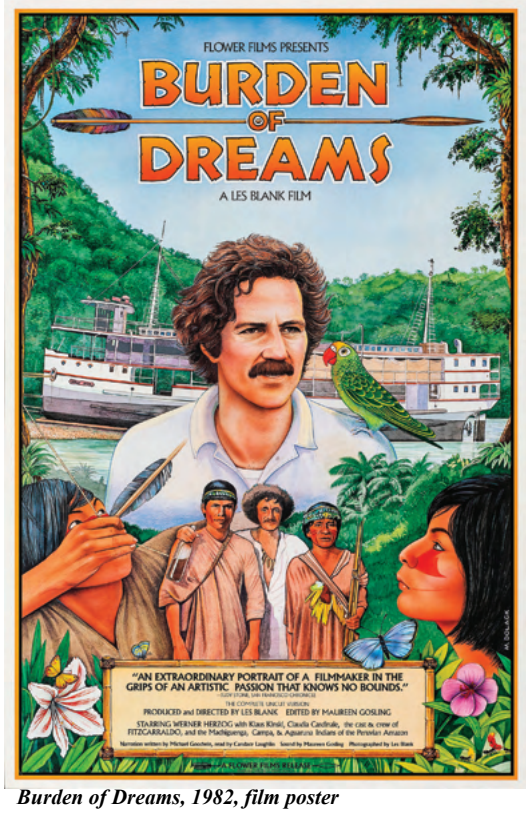
The famous sequence of hauling the steamship over the mountain still produces disbelief precisely because it is real. Herzog actually moved a 320-ton ship across a hill in the Peruvian jungle without miniature effects or digital simulation. The dangerous rapids are real. The exhaustion is real. The mud is real. One feels not only the representation of obsession but its physical residue embedded directly into the image itself.

This is where Burden of Dreams steps into the picture.

Les Blank's documentary reveals the production of Fitzcarraldo as a parallel expedition descending repeatedly toward catastrophe. Actors became ill. Crew members suffered severe injuries. Indigenous territorial conflicts erupted nearby. One

incident involved a spear passing through a man's neck without killing him. The original production collapsed after actor Jason Robards became sick, forcing Herzog to restart the film almost entirely with Klaus Kinski. The shoot stretched over years. At various moments the project seemed not merely doomed but insane.

And yet Herzog much like his protagonist Fitzcarraldo continued.



Burden of Dreams, 1982, film poster

Watching Burden of Dreams today, one cannot avoid thinking of another great chronicle of obsession and exploration: Stefan Zweig's Magellan. Herzog himself once described himself as a "Conquistador of the Useless," and the phrase captures both his grandeur and absurdity. Like Zweig's Magellan, Herzog appears driven by a vision whose destination remains uncertain even to himself. Both men command crews composed not of fellow visionaries but of exhausted workers, opportunists, adventurers, and sceptics motivated by money, survival, or curiosity rather than transcendence. Both repeatedly encounter mutiny, despair, impossible geography, and the growing suspicion that the expedition itself has become detached from rational purpose. Yet both persist because they possess the terrifying conviction that retreat would constitute spiritual death.

Burden of Dreams becomes extraordinary precisely because it documents not triumphant genius but the humiliations of ambition. Herzog's conquest constantly transforms into defeat. Nature resists him. Logistics collapse. Human bodies fail. The jungle appears to absorb every assertion of control and return it as exhaustion, disease, and delirium. At one point Herzog remarks that the jungle is filled not with harmony but with "overwhelming and collective murder." It is one of his most famous statements, often quoted as evidence of his romantic madness, yet the line reveals something deeper: Herzog's cinema rejects sentimental ideas about nature as benevolent equilibrium. In his films, existence is brutal, indifferent, and chaotic, and meaning emerges only through confrontation with this indifference.

Perhaps this is why Herzog's fiction often feels documentary-like, while his documentaries drift toward myth. A quote often attributed to Krzysztof Kieślowski that documentaries should look like fiction and fiction should look like documentary applies almost perfectly to Herzog. Fitzcarraldo feels at times less like scripted narrative than captured collective psychosis.

Meanwhile Burden of Dreams gradually acquires the structure of an epic fiction about filmmaking itself.

But the mythology surrounding Herzog is complicated. Cinema culture has always been dangerously attracted to the figure of the "mad genius": the artist who sacrifices morality, safety, relationships, and sometimes basic humanity in pursuit of transcendence. Fitzcarraldo occupies a deeply uncomfortable place within this tradition because the results are undeniably extraordinary. Watching the ship climb the mountain, one feels awe inseparable from ethical unease.

Was it worth it?

Could such a film be made today under contemporary production standards emphasizing physical safety, labour protections, and mental well-being? Probably not in the same way. Nor should romantic mythology exempt directors from accountability. The suffering documented in Burden of Dreams is real suffering, not aesthetic metaphor.

Yet another question emerges alongside the ethical one: could the same artistic result have been achieved through simulation?

Herzog himself admitted that Fitzcarraldo could have been filmed much more easily closer to civilization. But he also believed that removing the production from genuine danger would fundamentally alter the mental state of everyone involved. The film's reality depended on the crew genuinely sharing the protagonist's exhaustion and obsession.

This question feels particularly urgent now, at a moment when cinema itself stands on the edge of technological transformation. At this year's Cannes Film Festival, the teaser for an AI-generated feature Hell Grind was presented as the world's first feature allegedly created almost entirely through artificial intelligence technologies. Whether viewed as innovation, provocation, or publicity spectacle, its presence signals a rapidly approaching future in which cinema may no longer require physical confrontation with reality at all.

And yet Herzog's relevance strangely persists even within this technological shift.



About a Hero, 2024, film poster

A telling example is About a Hero, Piotr Winiewicz's experimental film built around an AI model trained on Herzog's voice and worldview. The project asked whether a machine could replicate not simply Herzog's speech patterns but his philosophical sensibility itself. The premise was intriguing, unsettling, and

post-iconically funny. But eventual execution was beyond disappointing: Herzog proved difficult to reproduce precisely because his artistic identity emerges not only from language but from lived encounter with reality. His contradictions, humour, arrogance, melancholy, theatricality, and existential curiosity form something too unstable to reduce into algorithmic consistency.

Importantly, this does not necessarily constitute an argument against AI itself. Herzog, unlike many reactionaries, has never positioned himself as a simplistic enemy of technological progress. He remains fascinated by innovation, space travel, scientific discovery, and new forms of image-making. Technology for Herzog is secondary: merely a tool. What matters is whether there exists behind it a genuine visionary impulse.

This is perhaps why his legacy continues to feel unexpectedly alive. Herzog belongs to a disappearing lineage of artists for whom creation required not only imagination but direct physical engagement with the world. His cinema possesses weight. Mud, rivers, steam, mountains, sweat, exhaustion, danger. Even his documentaries carry the sensation that the filmmaker himself has entered the landscape rather than observed it from safe distance.

In one of the most quoted moments from Burden of Dreams, Herzog declares: “We have to articulate ourselves, otherwise we would be cows in the field.” The line became legendary enough to inspire podcasts, merchandise, endless online circulation. But stripped from meme culture, the quote reveals something central about Herzog’s worldview. Art is not decoration. It is humanity’s refusal to remain passive before existence.

This is why Fitzcarraldo still matters.

Not because modern filmmakers should literally drag ships across mountains. Not because suffering automatically produces greatness. Not because the myth of the tyrannical auteur deserves preservation. But because the film documents an intensity of belief increasingly difficult to imagine within contemporary culture artistic ambition so absolute that it reshapes reality around itself.

The image of the ship climbing the mountain now feels almost allegorical for cinema itself. In an age where images can be generated frictionlessly by algorithms, Herzog reminds us of a different relationship between art and reality: one rooted in resistance, gravity, friction, and risk. His films insist that discovery requires contact with the world, not merely its simulation.

Much like the dreamers populating his documentaries and fiction features alike, Herzog does not simply observe existence. He advances toward it with endless curiosity, choosing engagement over distance again and again. Where others see hostile terrain, absurdity, failure, or futility, he still sees conquest an endless conquest as the stubborn human refusal to surrender imagination before impossibility.

And perhaps this is why Werner Herzog continues to matter today, even or especially in the age of artificial intelligence. The ship still has to cross the mountain.

Elena Rubashevska

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SAS:
One Continuous Adventure

Ivan Tolstoy

ASSA — Author Solovyov Sergei Alexandrovich — this interpretation of the titleof the Russian master's cult film as an acronym of his name was put forward by Sergei Bugaev Africa, the actor who played the boy Bananan. It may not be the most accurate explanation of the title, but it defines Sergei Alexandrovich himself with remarkable precision. He was truly a great author: not only in cinema, theater productions, festivals, and books, but also as the author and artist of his own life, and of the life around him.

This article will not be a piece of film scholarship; there will be no grand analysis of the master's films here. It will be, rather, an ode of love and a message sent into the past from a student to a teacher — a teacher who, unlike the audience at the Dhaka Film Festival in 2021, never had the chance to see my film.

SAS — Sergei Alexandrovich Solovyov — was the abbreviation we, his pupils and students, always used for him. His master's course in VGIK produced directors known all over the world: Alexei German Jr. (a participant in Berlin, Cannes, and Venice), Rashid Nugmanov (Berlin, Venice, Cheva-



About a Hero, 2024, film poster

lier of the Order of Arts and Letters in France), Sergei Livnev, Anna Melikyan... the list could go on. His main principle of teaching was a rule he had overheard from his own teacher – Mikhail Romm: 'Directing cannot be taught; it can only be learned.' And that was how it was: in his directing classes there was more poetry than craft. The only 'lesson' I remember was the day an oak leaf, carried from outside by a strong gust of wind, flew into our classroom, performed several pirouettes, and landed on his head. "That is cinema!"

Of course, we understood that behind a certain boyishness stood a man who knew exactly what he was doing, and we kept peeking, trying to find the meaning inside his words. And, of course, we learned from his films.

I will try to speak about his oeuvre in the chronology in which I watched his films — perhaps the most incorrect chronology for getting to know this director. In Yasnaya Polyana, where I lived for seventeen years, and where Leo Tolstoy had lived his whole life before me, I, at the age of fifteen, had the chance to see Assa-2, which Sergei Solovyov himself was presenting there. It is the sequel to his best-known film, Assa, and perhaps his least accepted film by the mass audience — which is not entirely surprising. It is a highly avant-garde continuation of a story beloved by millions: the beautiful Alika, the free artist Bananan, and the gangster Krymov, now transported — together, of course, with their children — into the reality of the new Russia. It is a very free film (that word will appear often here), one that refuses to indulge the viewer's desires. Viewers were most likely not ready for the return of beloved characters under entirely new circumstances, told in an entirely new cinematic language.

The second Assa became something intermediate between the first film and his Anna Karenina, a project he had dreamed of making for almost twenty years. In the film, the characters are shooting a film based on Tolstoy's novel, and Karenina's tragic story rhymes with the life of the grown-up Alika and her daughter Anna.

The first Assa was a film about youth, freedom, music, and the feeling that life can be changed by one brave gesture. The second part appears in a different world: more cynical, depleted, and strange. That is why Solovyov does not offer the viewer a simple nostalgic return to beloved characters. Instead, he shows that the past cannot be revived in its former form — everyone's beloved Bananan here either appears as a sunflower-seed seller, or as a head without a body existing outside time and space, or perhaps does not appear at all. On the contrary, Solovyov shows that time has passed through everyone — through Alika, through the country, through music, through the very possibility of being free in the way freedom seemed possible at the end of the 1980s. In this sense, the second Assa is not a film about return, but about the impossibility of return.

The release of the second Assa was very important as a bridge toward Anna Karenina, and, as far as I know, the first film awaited the latter in distribution.

And then, the following year, Solovyov brought Anna Karenina to the same place — Yasnaya Polyana. At that time, it was for him, almost the work of a lifetime.
This is a film that matters by the very fact

of its existence. It is one of those rare projects that was shot and assembled over years, surviving pauses, returns, shifts in time, and changing production circumstances. The very sensation of a long movement through time is already embedded in its form: the film seems not to have a single moment of birth, but to be gradually composed out of different stages and repeated returns to the same material.

For Solovyov, Anna Karenina was not an attempt simply to adapt the novel. Rather, it was a long conversation with the text — a text to which he returned at different times and in different states of cinema, both inner and outer.

After the second Assa and Anna Karenina, in my own chronology of watching SAS's films, comes One Hundred Days After Childhood — one of Solovyov's brightest and most delicate films. At first glance, it is a simple story about teenagers in a summer camp, first love, jealousy, and growing up. But Solovyov films it as a great event in the inner life of young people. What interests him is not so much the plot as the very movement of feeling: the way a person first encounters love, pain, awkwardness, beauty, and the impossibility of explaining everything in words. In this film, childhood does not end loudly or dramatically, but almost imperceptibly — through a glance, a pause, an offense, a confession, a chance meeting. Solovyov combines the everyday life of Young Pioneers with the world of art, literature, theater, and Russian estate culture — weaving different media into cinema was one of his favorite devices — and so an ordinary summer becomes a space of first spiritual experience. The characters are still very young, but the director treats their feelings with utmost seriousness, without condescension or sentimentality. Love here is shown not as a child's game, but as the first true trial of the soul. Visually, too, the film resembles not everyday life, but a painted memory: soft, sunlit, slightly sad. The Solovyov we recognize is already visible in it: a director for whom youth is always connected with beauty, freedom, and the painful discovery of the world. That is why One Hundred Days After Childhood should be seen not simply as a film about first love, but as a film about the moment when a person first understands: childhood has passed, and an entirely different life lies ahead.

Tender Age is built in an entirely different way — perhaps one of Solovyov's most personal films, because in it he speaks not only about his son's generation, but also about a certain guilt before that generation, or anxiety for them. It is the story of a boy growing up in a country where everything changes too quickly: Soviet Pioneer childhood comes to an end, adults lose their authority, and the new life turns out to be rougher and more dangerous than promised. Solovyov films this world in places excessively, at times almost carnivalesque — something Solovyov always knew how to do — but that form is exactly what suits a time when the old has already collapsed, and the new has not yet become normal life. The film has love, friendship, tenderness, but beside them all the time stand war, crime, confusion, and the feeling of a lost future. That is why Tender Age cannot be perceived simply as a romantic story about first love. It is rather a film about children entering adult life without real guides. And yet we give them the right to cope on their own, which, in the end, one way or another, they will.

Among Solovyov's less obvious films that I love is Melodies of a White Night — a touching movie about the love between a Soviet musician and a Japanese pianist, and one of the most tender and musical films of Solovyov's early period. What matters more than the plot is the very feeling of fleeting happiness. Solovyov films love as a state almost impossible to express in words: it exists in pauses, glances, music, the white nights of Leningrad, and the silence of Japanese landscapes. There are no major dramatic turns in this film — it flows like a melody, where the essential thing is not the event but the intonation. The characters seem to understand in advance that their happiness cannot last long, and this makes every meeting especially fragile. Leningrad and Kyoto are not merely settings here, but two poetic spaces between which feeling is born. Isaac Schwartz's music helps Solovyov speak about love without direct explanation — as if the film itself becomes a romance about closeness and parting. It is a quiet film, but in that quietness there is strength. It reminds us that sometimes the most important things in life happen almost without words — and remain with us as melody.

Solovyov's musicality can be traced throughout his work. Or, more precisely not musicality, but the ability to hit the nerve of the present. For Assa, not without the help of Rashid Nugmanov and his Yahha, he found Viktor Tsoi, who became the voice of a generation. Or Shnur, Sergei Shnurov, in the second Assa, performing in the finale no longer 'Changes.' And, of course, Basta in Ke-Dy, the last feature film SAS made while we were in our second year. Perhaps this is the master's most unseen film — and, what is especially painful, a film misunderstood by the viewer.

In Ke-Dy, Solovyov returns once again to his central theme: youth as a state of the soul, not the age written in a passport. At first glance, it is an almost accidental story about a young man named Sasha (nicknamed Jagger), a girl named Amira, a child named Mitya, and a pair of sneakers bought before leaving for the army. But for



About a Hero, 2024, film poster

Solovyov, accident is always more important than a neat plot: it is from chance encounters, pauses, conversations, and absurd actions that his sense of life is born. Ke-Dy was called uneven, strange, at times falling apart — I cannot agree with any of those statements — but in that 'falling apart' there is its own truth, as if the director deliberately rejects smoothness in order to preserve the living breath of the moment. This film does not try to be contemporary in the direct sense: the rapper Basta, shopping malls, and contemporary characters are necessary to Solovyov not for fashion, but for a new variation of his eternal conversation about love, freedom, and tender age. Once again, he looks at young people not from above, but almost as equals, with curiosity and tenderness. The film contains many quotations, references, old cultural shadows — from The Cranes Are Flying to Jules Verne — but they do not turn the picture into a museum. On the contrary, they show how the past continues to live inside the present. Ke-Dy is not a grand dramaturgical construction, but rather a lyrical composition in which intonation, gesture, light, musical pause, and sudden human closeness matter. Solovyov seems to be making a film 'about nothing,' but precisely this 'nothing' turns out to be a conversation about the most important things: fear of the future, the impossibility of growing up according to the rules, and the brief happiness that appears from nowhere and disappears just as quickly. That is why Ke-Dy should be understood not as a late attempt by the master to speak the language of youth, but as yet another attempt to capture vanishing youth — not as in Assa, and not tragically, as in Tender Age, but contemporarily: confused, funny, defenseless, alive and beautiful. Something similar existed in Odnoklassniki, written by another of his talented students, Sonya Karpunina. The endless force of youth, which never left Solovyov, grew again and again thanks to his young co-authors. SAS's penultimate film was, naturally, also compared to his magnum opus and it was called Assa-light. Although it seems to me that if we must hang labels on it, we might prefer One Hundred Days After Childhood-2.

Solovyov comes to Odnoklassniki as to another chapter of his endless film about youth — only now youth is no longer lit by the Pioneer sun of One Hundred Days After Childhood, nor by the rock-and-roll atmosphere of Assa, nor by the bitter freedom of Tender Age. This is youth after all the myths: the youth of the 2000s, which seems to have everything — money, a cool graduation party, limousines, nighttime Moscow (in the 2010s, this is especially important), the possibility of going anywhere — but lacks the main thing: an inner language with which to understand what all of it is for. Solovyov again films children entering adult life, but now this entrance resembles not an initiation, but a confused wandering through a space where freedom too easily turns into melancholy and boredom.

I want to remember two of his last films: the short films P.S. Uti-Uti-Uti (which premiered at the Rotterdam Film Festival) and Whoever Doesn't Love Handel Gets a Kick in the Pants (a film that was never shown anywhere, and that almost no one has seen).

Uti-Uti-Uti was conceived in Yasnaya Polyana, where Sergei Alexandrovich was showing his Ke-Dy to Russian writers. After the screening, we found ourselves at

the same table, and Sergei Alexandrovich began recalling a favorite place of his on a lake near Milan. Without embarrassment, Stasya Tolstaya, a student of his, said that she had a script about a lake and two girl. SAS, suddenly inspired, asked her to send him the text the very next day. Of course, there was no script. There was only one phrase in her head: 'Uti-uti-uti.' Overnight, the script was written, and two weeks later the film was shot — not in Milan, but at Mosfilm. This story of two young girls by a pond who encounter an old fisherman — played by Solovyov himself, who in the film masterfully performs just one action: he raises a finger to his lips and says, 'Shhh' — was born out of a pleasant evening and a funny phrase, screened at Rotterdam and Spirit of Fire, and in general became a landmark event for Russian cinema. Solovyov insisted on the formulation 'P.S.' in the title. I wouldn't say that this is the afterword to Sergei Alexandrovich's work; the postscript is rather that luminous appearance of him as the old fisherman in the mist.

In her memories of Solovyov, the author of Uti-Uti-Uti , Stasya Tolstaya, writes:

'He understood that our naive, desperate, almost student-like adventure would become the final cloud of smoke — he adored using smoke both in cinema and in theater — through which all of his work would be visible. Not a conclusion, not a full stop — but an afterword.
And so it remained:
P.S. Uti-Uti-Uti.
And in that was all of SAS.
All of him — a charming old man in the mist.
A man who exists and disappears at the same time. Who tries to catch a fish in a pond — patiently, stubbornly, with a child-like faith in the impossible. And whom two young girls disturb — not out of vulgarity, but because of the very nature of the world, where beauty always distracts from the main thing.
He laughed at that image. And he was that image.
He never gave direct answers, but he always left keys. He never explained everything to the end, but he always pushed you toward the place which is frightening and thrilling at the same time.'

This story is deeply symbolic, and all of Sergei Alexandrovich is in it — a man ready for any adventure, any escapade. SAS's entire life was one continuous adventure.

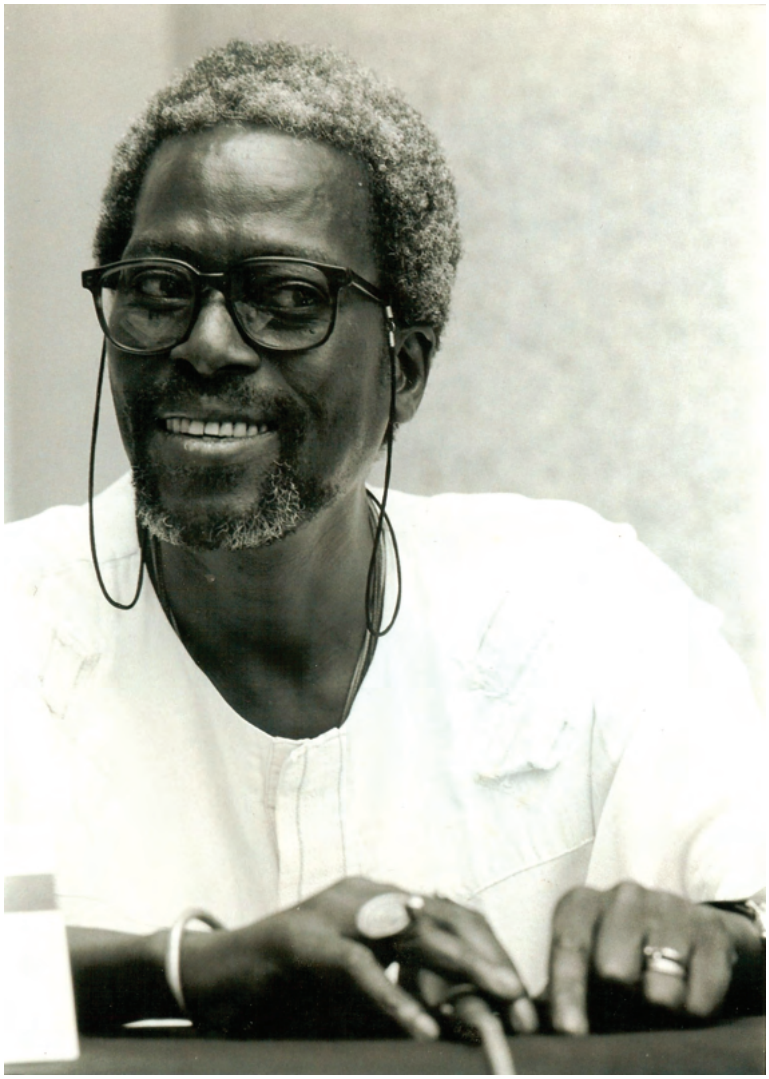
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Djibril Diop Mambéty: The Rebel Poet of African Cinema

Md Rabbi Islam



Djibril Diop Mambety. Photo Carlo Reguzzi.

Djibril Diop Mambéty did not leave behind many films. He left behind something more difficult to measure. He left a voice, a rhythm, a way of looking at people who are usually passed by. His cinema came from the street, from memory, from laughter, from hunger, from children, from music, and from the wounded dreams of a country still learning how to live after colonial rule. He was born in 1945 in Colobane, near Dakar in Senegal. Colobane was not simply the place where he began life. It became the place his cinema kept returning to, even when his characters dreamed of leaving it. He once said, "All my films speak about the city I was born in." That sentence feels like a key placed in the reader's hand. To understand Mambéty, one must begin there, in Colobane, among ordinary people and open roads, among the poor and the proud, among the restless and the forgotten. The child of a Muslim cleric and a member of the Lebou community, Mambéty grew up close to a world of speech, ritual, music, faith, and oral memory. These things would later pass into his films. His work never felt like cinema made only from cinema. It felt as if it had also been made from stories told in court-

yards, from jokes heard in markets, from songs floating through streets, from the sharp eyes of people who had little but saw everything.

Before he became a filmmaker, Mambéty entered the world of acting. He studied drama and worked at the Daniel Sorano National Theater in Dakar. But he was not the kind of artist who settled easily inside institutions. He was dismissed from the theater for disciplinary reasons. That detail sounds small, but it fits the shape of his life. Mambéty was not made for obedience. He was made for movement. He did not study filmmaking in the formal way. He had no official film-school training. He taught himself. He learned by looking, by listening, by acting, by walking through Dakar, by watching the people around him, and by trusting the images that rose from inside him. This gave his cinema a freedom that still feels rare. His films do not behave like ordinary films. They bend, jump, sing, mock, repeat, and dream. They can be funny and painful in the same breath. His first short film, Contras' City, made in 1969, already showed the young filmmaker's eye for contradiction. Dakar appears there as a city divided between colonial memory and African life. Old European buildings stand beside local streets. Official spaces exist beside the energy of ordinary people. The city is not calm. It is full of signs. Mambéty looks at it as someone who knows that every wall, every street, and every body carries history.

The next year he made Badou Boy, a film filled with mischief and chase. Its young rebel moves through Dakar with the energy of someone who refuses to be caught. Mambéty was already drawn to such figures. He liked people who slipped away from control. He liked boys who ran, musicians who dreamed, women who returned, children who resisted, and poor people who found ways to survive. He did not need perfect heroes. He needed people who were alive. In 1973, Mambéty made the film that would place him among the great names of world cinema. Touki Bouki, also known as The Journey of the Hyena, tells the story of Mory and Anta, two young lovers who want to leave Senegal for France. They dream of Paris. They dream of money, style, freedom, and escape. They want another life, one they imagine is waiting for them across the sea. Yet Touki Bouki is not a simple story about migration. It is a story about desire. Mory and Anta do not only want to travel. They want to become different people. They want to break out of the life around them. France becomes a shining idea. Paris becomes a word full of music. But Mambéty understands that dreams can wound the dreamer. The dream of Europe is beautiful, but it is not innocent. It grows out of poverty, colonial memory, disappointment, and fantasy.

The film does not move in a straight line. It moves like heat, like memory, like a song heard too many times. Images return. Sounds repeat. Reality slips into dream. The lovers steal, run, pose, imagine, and chase a future that may not exist. Josephine Baker's "Paris, Paris, Paris" returns again and again like a spell. The song is bright, but beneath its brightness is sadness. It carries the voice of escape and the pain of wanting to be elsewhere. One image from Touki Bouki is impossible to forget. Mory rides a motorcycle with the skull and horns of a dead animal fixed to the front. It is strange and beautiful. It is also frightening. The motorcycle suggests speed, youth, pride, rebellion, and escape. The skull

suggests death, sacrifice, danger, and memory. Mory rides toward freedom, but death rides with him. In that image, Mambéty gives us the whole film. The ending of Touki Bouki stays like a wound. Anta boards the ship to France. Mory turns back. She leaves. He stays. The dream breaks in two. Mambéty does not explain the moment for us. Maybe Mory is afraid. Maybe he cannot leave Senegal. Maybe Anta has more courage. Maybe leaving is itself a kind of loss. The silence of that ending is part of its beauty. It does not close the story. It lets the story continue inside us.

After Touki Bouki, Mambéty did not quickly move from one feature to another. Nearly twenty years passed before his next feature film. It would be easy to call this a silence, but silence is not always emptiness. For an African filmmaker with a vision as unusual as his, the road to production was not simple. Money was difficult. Support was limited. His imagination did not fit neatly into the expectations of producers or critics. He was not trying to make many films. He was trying to make films that mattered. During that long gap, he made Parlons Grand-mère, a short documentary connected to the making of Idrissa Ouédraogo's Yaaba. Even there, one can feel Mambéty thinking about storytelling itself. He cared about film language, but he did not want it to be a prison. He believed stories had to be reinvented. He believed cinema should not become a slave to grammar. For him, film was closer to magic than machinery. When Hyènes arrived in 1992, it felt like a return and a warning. The film is based on Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play The Visit, but Mambéty made it his own. He brought the story to Colobane. He filled it with Senegalese life, African oral tradition, slow rhythm, satire, ceremony, and terrible beauty.

In Hyènes, a wealthy woman named Linguère Ramatou returns to the town that once rejected her. Years before, she had loved Dramaan Drameh, but he betrayed her. Now she comes back rich beyond imagination. The town is poor. Its people are tired, hungry, and waiting for rescue. Linguère offers them a fortune. But there is one condition. They must kill Dramaan. At first, the people are shocked. They say they would never accept such a thing. They speak of dignity and justice. They insist that no amount of money can buy a human life. But slowly the town begins to change. People begin to buy new shoes, new clothes, and new goods. Credit appears. Desire spreads. No one says openly that Dramaan will die, but everyone begins to act as if the money has already been promised. This is the terror of Hyènes. It shows corruption not as a sudden storm but as a slow change in the weather. The people of Colobane do not become cruel all at once. They become practical. They become hopeful in the wrong way. They tell themselves they are still good. They wait for someone else to name the crime. Mambéty shows how a soul can be sold in small pieces.

He said the enemies in Hyènes were "money, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank." The line is direct, but the film itself is not simple. It is not only about distant institutions or global power. It is also about human weakness. It asks what poverty can do to people. It asks how hunger can make evil seem reasonable. It asks how a community can betray one person while pretending to protect itself. The title is perfect. The hyena is an animal of hunger, laughter, shame, and survival. In

the film, the people of Colobane slowly become hyenas. They gather around money. They wait for the kill. They hide inside the crowd. They laugh, bargain, and look away. By the end, guilt belongs to everyone and therefore to no one. That is the sharpest pain of the film. Still, Mambéty is not cruel to the poor. He knows their suffering. He understands that poverty presses on the body and soul. He knows that dignity is harder to protect when hunger has entered the house. This is why Hyènes is a tragedy rather than a sermon. It does not excuse betrayal, but it understands the ground where betrayal grows.

After the darkness of Hyènes, Mambéty turned toward a smaller and more tender project. He began Tales of Little People, a trilogy that he did not live to finish. These films were meant as a tribute to ordinary people, especially the poor. He once described the poor as "the only truly consistent" people. He saw in them not emptiness but endurance. He saw the daily struggle to protect what is essential. The first film in this project was Le Franc, released in 1994. It tells the story of Marigo, a poor musician whose life has been squeezed by debt and bad luck. His landlady has taken his instrument because he owes rent. He is poor, foolish, funny, stubborn, and full of hope. Like many of Mambéty's characters, he is not heroic in the usual way. He is heroic because he continues. The film is connected to the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc. That economic event may sound distant and official, but Mambéty brings it down to daily life. He shows that money is never only numbers. It is rent, food, music, sleep, shame, and possibility. A decision made far away can enter a poor man's room. It can take away his instrument. It can make his hope look foolish. But Marigo still dreams. Mambéty had a great gift for filming poverty without reducing poor people to suffering. Marigo is not just a victim. He has rhythm, desire, imagination, and comedy. He is ridiculous at times, but never worthless. Through him, Mambéty shows that the poor are not empty figures waiting to be pitied. They are complete human beings. They can be funny, angry, selfish, hopeful, and full of music. The second film in the trilogy was The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun. It was released after Mambéty's death and remains one of his most beautiful works. Its story is simple. Sili, a disabled girl in Dakar, decides to sell newspapers. The newspaper is called Le Soleil, which means "The Sun." That title already feels like a promise. Sili enters a street world controlled by boys. They do not want her there. People underestimate her. Some push her aside. Others treat her as if she has no place in the city. But Sili refuses to disappear. She walks through Dakar with courage. She sells the newspaper. She claims the street. She does not ask for pity. She asks to be seen. This may be Mambéty's gentlest film, but its gentleness is not weak. Sili's struggle carries the force of a whole life. To sell a newspaper becomes an act of courage. To keep walking becomes a form of resistance. To insist on one's place in the world becomes a victory.

In Sili, Mambéty gives us one of his clearest images of dignity. She is poor, young, female, and disabled, yet the film never treats her as helpless. It sees her strength without turning her into a symbol only. She is a child, but she has a seriousness that the adult world lacks. She knows unfairness when she sees it. She answers it by continuing. That is why The Little Girl Who Sold

the Sun feels like a final blessing. After the restless dream of Touki Bouki and the bitter darkness of Hyènes, Mambéty leaves us with a child who keeps going. She does not defeat the whole world. She does something smaller and more powerful. She refuses to vanish. Mambéty died in Paris on July 23, 1998. He was only fifty-three. He was being treated for lung cancer. At the time of his death, he was still working on The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun. The film came to audiences after he was gone, like a letter delivered late but still full of life. His death was early, but his work does not feel small. Some artists build their legacy through quantity. Mambéty built his through intensity. His films are few, but each one opens a world. Each one has its own weather, rhythm, humor, and wound. Each one continues after it ends.

To pay tribute to Djibril Diop Mambéty is to honor a filmmaker who trusted the people others ignored. He trusted street children. He trusted poor musicians. He trusted lovers who dreamed too much. He trusted women who crossed oceans and returned with power. He trusted faces marked by hardship. He trusted laughter even when the world was cruel. He also trusted sound. In his films, sound is never only background. Songs carry desire. Noise carries pressure. Silence carries judgment. The sound of "Paris" in Touki Bouki is not just music. It is a dream calling from across the sea. The quiet spaces in Hyènes are not empty. They are filled with fear. Mambéty understood that cinema is not only what the eye sees. It is also what the ear remembers. His films gave African cinema a new kind of freedom. He showed that African stories did not have to be told in only one way. They could be political and poetic. They could be serious and playful. They could use myth, satire, modern editing, oral tradition, music, and silence together. They could speak about poverty without pity. They could speak about history without becoming heavy. They could be deeply local and still speak to the world. Mambéty did not make Africa simple for anyone. He did not offer easy pride or easy despair. He showed beauty and failure together. He showed the dream of Europe and the pain behind it. He showed the corruption of money and the weakness of people who need it. He showed children not as decoration but as carriers of hope. He showed the poor not as shadows but as human beings with full inner lives. His characters remain with us because they are unfinished. Mory still stands between the ship and the land. Anta still walks toward another future. Linguère still returns with money and memory. Dramaan still waits as his town betrays him. Marigo still chases hope through poverty. Sili still sells the sun. They remain alive because Mambéty did not close them inside simple meanings. There is something deeply human in this. We all know something of wanting to leave. We all know something of being unable to leave. We all know what money can do to people. We all know what it means to want dignity. We all know what it means to be unseen. Mambéty's films begin in Senegal, but they travel far because they touch these shared wounds. He was a poet of Colobane, but he was not a small poet. He turned one place into a whole universe. The road from Colobane to Dakar became a road of memory and desire. The ship to France became a question about exile. The town in Hyènes became a mirror of the modern world. A poor musician became the face of endur-

ance. A little girl selling newspapers became the image of courage. This is why his cinema still matters. It does not grow old because it was never built on fashion. It was built on hunger, laughter, dreams, and truth. It was built on the lives of people who continue even when the world gives them little. It was built on freedom. Djibril Diop Mambéty was the dreamer of Colobane. He was also one of cinema's great freedom-makers. His films move like roads from the city to the sea, from the sea to exile, from exile to return, from return to memory. They do not end neatly. They stay open. They keep breathing. Somewhere in that breathing, the motorcycle still races with the skull on its front. The ship still waits. The hyenas still laugh. Marigo still protects his fragile dream. Sili still walks through Dakar selling the sun. Mambéty is gone, but the dream he gave to cinema is still alive.

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THE ARCHITECT OF CINEMATIC PERFECTION
Stanley Kubrick's Films, Life, and Visual Genius

Md Rafiul Islam (Rafi)

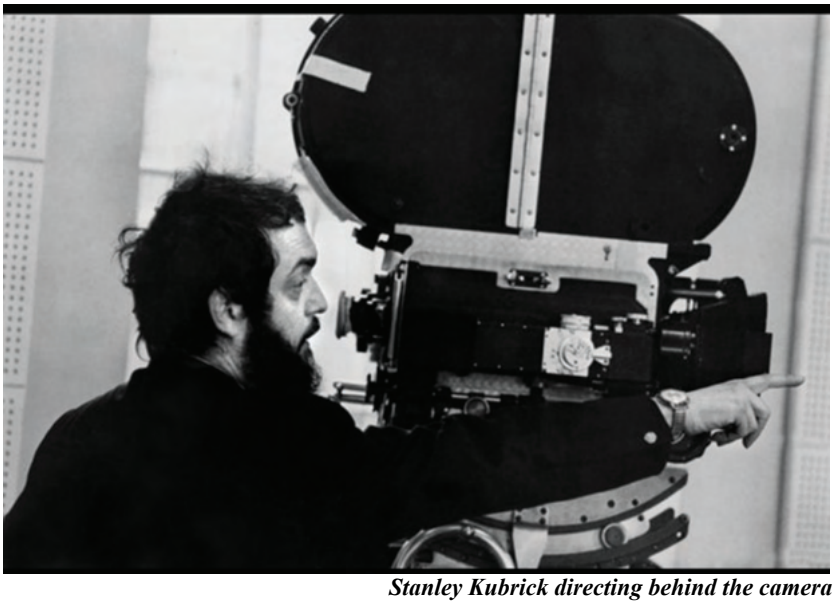
Few filmmakers have shaped the language of cinema as profoundly as Stanley Kubrick. Celebrated for his visual precision, intellectual depth, and uncompromising artistic vision, Kubrick transformed filmmaking into a medium capable of exploring humanity's most complex questions. His films challenged audiences to reflect on war, technology, power, violence, and the nature of existence itself, while continuously pushing the boundaries of cinematic storytelling.

From Paths of Glory and Dr. Strangelove to 2001: A Space Odyssey, The Shining, and Full Metal Jacket, Kubrick demonstrated a rare ability to reinvent himself across genres without losing his distinctive voice. His innovative use of composition, camera movement, sound, and visual symbolism continues to influence generations of filmmakers, making his work essential study material in film schools around the world.

What distinguished Kubrick from many of his contemporaries was his relentless pursuit of perfection. Known for extensive research, technical innovation, and extraordinary attention to detail, he approached filmmaking with the discipline of a scientist and the imagination of an artist.

Although he directed only thirteen feature films during a career spanning nearly five decades, each project left an enduring mark on world cinema.

This article explores the life, creative philosophy, and cinematic legacy of Stanley Kubrick, examining how a young photographer from New York evolved into one of the most influential filmmakers in the history of motion pictures.



Stanley Kubrick directing behind the camera

Growing Up in the Bronx: Chess, Photography, and Curiosity

Stanley Kubrick was born on July



Young Stanley Kubrick during his early years as a photographer

26, 1928, in the Bronx, New York City, into a middle-class Jewish family. While he was not particularly distinguished in formal academics, he possessed an intense curiosity and a strong habit of independent learning that would later define his creative career.

Two early influences proved especially significant: chess and photography. Introduced by his father, Jacques Kubrick, both pursuits helped shape his intellectual and artistic development. Chess taught him patience, strategy, and analytical thinking, while photography awakened his fascination with visual storytelling. At the age of twelve, he received a camera and soon began photographing everyday life across New York, developing a keen eye for composition, perspective, and human behavior. His talent became evident in 1945 when a photograph he captured was purchased by Look magazine. The publication later hired him as a staff photographer, providing invaluable professional experience. Through assignments that documented ordinary people, public figures, and post-war American life, Kubrick learned how images could communicate emotion, atmosphere, and narrative without relying on words.

These formative years served as an informal education in visual storytelling. Photography taught him to observe carefully, think visually, and construct meaning through images, skills that would later become fundamental to his filmmaking style. By the late 1940s, fascinated by the possibilities of motion pictures, Kubrick began looking beyond still photography toward cinema, setting the stage for a remarkable journey that would transform both his life and the art of filmmaking itself.

From Still Images to Moving Pictures

Stanley Kubrick's transition from photography to filmmaking was driven by a simple realization: a single image could capture a moment, but cinema could explore an entire world. While working for Look magazine in the late 1940s, he developed a keen visual sensibility, learning how composition, light, and human expression could communicate meaning without words. These lessons would later become the foundation of his cinematic style.

Unlike many filmmakers of his era, Kubrick received no formal film education. Instead, he taught himself through observation, experimentation, and an unwavering curiosity about the medium. His early documentaries, including Day of the Fight (1951), Flying Padre (1951), and The Seafarers (1953), were modest in scale but significant in shaping his understanding of visual storytelling, rhythm, and cinematic structure.

Kubrick's artistic ambitions soon extended beyond documentary filmmaking. His early feature films ,Fear and Desire (1953), Killer's Kiss (1955), and particularly The Killing (1956) revealed a filmmaker developing a distinctive voice. These works showcased his growing interest in psychological tension, narrative experimentation, and meticulous visual design, qualities that would later define his masterpieces.

More importantly, this period marked the transformation of a talented photographer into a serious filmmaker. Kubrick was no longer simply recording reality; he was constructing it. By the mid-1950s, he had established the artistic and technical foundations of a career that would ultimately reshape the possibilities of modern cinema. Breaking into Hollywood

By the mid-1950s, Stanley Kubrick had already begun attracting attention as one of America's most promising young filmmakers. The breakthrough came with The Killing (1956), a crime thriller praised for its innovative narrative structure and visual precision. Although modest in scale, the film revealed Kubrick's growing confidence as a storyteller and demonstrated his willingness to challenge conventional cinematic form.

The film's success brought him to the attention of actor Kirk Douglas, leading to Paths of Glory(1957), a powerful anti-war drama that transformed Kubrick from a talented newcomer into a serious artistic voice. Through its unflinching portrayal of military injustice and human suffering, the film showcased themes that would remain central throughout his career: authority, morality, and the fragility of human dignity.

Kubrick's rising reputation led to Spartacus (1960), his first major Hollywood production. While the film achieved critical and commercial success, the experience exposed him to the limitations of the studio system. Creative decisions were often shaped by producers and executives, leaving little room for the complete artistic control he valued.

This experience proved decisive. Rather than adapting to Hollywood, Kubrick chose independence. Relocating to England, he began developing a filmmaking approach defined by creative freedom, meticulous craftsmanship, and uncompromising artistic standards.

By the early 1960s, Kubrick had achieved more than professional success; he had established the principles that would define his legacy. From The Killing to Spartacus, he emerged not simply as a Hollywood director, but as an artist determined to expand the possibilities of cinema itself.



A scene from Paths of Glory (1957)

Paths of Glory and the Rise of a Visionary

While The Killing announced Stanley Kubrick's arrival, Paths of Glory (1957) revealed the filmmaker he would become. Widely regarded as one of the greatest anti-war films ever made, it established Kubrick as a director capable of combining visual sophistication with profound moral inquiry.

Set during World War I, the film examines the devastating consequences of power, bureaucracy, and institutional injustice. Rather than glorifying combat, Kubrick focused on the human cost of war, portraying ordinary soldiers trapped within a system shaped by ambition and indifference. This humanistic perspective would become a recurring feature of his cinema.

Equally significant was the film's visual achievement. Kubrick's fluid tracking shots through the trenches and his precise use of composition demonstrated an emerging mastery of cinematic language. Every frame serves both an aesthetic and narrative purpose, reflecting his belief that images could communicate meaning as powerfully as dialogue.

More than a critical success, Paths of Glory marked the emergence of Kubrick's artistic identity. The themes that would later define his greatest works power, morality, violence, and the vulnerability of the individual are already present here. In many ways, the film represents the first fully realized expression of the vision that would shape modern cinema for decades to come.

2001: A Space Odyssey and the Future of Cinema

If Paths of Glory established Stanley Kubrick as a major filmmaker, 2001: A Space Odyssey(1968) cemented his place among cinema's greatest visionaries. More than a science-fiction film, it was a bold meditation on evolution, technology, intelligence, and humanity's place in the universe.

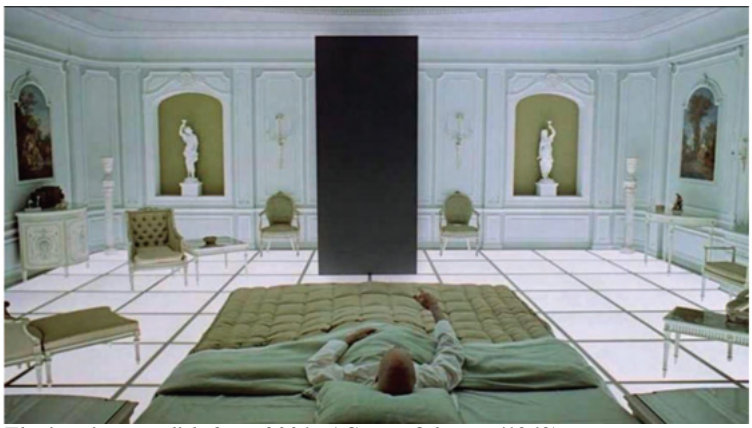
Created in collaboration with Arthur C. Clarke, the film emerged during the height of the Space Race but rejected the conventions of mainstream science fiction. Rather than focusing on adventure or spectacle, Kubrick explored profound philosophical questions about human progress and the relationship between people and machines. The iconic HAL 9000 became one of cinema's most memorable representations of artificial intelligence, raising concerns that remain strikingly relevant in the digital age.

What truly distinguished 2001 was its revolutionary visual language. Long before the arrival of digital effects, Kubrick created a cinematic experience of unprecedented realism and scale. His use of symmetrical compositions, extended takes, and meticulously designed imagery transformed space into both a physical frontier and a philosophical landscape. Every frame reflected an extraordinary level of artistic precision.

Equally influential was the film's innovative use of classical music. By pairing images of the future with compositions by Richard Strauss, Johann Strauss II, and György Ligeti, Kubrick elevated science fiction into cinematic poetry. The result was a film that communicated as much through image, sound, and atmosphere as through narrative.

Initially divisive, 2001: A Space Odyssey is now widely regarded as one of the most important films ever made. Its influence extends far beyond the science-fiction genre, inspiring generations of filmmakers, artists, and scholars. More than five decades after its release, the film continues to challenge audiences to imagine the future while reflecting on what it means to be human. Through 2001, Kubrick did not simply envision the future of humanity ,he redefined the future of cinema itself.

The Perfectionist Behind the Camera



The iconic monolith from 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

If one quality came to define Stanley Kubrick's career, it was his relentless pursuit of perfection. For Kubrick, filmmaking was not merely a profession but an artistic discipline that demanded patience, precision, and absolute commitment. Every detail from performance and cinematography to production design and sound was approached with extraordinary care.

Kubrick became famous for extensive research, lengthy production schedules, and an insistence on multiple takes. He believed that great cinema emerged through refinement, often pushing scenes far beyond conventional limits in search of emotional authenticity and visual precision. While his methods were sometimes criticized as demanding, they reflected a filmmaker unwilling to compromise his artistic vision.

This perfectionism was evident in works such as Barry Lyndon (1975), where he employed specially modified lenses to film scenes using natural candlelight, creating images that resembled classical paintings. Such innovations demonstrated his unique ability to combine technical experimentation with aesthetic beauty.

Yet Kubrick's pursuit of perfection was never simply about control. It stemmed from a belief that cinema could achieve the same artistic depth as literature, music, or painting. By treating filmmaking as both a craft and an art form, he expanded the possibilities of the medium and established a standard of excellence that continues to inspire filmmakers today.

More than any individual technique, it was this uncompromising commitment to artistic integrity that defined Stanley Kubrick's legacy and secured his reputation as one of cinema's greatest masters.

Mastering the Lens: Kubrick's Cinematic Language

Beyond his films and their themes, Stanley Kubrick's enduring influence lies in his mastery of visual storytelling. Few directors have developed a cinematic language as distinctive and recognizable as his.

Through composition, camera movement, lighting, and sound, Kubrick transformed every frame into a carefully constructed artistic statement.



A memorable frame from The Shining (1980)

One of the defining characteristics of his style was the use of symmetry and one-point perspective. Characters often appear centered within meticulously designed spaces, creating images that are both visually striking and psychologically revealing. These compositions convey order, isolation, and tension, becoming an essential part of the emotional experience of his films.

Kubrick was equally innovative in his use of camera movement. His fluid tracking shots invite viewers into the physical and psychological worlds of his characters, while his deliberate pacing creates a sense of immersion rarely achieved in mainstream cinema. Combined with his pioneering approach to lighting most notably in Barry Lyndon his images often resemble moving paintings rather than conventional film scenes.

Another hallmark of Kubrick's cinematic language was his reliance on visual symbolism. Rather than explaining ideas through dialogue, he allowed images, spaces, and objects to carry deeper meaning. This visual richness encourages audiences to interpret his films actively, contributing to their enduring fascination and critical relevance.

Perhaps most importantly, Kubrick understood cinema as a synthesis of image and sound. His use of classical music alongside carefully composed visuals created moments of extraordinary beauty, tension, and philosophical depth. Through this unique artistic approach, Kubrick demonstrated that film could function not only as entertainment but also as a sophisticated form of visual and intellectual expression. Today, his cinematic language remains one of the most studied and influential in film history, continuing to inspire filmmakers, scholars and audiences around the world.

The Shining, Full Metal Jacket, and Later Masterpieces

By the late 1970s, Stanley Kubrick had already established himself as one of cinema's most innovative filmmakers. Yet his later works demonstrated that he remained committed to artistic reinvention, continuously exploring new genres while deepening his examination of human psychology and social institutions.

With The Shining (1980), Kubrick transformed the horror genre into a study of isolation, paranoia, and psychological

collapse. Rather than relying on conventional scares, he created an atmosphere of unease through meticulous composition, haunting sound design, and fluid camera movement. The film's visual style and unsettling ambiguity have made it one of the most influential horror films ever produced.

In Full Metal Jacket (1987), Kubrick returned to themes of power and dehumanization, examining how war reshapes individual identity. Through its stark portrayal of military training and combat, the film challenges romanticized notions of heroism and exposes the psychological consequences of violence. Like Paths of Glory, it reflects Kubrick's enduring skepticism toward institutions and authority.
His final film, Eyes Wide Shut (1999), shifted from public conflict to private desire. Exploring themes of intimacy, secrecy, and human vulnerability, the film revealed a more introspective side of Kubrick's artistry. Its dreamlike atmosphere and psychological complexity continue to invite interpretation and debate.

Although vastly different in genre and tone, these films share concerns that run throughout Kubrick's work: isolation, power, fear, identity, and the hidden dimensions of human behavior. Together, they demonstrate the remarkable range of a filmmaker who never stopped experimenting or challenging audiences. More than late-career successes, they represent the culmination of an artistic vision that continues to influence contemporary cinema.

The Legacy of Stanley Kubrick

Few filmmakers have influenced cinema as profoundly as Stanley Kubrick. More than two decades after his death, his films continue to shape how cinema is created, studied, and understood. Their enduring relevance lies not only in technical innovation but also in their ability to confront timeless questions about power, technology, morality, violence, and the human condition.

Kubrick's influence extends far beyond his own filmography. His visual precision, thematic depth, and commitment to artistic integrity have inspired generations of filmmakers, while his work remains a cornerstone of film education worldwide. Directors, cinematographers, editors, and screenwriters continue to study his methods, not merely for their technical brilliance but for their ability to combine intellectual complexity with emotional impact.

Perhaps Kubrick's greatest achievement was his belief that cinema could be both artistically ambitious and widely accessible. He challenged audiences to think critically without sacrificing the immersive power of storytelling, proving that film could function simultaneously as entertainment, philosophy, and art.

Yet Kubrick's legacy is defined by more than influence alone. He expanded the possibilities of what cinema could achieve, transforming it into a medium capable of exploring humanity's deepest fears, aspirations, and mysteries. His films continue to inspire discussion, reinterpretation, and discovery, ensuring that each generation finds new meanings within his work.

In this sense, Stanley Kubrick remains more than a celebrated filmmaker from the past. His ideas, images, and artistic vision continue to shape the future of cinema,

securing his place among the most influential artists of the twentieth century.

The Living Spirit of Cinema

Stanley Kubrick's journey from a young photographer in New York to one of cinema's most influential filmmakers is ultimately a story of curiosity, discipline, and artistic courage. Throughout his career, he refused to accept creative limitations, constantly challenging both himself and his audience to see cinema as more than entertainment.

What makes Kubrick's work enduring is its timelessness. Decades after their release, his films continue to provoke questions about technology, power, morality, identity, and the human condition. Rather than offering simple answers, they invite viewers to think, interpret, and engage with complexity qualities that remain increasingly valuable in an age of instant consumption.

For students of film and television, Kubrick represents more than a legendary director; he represents a way of thinking about cinema. His work demonstrates that every creative decision whether involving image, sound, movement, or narrative can contribute to a deeper artistic vision. Through his meticulous craftsmanship and intellectual ambition, he expanded the possibilities of cinematic expression.

Perhaps the most enduring lesson of Kubrick's career is the value of curiosity. He approached filmmaking as a lifelong process of exploration, never ceasing to experiment, question, and innovate. That spirit continues to resonate with filmmakers and audiences across generations.

More than twenty years after his death, Stanley Kubrick remains a living presence in world cinema. His films continue to inspire, challenge, and captivate, proving that great art does not belong to a single era. In redefining what cinema could achieve, Kubrick left behind not only a body of remarkable work but a lasting vision of film as an art form capable of illuminating the deepest dimension of human experience.

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The Road Beyond the Horizon: The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami

Reaty Akter

Imagine a traveler walking along an unfamiliar road at dusk. There is no destination marked on a map, no dramatic event waiting at the end of the journey. The road curves gently through dusty hills, disappearing beyond the horizon. A soft wind moves through the trees. Somewhere in the distance, a dog barks. The traveler pauses, uncertain whether to continue or turn back. Yet he keeps walking.



Abbas Kiarostami (1940–2016)

Years later, he may not remember where the road led. He may not recall the names of the villages he passed or the faces of the strangers he met. What remains is something less tangible but more enduring: the feeling of having truly seen the world for a brief moment, of noticing the silence between words, the beauty hidden in ordinary things, and the humanity shared between strangers.

This imagined traveler could easily belong to a film by Abbas Kiarostami.

A road disappearing into the horizon, a child searching for a friend, a man driving through the dusty hills of Iran. In the cinema of Abbas Kiarostami, these are never merely images. They are questions quiet, patient, and deeply human. His films

do not rush toward answers. Instead, they invite us to linger within uncertainty, to observe carefully, and to discover meaning where we least expect it.

There are filmmakers who tell stories, and there are filmmakers who teach us how to see. Abbas Kiarostami belonged to the latter category. Throughout a career spanning more than four decades, he transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary, revealing profound truths through the smallest gestures and the simplest moments. His cinema was not built on spectacle or dramatic excess; it was built on observation, silence, and an unwavering faith in humanity.

Born on June 22, 1940, in Tehran, Iran, Kiarostami developed a passion for visual art long before he became a filmmaker. As a child, he was fascinated by drawing and painting, often finding comfort in observing the world around him. This habit of observation would later become the foundation of his cinematic philosophy.

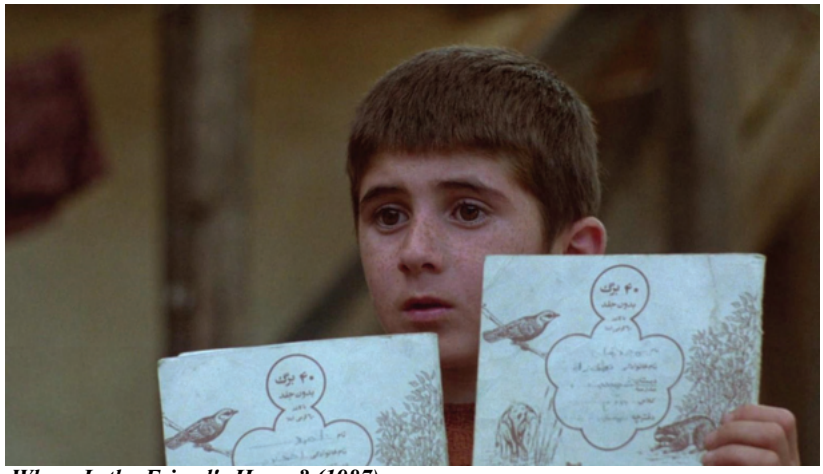
He studied Fine Arts at the University of Tehran and began his professional life as a graphic designer, illustrator, and advertising artist. Designing posters, advertisements, and book covers sharpened his eye for composition, balance, and simplicity qualities that would later become hallmarks of his filmmaking.

His journey into cinema began in 1969 when he joined the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, widely known as Kanun. There, he directed his first short film, Bread and Alley (1970), a deceptively simple story about a boy trying to get home while confronted by a barking dog.

At first glance, the premise appears insignificant. Yet within this brief narrative lies the essence of Kiarostami's artistic worldview. The film observes rather than explains. It trusts the audience. It discovers drama not in extraordinary circumstances but in ordinary experiences. More importantly, it treats a child's fear with dignity and seriousness, refusing to trivialize emotions simply because they belong to a young person.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Iranian cinema underwent a remarkable transformation often referred to as the Iranian New Wave. While many filmmakers focused on political allegories or conventional narratives, Kiarostami turned toward children, rural communities, and everyday life. He understood something many artists overlook: the ordinary contains extraordinary depth when observed carefully.

This philosophy reached one of its most beautiful expressions in Where Is the



Where Is the Friend's House? (1987)

Friend's House? (1987). The film follows Ahmed, a young boy who accidentally takes home his classmate's notebook and becomes determined to return it before school the next day.

The plot could hardly be simpler. Yet Kiarostami transforms this modest premise into a profound exploration of responsibility, empathy, and moral courage. Ahmed's journey through neighboring villages becomes more than a physical search. It becomes an ethical journey. Every door he knocks on and every obstacle he encounters reveals something about society and human relationships.

The film became the first part of what would later be known as the Koker Trilogy, followed by And Life Goes On (1992) and Through the Olive Trees (1994). Unlike the later two films, Where Is the Friend's House? unfolds as a relatively straightforward and linear narrative centered on a child's moral journey. The subsequent films, however, gradually blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. Drawing inspiration from the real-life earthquake that struck northern Iran in 1990 and from the making of the earlier film itself, they create a fascinating dialogue between lived experience and cinematic storytelling. Together, the trilogy stands as one of cinema's most remarkable explorations of the relationship between reality and fiction. After a devastating earthquake struck northern Iran in 1990, Kiarostami returned to the region where Where Is the Friend's House? had been filmed. Rather than making a straightforward documentary, he created And Life Goes On, a fictionalized account of a filmmaker searching for the child actors from the earlier film. Then, within that film, he discovered another story that inspired Through the Olive Trees.

The result is a fascinating cinematic structure where reality inspires fiction, fiction documents reality, and both become inseparable. Kiarostami challenges audiences to reconsider the boundaries between truth and storytelling. Instead of presenting reality as fixed and objective, he reveals it as layered, complex, and endlessly open to interpretation.



In Close-Up(1990) Kiarostami dissolves the boundary between reality and fiction

This interest in ambiguity reached its most celebrated expression in Close-Up (1990), widely regarded as one of the greatest films ever made. Based on a real event, the film tells the story of Hossain Sabzian, a



Taste of Cherry (1997)" won the Palme d'Or at Cannes

man who impersonated filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf and convinced a family that he was a famous director.

Rather than casting actors, Kiarostami invited the real people involved to reenact their own experiences. The result is neither documentary nor fiction. It exists somewhere between the two.

Close-Up asks difficult questions. Why do people tell stories about themselves? Why do they long to become someone else? What role does cinema play in shaping identity?

More importantly, Kiarostami approaches Sabzian not with judgment but with compassion. He recognizes that beneath the deception lies a deeply human desire: the desire to be seen, respected, and understood.

International recognition reached new heights with Taste of Cherry (1997), the film that won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival the highest honour awarded by the festival and one of the most prestigious awards in world cinema.

The story follows Mr. Badii, a man driving through the outskirts of Tehran searching for someone willing to bury him after his planned suicide. In lesser hands, the film might have become a bleak meditation on death. Kiarostami transforms it into something far more complex: a meditation on existence itself.

By the late 1990s, Kiarostami had become one of the most respected filmmakers in world cinema. His work received major recognition from festivals in Cannes, Venice, Locarno, Chicago, and Tokyo. In 2000, he was awarded the Akira Kurosawa Award for Lifetime Achievement, further cementing his place among the great masters of international cinema.

Yet awards never seemed to alter his artistic temperament. Success did not push him toward larger productions or greater spectacle. Instead, it strengthened his belief that the smallest stories often reveal the deepest truths.

Few images appear more frequently in Kiarostami's work than the road. Sometimes it stretches endlessly toward the horizon. Sometimes it twists through mountains in sharp zigzags. These roads are more than visual motifs; they are philosophical metaphors.

Life, in Kiarostami's cinema, rarely moves in a straight line. The winding roads suggest uncertainty, detours, failures, and unexpected discoveries. Characters travel without fully knowing where they will arrive, much as human beings navigate their own lives. The journey itself becomes more important than the destination.

His famous hillside roads remind us that meaning is not always found at the end of the path. It emerges while moving through it. The bends, interruptions, and changes of direction mirror the rhythms of human existence its setbacks, possibilities, and quiet transformations.

Nature occupies a central place in this process. Roads winding through mountains, olive groves swaying in the wind, distant villages perched on hillsides, and endless skies stretching beyond the frame are never mere backgrounds. They are emotional and philosophical spaces.

In Kiarostami's cinema, a road symbolizes possibility. A hill represents struggle. A solitary tree evokes resilience. Nature becomes a silent participant in human experience.

This visual sensitivity emerged from Kiarostami's work as a photographer. Outside filmmaking, he developed a distinguished body of photographic work focusing on roads, trees, snow-covered landscapes, and empty horizons. His photographs reveal the same aesthetic principles that shaped his films: simplicity, patience, and attentiveness.

Kiarostami was also a poet, and his poetic sensibility infused every aspect of his art. He understood that poetry does not require elaborate language. Sometimes a single image a tree in snow, a road vanishing into fog, or a child standing alone can express emotions more powerfully than pages of explanation.

The influence of Kiarostami extended far beyond Iran. Filmmakers across continents admired his ability to create profound emotional and philosophical experiences from seemingly ordinary situations. Among his admirers was Martin Scorsese, who described Kiarostami as representing the highest level of artistry in cinema.

His later films continued to explore new forms and possibilities. The Wind Will Carry Us (1999), Ten (2002), Certified Copy (2010), and Like Someone in Love (2012) demonstrated an artist constantly evolving while remaining faithful to his core concerns.



Beyond the horizon. "Where Is the Friend's House? (1987)"

Whether working in Iran, Italy, or Japan, he remained interested in the same fundamental questions: How do people connect? How

do they misunderstand one another? How do they construct meaning in uncertain lives?

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Kiarostami's work is its humility. His films never announce themselves as profound. They do not demand admiration. Instead, they quietly accompany viewers, allowing meaning to emerge gradually.

This humility feels increasingly rare in an era dominated by speed, noise, and spectacle. Contemporary culture often rewards immediate reactions and constant stimulation. Kiarostami offered something different: patience.

His cinema asks us to slow down, to listen, to observe, and to notice. They remind us that human life is not composed solely of dramatic events. Much of existence unfolds in conversations, walks, silences, glances, and small acts of kindness.

Perhaps that is why Kiarostami's films endure. They do not offer conclusions so much as invitations an invitation to look more carefully, to listen more deeply, and to recognize the extraordinary within the ordinary.

Abbas Kiarostami passed away on July 4, 2016, in Paris. Yet his work remains alive, not only in archives and film schools but in the minds of viewers who continue discovering his films for the first time.

There is an old feeling many travelers know. After a long journey, you arrive home carrying no souvenirs, no photographs, no proof of where you have been. Yet something within you has changed. The roads you walked remain somewhere inside your memory. The landscapes become part of your way of seeing.Watching a Kiarostami film feels much the same. When the screen fades to black, it often seems as though nothing dramatic has happened. No grand revelations. No spectacular climax. Yet hours later, days later, sometimes years later, the film returns unexpectedly a road stretching toward the horizon, a child knocking on a stranger's door, the wind moving through olive trees. And suddenly you realize that Kiarostami was never merely telling stories.

In a world increasingly crowded with noise, he reminded us that silence can carry emotion. In a culture obsessed with certainty, he embraced questions. In an age of distraction, he encouraged observation.

His greatest legacy may not be a particular film or a particular image. It may be a way of looking at the world a way that finds dignity in ordinary people, beauty in simple moments, and humanity in places where others fail to notice it.

The road disappears into the horizon. We never quite see where it ends.

Yet somehow, because of Abbas Kiarostami, we keep walking.

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THE MASTER OF MOVIE MAGIC

Martin Scorsese's Films, Life, and Camera Secrets

Sifat Ahmed

When you watch a Martin Scorsese movie, you feel an instant rush of energy. The camera flies across the room, the music pumps into your ears, and characters tell wild, fast stories. For over 50 years, Scorsese has been making some of the most exciting movies in history. In our film classes, we don't just watch his movies for fun but we study them like a textbook. He is a master director who completely changed the way Hollywood tells stories. This article will show you how an ordinary boy who loved movies grew up to change the cinema world forever.

From the dangerous streets of old New York to grand historical stories, Scorsese's films explore deep questions about right and wrong, guilt, friendship, and survival. As a film student, learning how he moves his camera and cuts his scenes gives us the ultimate inspiration. Let's take a look at his life journey, his most famous films, and the secret partnerships that made him a Hollywood legend.

Growing Up in Little Italy: Movies and Asthma

Martin Scorsese was born on November 17, 1942, in New York. He grew up in an area called Little Italy. His parents, Charles and Catherine, worked in clothing factories and were the children of poor immigrants. The neighborhood was a lively but tough place. On one side stood the powerful Catholic church; on the other side, real mobsters ruled the street corners. This mix



Martin Scorsese in his famous thick glasses.

of religion and crime would affect almost every movie Scorsese ever made.

As a little boy, Martin suffered from severe asthma. He could not play sports or run around with other kids. Instead, he spent hours looking out his apartment window, watching how people behaved on the streets below. To keep him happy and safe, his father started taking him to the movie theaters in Times

Square. In those dark rooms, the big screen became his escape. He fell in love with old Hollywood Westerns, intense dramas, and beautiful foreign films.

"Cinema is a physical relationship between the filmmaker and the camera. It is an act of faith." — MARTIN SCORSESE (Christie & Thompson, 2003)

At first, Martin wanted to become a priest. He even entered a church school in 1956. However, his love for rock-and-roll music, books, and movies was just too strong. He left the church school and joined New York University (NYU) in 1960 to study film. There, a great teacher named Haig Manoogian showed him how to turn his personal feelings into real film projects. Martin had found his true home.

The College Years and Early Short Films

At film school, Martin and his friends were full of excitement. They used cheap 16mm cameras and tried wild new styles. His student films were fast, funny, and different. His most famous short film was called The Big Shave (1967). It shows a young man shaving his face until he bleeds heavily. It looked simple, but it was actually a powerful protest against the painful Vietnam War. This short film proved that Martin knew how to use violence to make people think, not just to shock them. Soon after, he made his first full movie, Who's That Knocking at My Door (1967), starring his college friend Harvey Keitel.

The 1970s: Finding His Style and Meeting De Niro

In the early 1970s, Scorsese went to Hollywood. He worked for a famous low-budget movie producer named Roger Corman, who taught him how to shoot films very fast and with very little money. But another famous independent director, John Cassavetes, told Martin to stop making cheap studio films and return to the real, gritty stories of his youth.

Martin listened. He directed Mean Streets (1973), a high-energy movie about small-time criminals in Little Italy. This was a massive moment because it started



The famous movie poster for Taxi Driver. It shows Travis Bickle walking alone on the dangerous, neon-lit streets of New York City.

his legendary partnership with actor Robert De Niro. De Niro played a wild, unpredictable character named Johnny Boy, bringing a dangerous energy to the screen. In this movie, Scorsese perfected his style: using slow-motion shots, putting great rock songs over scenes, and showing deep, tragic friendships.

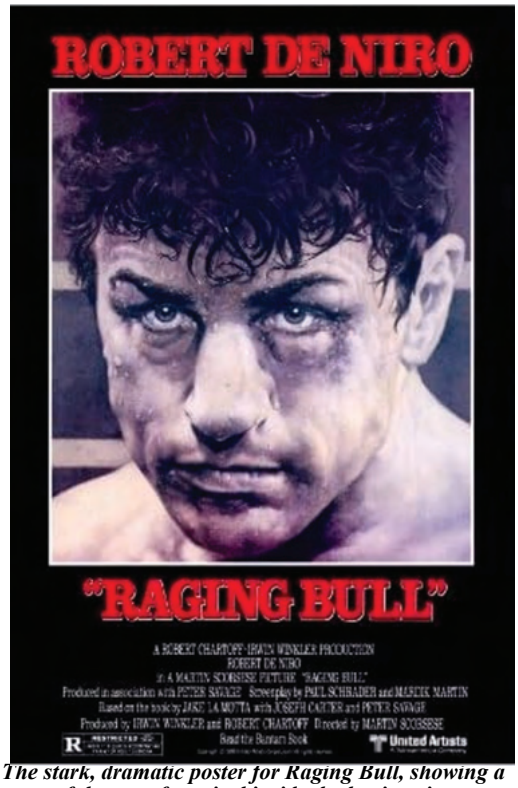
The success of Mean Streets (1973) led to one of the most famous movies ever made: Taxi Driver (1976). De Niro played Travis Bickle, a lonely ex-soldier driving a cab through a dark, messy New York City. The movie is brilliant because it lets us see the city directly through Travis's lonely, breaking mind. The camera glides through neon lights and rainy streets while haunting jazz music plays. Taxi Driver (1976) won the highest prize at the Cannes Film Festival and made Scorsese a true star.

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Tough Times and a Big Comeback

After Taxi Driver, Scorsese faced massive personal and professional problems. He tried to make a big, expensive musical called New York, New York (1977), but it failed badly. Overworked and struggling with substance abuse, Martin became very sick and ended up in the hospital in 1978. He thought his career was over.

While he was in the hospital, Robert De Niro visited him. He handed Martin a book about a real boxer named Jake LaMotta. De Niro begged him to direct it. Martin did not care about sports, but as he read the book, he understood the story. It was about a man destroying his own life and looking for a second chance. Martin realized he had to make this movie to save himself. 'I made it like it was my very last film,' he later said. That movie was Raging Bull (1980), and critics consider it a total masterpiece.



The stark, dramatic poster for Raging Bull, showing a powerful story of survival inside the boxing ring.

Scorsese shot it in beautiful, high-contrast black-and-white. He put the camera right inside the ring during the fights, changing the speed of the film and using strange sound designs to show the boxer's anger and pain. The film won Oscars and saved Scorsese's life and career.

Trying New Things in the 1980s

During the 1980s, Scorsese proved he could direct any type of movie. He made The King of Comedy (1982), a dark but funny film about a lonely man who kidnaps a talk-show host just to get famous. It predicted our modern world of social media fame perfectly! He also made a wild comedy called After Hours (1985) and a big studio hit called The Color of Money (1986), which won Paul Newman an Oscar.

Finally, he made a deeply personal religious film called The Last Temptation of Christ (1988), showing that he was never afraid to take massive artistic risks.

Goodfellas: Changing the Mob Genre Forever

In 1990, Scorsese returned to mob stories and made Goodfellas. It follows the real life of a gangster named Henry Hill over 30 years. The movie doesn't look at crime from the outside; it takes you right inside the mob family, showing why the lifestyle seemed so fun and wealthy before everything fell apart.

Goodfellas moves incredibly fast. It uses constant music, freeze-frames, and quick narration. Its most famous scene is the 'Copacabana shot.' The camera follows Henry and his girlfriend through the back doors and busy kitchens of a nightclub in one single, unbroken three-minute shot. It shows the audience exactly how amazing power feels, doors just open for you. Goodfellas changed how modern movies deliver information and influenced a generation of young filmmakers.



The iconic poster for Goodfellas. This movie changed gangster films forever with its fast pace and cool music soundtracks.

Mastering the Lens: The Scorsese Cinematic Language

For film students, Scorsese is the ultimate teacher because his "visual signature" is so distinct. He doesn't just record a scene; he uses the camera to tell you how a character feels. One of his most famous tools is the dolly zoom, where the camera moves toward a subject while zooming out (or vice versa). This creates a feeling of vertigo or sudden realization, famously used in Goodfellas during the diner scene to show Henry Hill's growing paranoia.

His editing, managed for decades by the legendary Thelma Schoonmaker, often uses "jump cuts" and freeze-frames to disrupt the flow of time. This makes the audience feel the chaotic energy of the characters' lives. In The Wolf of Wall Street, the editing is lightning-fast to match the drug-fueled adrenaline of Jordan Belfort. Conversely, in Silence, he lets the camera sit still for long periods, forcing the viewer to feel the heavy weight of the characters' spiritual struggle.

The Soul of the Soundtrack

Scorsese is a pioneer in using popular music as a narrative tool. Whether it is the aggressive punk of The Clash or the rolling blues of Muddy Waters, the music is never just "background noise." He often picks songs that contrast with the violence on screen, creating a strange, operatic beauty.

In Casino, the constant stream of 50s and 60s hits creates a sense of a world that is sparkling on the outside but rotting and violent underneath.

"More than the lifestyle, it was the rhythm of the life that I wanted to capture. It had to start like a gunshot and just keep accelerating." — MARTIN SCORSESE ON 'GOODFELLAS (Schickel, 2011)

ing historical epics and thrilling psychological mysteries. The Scorsese-DiCaprio partnership is simply one of the greatest stories of creative reinvention in modern Hollywood. When they first joined forces, Scorsese was a legendary director looking for a new muse to help him secure massive studio budgets, and DiCaprio was a young superstar desperately trying to escape the



Six films. One iconic director-actor partnership. Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio redefined modern cinema with unforgettable stories and complex characters.

Scorsese kept busy throughout the 1990s. He made a hit thriller called Cape Fear (1991), a beautiful romance drama set in old New York called The Age of Innocence (1993), and a massive, colorful crime epic called Casino (1995).

As the new century started, Scorsese found a new favorite actor: Leonardo DiCaprio. This partnership brought fresh energy to Scorsese's work, leading to massive, exciting historical epics and thrilling psychological mysteries. The Scorsese-DiCaprio partnership is simply one of the greatest stories of creative reinvention in modern Hollywood. When they first joined forces, Scorsese was a legendary director looking for a new muse to help him secure massive studio budgets, and DiCaprio was a young superstar desperately trying to escape the shadow of Titanic and prove he was a serious dramatic actor.

Over more than two decades, they completely transformed each other's careers. Here is the deep dive into their six landmark films together.

1. Gangs of New York (2002)

This film was a massive gamble for both men. For Scorsese, it was a multi-million-dollar passion project he had been

trying to get made for twenty years. For DiCaprio, playing the vengeful Irish immigrant Amsterdam Ready was his first real attempt at a gritty, adult, violent role.

This movie functions as a classic historical revenge story, but Scorsese uses the physical world on screen to transform the setting into a dangerous enemy for the characters.The film uses incredible, real-life set construction to build a small world of constant fighting. We first meet DiCaprio's character, Amsterdam, through close-up camera movements that follow him low to the ground, showing how alone he feels in the wild streets. Scorsese balances this quiet struggle with the loud, dramatic presence of Bill the Butcher, making the movie feel like a massive battle where the huge scenery almost overwhelms our young hero.While the film had its flaws, it served as a vital testament to DiCaprio's ability to anchor a somber, substantial period piece, establishing the artistic groundwork for their future legendary collaborations.

2. The Aviator (2004)

If Gangs of New York was the trial run, The Aviator is where the partnership truly clicked. DiCaprio actually brought the project to Scorsese, reversing the traditional director-actor dynamic. He stars as Howard Hughes, the brilliant, glamorous, and deeply troubled billionaire aviator and movie mogul.

The film traces Hughes's life from the late 1920s to the 1940s, capturing the glitz of old Hollywood alongside his agonizing descent into severe Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and paranoia. DiCaprio's performance is incredibly raw, especially in the second half of the film as Hughes locks himself away in a dark screening room, washing his hands until they bleed. The film was a massive commercial and critical success, earning eleven Oscar nominations and proving that DiCaprio and Scorsese together were a box-office powerhouse.

3. The Departed (2006)

This film, which captures the peak of their intense creative partnership, explores the fierce world of crime in Boston.It presents a gripping, violent game of survival between a deep-cover officer embedded in the Irish mafia (DiCaprio) and a criminal plant hiding within the police force (Matt Damon). The movie serves as a brilliant lesson in parallel editing, utilizing constant cross-cutting between these two mirrored existences to generate an atmosphere of unbearable pressure.

Working alongside his long-term editor Thelma Schoonmaker, Scorsese employs sharp, frantic jump cuts and match cuts to amplify the mental stakes. To highlight the protagonist's extreme paranoia, Billy Costigan is often trapped in the frame through a shallow depth of field that blurs his surroundings, mirroring the slow erosion of his actual self. Throughout the film, the camera moves with a restless, unpredictable rhythm that echoes the high-tension chaos of the Boston streets.

In his role as Costigan, DiCaprio is like a raw nerve, perpetually on the edge of a total breakdown while evading Jack Nicholson's terrifying mob leader. He perfectly embodies the crushing anxiety of an undercover life, where surviving means resorting to violence and medication. A massive success at the cinema, this film became a beloved piece of entertainment that finally

broke Scorsese's long "Oscar curse," earning him the well-deserved Academy Award for Best Director.

4. Shutter Island (2010)

Taking a sharp turn into psychological horror and gothic mystery, Shutter Island stars DiCaprio as Teddy Daniels, a traumatized U.S. Marshal sent to a secluded psychiatric hospital on a remote island to investigate the disappearance of a patient.The film is a masterclass in tension and dread. DiCaprio plays Teddy as a man haunted by nightmares of his deceased wife and the horrors he witnessed liberating a concentration camp in World War II. As the island's atmosphere grows more claustrophobic and the staff seems more sinister, DiCaprio's performance shifts from confident lawman to a man completely losing his grip on reality. Scorsese deliberately introduces intentional continuity errors such as a glass of water vanishing from a character's hand between cuts, or a notebook suddenly changing positions to subtly distort the spatial logic of the scene, planting seeds of doubt in the viewer's mind before the final twist is revealed and stands as their highest-grossing opening weekend together.

5. The Wolf of Wall Street (2013)

This movie is a three-hour, adrenaline-fueled, unapologetic riot. Based on the true story of Jordan Belfort, a New York stockbroker who made hundreds of millions defrauding investors, the film is a dark, hilarious satire of absolute American greed and corruption.

In this wild ride, DiCaprio's character constantly breaks the fourth wall, talking directly to the audience and making us feel like his secret partners in crime. Scorsese uses energetic whip pans, fast-moving tracking shots, and sudden freeze-frames to match the loud, fast-paced narration. This electric camera work perfectly captures the drug-fueled adrenaline of Jordan Belfort's world, transforming the story into a dark and hilarious look at absolute American greed.

6. Killers of the Flower Moon (2023)

This project represents their most serious and thoughtful work yet. Taking inspiration from David Grann's famous book, the movie reveals the dark "Reign of Terror" that struck 1920s Oklahoma. It tells the heartbreaking story of how members of the Osage Nation, who became wealthy from oil, were targeted and killed for their fortunes. Working with cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto, Scorsese uses a wide anamorphic aspect ratio to show the contrast between the vast, open land and the spiritual darkness growing within the community. Rather than using his signature quick edits, the camera moves with a slow, heavy rhythm, often pausing to capture images that are both stunning and tragic. Through this lens, Leonardo DiCaprio's character, Ernest Burkhart, is shown in natural, harsh lighting that strips away his celebrity glow, forcing us to witness his moral decay and his part in the atrocities committed against the Osage people.

Interestingly, DiCaprio decided against playing the brave investigator from the FBI. Instead, he took on the role of Ernest Burkhart, a frail and easily led veteran who claims to love his Osage wife, Mollie (Lily Gladstone), even while he slowly poisons her on behalf of his wicked uncle, portrayed by Robert De Niro. It is a deeply sad performance that offers no easy charm. By bringing De Niro and DiCaprio togeth-



Martin Scorsese directing actors on a modern movie set, showing his endless passion for storytelling even in his 80s.

er in the same Scorsese movie, the film feels like a grand finale for the director's incredible journey in cinema.

Late Career: Looking Back, Faith, and Growing Old

As Scorsese grew older, his style changed in a beautiful way. The wild rock-and-roll energy slowed down. He started making deeper, quieter movies about aging, regret, and time running out.

He made Silence (2016), a quiet, visual masterpiece about two priests searching for their lost teacher in old Japan. Then he made The Irishman (2019) for Netflix, reuniting old friends Robert De Niro, Joe Pesci, and Al Pacino. This movie used digital computer technology to make the actors look young again. Instead of making the mob life look cool, The Irishman shows the sad truth: it ends with an old, lonely man sitting by himself in a nursing home, waiting for death. It is a deeply moving film about regret.

"The things I was interested in forty years ago, I'm still interested in now. But the angle of vision has completely changed. You look at the horizon, and it's much closer." — MARTIN SCORSESE (Ebiri, 2019)

His latest big movie was Killers of the Flower Moon (2023). It tells the true, tragic story of how greedy white men murdered members of the wealthy Osage Native American nation for their oil money. Instead of making a simple detective story, Scorsese focused on a marriage built on betrayal. At the very end of the movie, Scorsese himself steps on screen to read the final words of the story, reminding us that we must never forget historical tragedies.

Saving Movie History for the Future

Scorsese does not just make movies, he also saves them. He noticed that old film reels were physically decaying and rotting away. If someone didn't act, thousands of old movies would disappear forever.

In 1990, he started a charity called The Film Foundation alongside other famous directors like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. So far, they have saved and restored over 1,000 classic movies from all over the world. He also started the World Cinema Project to save old, forgotten movies from developing nations. Thanks to his hard work, future generations of film students will always be able to study cinema history.

The Living Spirit of Cinema

Martin Scorsese's life is a beautiful love letter to the movies. He started as a small, sick boy who could only look out his window, and he became a global creative giant. His fast editing rhythms and fluid camera styles are printed onto our modern culture. But his true secret is his deep love for people, he always looks for hope, grace, and second chances inside his flawed, broken characters. Today, as we watch movies on small phones and computer screens, Scorsese reminds us that true cinema is a magical, artistic experience that can change your life forever.

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Guru Dutt:
The Maestro of Melodrama (1925 – 1964)

Ipsita Barat

Introduction

Guru Dutt Padukone was born in Mysore in 1925. He had his early education in Calcutta before doing basic training with dance maestro Uday Shankar, after which he joined Prabhat Studio. It is here that he got a break as a choreographer and became good pals with actor Dev Anand. From Prabhat, Guru Dutt moved to Famous studios and then to Bombay Talkies. Meanwhile, his close friend from Prabhat has launched his own banner, Navketan. Its Dev Anand who initiated Guru Dutt to direct a film for him.



Guru Dutt Padukone

Baazi (1951) was Guru Dutt's first film as a director under the banner of Navketan. Baazi was an immediate success. Guru Dutt followed it with Jaal (1952) and Baaz (1953). Neither film did well at the box office, but they brought together the Guru Dutt team that performed so brilliantly in subsequent films. He discovered and mentored Johnny Walker (comedian), V.K Murty (cinematography), and Abrar Alvi (writing and directing), among others. He is also credited with introducing Waheeda Rehman to Hindi cinema. Fortune smiled on Dutt's next film, the 1954 Aar Paar. This was followed by the 1955 hit, Mr. and Mrs. 55, Pyaasa (1957)- the story of a poet, rejected by an uncaring world, who achieves success only after his apparent death. His 1959 Kaagaz Ke Phool was an intense disappointment. He had invested a great deal of love, money, and energy in this film, which was a self-absorbed tale of a famous director (played by Guru Dutt) who falls in love with an actress (played by Waheeda Rehman, Dutt's real-life love interest). Kaagaz Ke Phool failed at the box office, and Dutt was devastated.

All subsequent films from his studio were, thereafter, officially helmed by other directors since Guru Dutt felt that his name was anathema to the box office. Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam (1962), a box office flop, was directed by his writer, Abrar Alvi, who won him the Filmfare Best Director's award. Rumors said that the film was ghost-directed by Guru Dutt himself. Guru Dutt also has his influence on his last box office

smash hit Chaudhvin Ka Chand (1960), directed by M. Sadique.

Synopsis of Select Films

Film	Synopsis
Aar Paar	Kalu, who spent time in prison for speeding, finds a job at Lalaji's garage after his release and falls in love with the daughter of the owner (Nikki). However, things begin to get out of hand when he is fired from his job and is then unknowingly hired as a driver for a gang.
Mr. and Mrs. 55	A young niece under the custody of a feminist aunt is forced into a contractual marriage with an unemployed cartoonist in an attempt to save her millions. However, in the course of her contractual marriage, she learns the true meaning of marriage and the deep significance of being an Indian wife. At the end of the film, she breaks through the locked doors of her aunt's mansion and elopes with a jobless cartoonist.
Pyaasa	*Pyassa* is a romantic melodrama set in Calcutta, which tells us of the thirst of love, the thirst for recognition and the thirst for spiritual fulfillment.
Kaagaz Ke Phool	Guru Dutt plays a film director who his family shuns because his profession has no social status. He became successful after discovering a new actress, Shanti, and fell in love with this young woman. His success is short-lived when they are forced to separate because of pressure from his daughter. The director has to face the inevitable fate of death.
Sahib Bibi Ghulam	The decadence of the Bengali Zamindar milieu and the rising bourgeoisie in the late 19th century, seen through the eyes of Bhoothnath.
Chaudvin Ka Chand	Two of the three friends living in Lucknow, where the Islamic culture flourishes falls in love with the same woman, Jamila. Nawab Pyare Mia gets a close look at a stunning woman at a busy marketplace, unable to get her out of his mind. But the problem arises when his close friend Aslam finds out that he is married to the same woman. Friends will now have to make sacrifices for each other to sanctify their friendship.

Personal Life

During the making of the hugely successful Baazi, Guru Dutt met and married the beautiful playback singer Geeta Roy. They had been engaged for three years and had to overcome a great deal of family opposition to marry. At the time of their marriage, Geeta was one of the top singers while Guru Dutt was still a struggling director. Despite their intense feelings for each other, their marriage was a stormy one, and in the last year of Guru Dutt's life, he

moved out of the family home and lived alone. Guru Dutt and Geeta Dutt had three children, but after the divorce, Geeta Dutt was given the custody of the children by the court. Guru Dutt's relationship with actress Waheeda Rehman also worked against their marriage. It has been 44 years since Guru Dutt committed suicide after three previous attempts of suicide on October 10, 1964, in Bombay at the age of 39. And with each passing year, his reputation as popular Indian cinema's finest director has grown from strength to strength, in country after country. Geeta Dutt herself died in 1972 at age 41, after excessive drinking, which resulted in liver damage.



Pyaasa (1957) Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par screenshot

Nation in Dutt's Melodrama

India got freedom in 1947. During the 1950s, India had a utopic vision. This period is known as the euphoric period of India that lasted from 1951 to 1957. In Dutt's film of the 1950s, vis-à-vis Aar Paar and Mr. and Mrs. 55, we see the same kind of utopic vision of the first-formed nation, released from over 22 years of British colonial rule. Guru Dutt did only two melodramas in the genre of comedy, but both had a utopic vision. In both the film, the hero and the heroine live happily ever after. In both the film the misrecognition of Kalu in Aar Paar and Preetam, the cartoonist in Mr. and Mrs. 55 gets rectified. And at the end of the day, the illiterate taxi driver and the unemployed cartoonist become the garage owner and newspaper editor. The utopic vision is also evident in terms of characterization; a wealthy niece could break through the locked doors of her aunt's mansion and elope with a jobless cartoonist; Literate Nikki falls in love with the motor mechanic and feels no shame to even teach him English in one of the songs. Moreover, even though Nikki, the independent woman, loves strong men and likes being accepted by them, but always on her own terms. A few others which depict the utopic vision are: Police officer being a father

figure to Kalu, a woman working at the construction site, Johnny's friendship with Preetam during the days of his unemployment; Unemployed Kalu gets a mechanic job with ease. Utopic vision in terms of Dutt's film is a vision where everything doesn't come down to materialism, and a vision where one sheds the shackles of past and adopts scientific and rational methods. In both the films Aar Paar and Mr. and Mrs. 55, we see the utopian possibilities of the newly independent nation.

The buyout mood in India started changing in 1957. Nehru, who was the visionary of this utopic vision, began to be seriously questioned after the failure of many of his plans and India's disastrous defeat of China in 1961. The prevalent atmosphere of rampant corruption created a nationalized hypocrisy, especially among the affluent middle class. National interest was being replaced by personal interest. This was the reason why, after just two comedies, having the utopic vision, Dutt moved on to the melodrama of tragedy to depict the ideological crisis of the state of India during the 60s.



Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman in Kaagaz Ke Phool (1959)

In Pyassa, the brother of Vijay categorizes him as Namak Haram, as he is a poet and refuses to do a 9-5 job. As opposed to the Preetam family in Mr. and Mrs. 55, the poet and the filmmaker are never accepted by society and family, as opposed to the mechanic and the cartoonist in the melodrama of comedy, the misrecognition of Vijay the poet as dead or mad or Suresh the filmmaker as a beggar never gets rectified. The world or their family never acknowledges them. The woman in the melodrama of tragedy are all helpless as compared to the independent woman like Nikki in Aar Paar or Anita in Mr. and Mrs. 55. In melodrama of tragedy, we have helpless woman like Vijay's mother and Gulabo (Pyassa), Shanti (Kaagaz Ke Phool) and the most tormented and helpless of all Choti Bahu (Sahib Bibi Ghulam) as she has to lose her life for breaking the norms of the Badi Haweli. Meena Vijay's love leaves him in search of materialistic gains and marries a well-to-do publisher. No one lives happily ever after. In Pyassa Vijay and Gulabo had to live in exile, whereas in Kaagaz Ke Phool and Sahib Bibi Ghulam, both Suresh and Choti Bahu had to face the inevitable fate of Death. In Pyassa for the 1st time,

Dutt tries to make the Indian audience abandon their utopic optimism and confront the daily acts of cruelty practiced not only by their own family members but also by citizens in Public spaces and professional institutions. His poetry creates no national awareness.

Typical Features and Narrative Strategy in Dutt's Films

For Guru Dutt, melodrama was not merely a suitable entertainment mode to woo the box office or the Hindi film audience of the 1950s and 1960s. In his capable hands, melodrama became a revealing and critical genre through which the contradictions and deceptions of the middle-class or proletarian Indian aspiring towards bourgeois stability could be depicted, explored, commented upon, and critiqued. Becoming his own producer and director in the 1950s, he adopted a critical distance from the mainstream Hindi film industry and gradually dissociated himself from the cliché-ridden escapist and idealistic melodramatic narratives churned out by most of his contemporaries. The main subjects that Indian cinema explored in the 1950s and 60s were strongly social in nature. Idealism was in the air, but the films were essentially bright in the eyes. All significant filmmakers of that time V Shantaram, Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor, Navketan, Mehboob Khan, etc., were wedded to the social cause. Guru Dutt, at the same time, had an interesting choice of context. The only film where he takes a strong moral stance was also a regressive one. The satire of Mr. and Mrs. 55 was a comment on the new divorce law passed that year. The film endorses the view that the ultimate place of a woman, no matter how modern she is at the feet of her husband.

Beyond Mr. and Mrs. 55, the subjects were nonjudgmental. He was magnetically drawn towards exploring flawed character, one that floated between black and white ends of the spectrum. Kaagaz Ke Phool was a self-portrait and remains a pioneer and a true flag bearer in his genre. Dutt rarely adapts for any of his films a popular Indian novel or a short story. The only exception is Sahib Bibi Ghulam, based on a Bengali novel by Bimal Mitra, and Chauvin Ka Chand, based on an Urdu story Jhalak written by Sagir Usmani. Aar Paar and Mr. and Mrs. 55 were his only comedies, whereas Pyaasa, Kaagaz Ke Phool, and Sahib Bibi Ghulam fall under his tragic trilogies. Moro over Sahib Bibi and Ghulam was directed by Abrar Alvi and was only ghost-directed by him. Dutt's melodrama shows a struggle between the utopian ideal and the dark social realities. The dark social reality shown in Pyassa is the double standards of the liberated Indian bourgeois of the 1950s. It exposes the selfish concerns of the institution of family and business. The city or the landscape plays a very significant role in Dutt's melodrama. Like Lalaji's garage, which becomes home and the space for erotic encounter in Aar Paar, Benches of the city park in Mr. and Mrs. 55, the lakeside home and the film studio in the case of Kaagaz Ke Phool, and the feudal mansion in the case of Sahib Bibi Ghulam. Flashback was one of the prime narrative strategies used by Dutt in his film. This is true for Kaagaz Phool, Sahib Bibi Ghulam, and Pyassa. In Pyassa Vijay accidentally meets her first love, Meena, in an elevator. The moment when she decides to leave him is recreated in his mind, not only in a flashback as a recollected image but also as a fantasy that is inserted inside the flashback.

Hollywood had a strong influence on Indian films in the Hindi film Industry. Guru Dutt is a classic example. He brought to Hindi cinema the tradition of Hollywood Comedy and Hollywood dance and musical routine. With the exception of Sahib Bibi and Ghulam, all his films are situated in the metropolis off Bombay and Calcutta. His metropolis character thinks, dresses, acts, and emotes like Westernized Indians. They eat and drink in a westernized hotel, and their homes have very few Indian signifiers. Their musical preference for songs and dance is also Western. One finds a great influence of Hollywood musicals in Dutt's cinematic presentation. Dutt's debt to Hollywood is seen in the way in which he orchestrates the fluid movement of the camera, the way in which he arranges the mise-en-scene and the way in which the songs and dance movement are created out of the narrative streams. Dutt borrowed his train suicide scene from Preston Sturges Sullivian Travells (1948) and transcribes it in his (1948) film Pyaasa. Several plot elements, like the tramp borrowing the hero's coat, getting his foot caught in the rails, and standing his arms raised in a crucified manner in the glaring light of the approaching locomotive, were all duplicated in Pyassa. The elaborate tracking and crane shot in the interior of the studios in Kaagaz Ke Phool were strongly reminiscent of Orson Welles ' Citizen Kane(1941). The depiction of the enclosed world of Dutt's film studio is very similar to Citizen Kane's Xanadu. Dutt made a remarkable attempt at Indianizing the Hollywood gangster, musical, and comedy genre in Aar Paar.

Dutts' lead character usually had internal demons to fight with. The line drawn between hero and villains, the heroine and the vamp, was always porous. Characters jumped from one side to the other. Mala Sinha and Vijay in Pyassa, Suresh in Kaagaz Ke Phool, and the most memorable Choti Bahu in Sahib Bibi Aur Gullam. Again, all the characters in Dutts' film were in constant pursuit of modernity. Ex- Kalu wanting to learn English during his off time, or Bhootnath wearing English shoes along with his traditional Dhoti Kurta, or the Bramho Samaj, followed by Jaba and her father. Again, in the case of Dutt's film, minor characters were always fleshed out, for example, Aar Paar, be it the bar man, the street urchin, or the newspaper vendor. And since he repeated artistes he worked with, the minor roles done in his films by artistes like Kum Kum and Tun Tun stand out for their individual wit and integrity. Furthermore, the characters in Dutt's film spoke with a language that reflected their background. The hero is from Madhya Pradesh in central India, so he speaks in a particular style. The garage owner, a Punjabi, spoke with Punjabi slang.

In addition to the lead characters, it can be noted that he created many memorable roles for supporting artists as well, notably Johnny Walker. But in most of his films, his characters are either black or white, for example, his brothers in Pyaasa. They are single-dimensionally black. If the director had explored the conflict of the outer world, which wants to help but cannot work with the waywardness of the poet, it would have put the entire effort a couple of notches above its current perch. Similarly, in Kagaz Ke Phool, he gives no voice to the wife. There is no exploration of the internal battles that the spouse of an intensely creative person may have had to fight. It is common wisdom that it is not easy to be wedded to an achiever, especially if he is

an artist. The film industry has many such suffering spouses to espouse. Yet Dutt chose to take the safe path of coloring the wife in unrelenting black. To sum up, it can be said that characterization was an area in which Guru Dutt attempted to break the mould, displayed sparks of genius, and created many memorable characters in the wake. But at the end of the day, he could not carry it to a depth that could truly bracket his work as path-breaking.



A song from Pyassa (1957)

Dutt's Aesthetics of Hindi Film Songs

Dutt's melodramas are remembered not only for their remarkable songs but for his creative presentation of them as well. Most of his films featured several songs accompanied by Dance sequences. Hindi film songs had great importance in an average Indians life, both as an integral part of a particular filmic situation and as an independent musical entity as well. During the 1950s, an ordinary day in India, be it in a city or a village, invariably began with bhajans on All India Radio. Similarly, Hindi film songs were scheduled daily from 6 pm to 10 pm on one of the most popular programmes, Chayageet, a musical round-up of Hindi film songs usually around a particular theme. This tradition continued, and with the advent of mass media, it intensified further. Hindi film songs had dual functions to perform. It was both a part of the film narrative and a song that existed in complete isolation from its cinematic source, and by virtue of its own musical merit, a personal favorite for the spectator and listener. It is at this point in time that Dutt decides to tell his stories with songs and dances, and not just with words.

In many of Guru Dutt's songs and dance numbers, he creates the musical moment out of the environment in which he locates his characters. Lovers in his films never had to visit a park to embrace their love; they always did it in their immediate environment. He also makes the character use props at hand. Many directors choose to enhance the fantasy elements by setting a scene in unreal and glamorous locations, but in Guru Dutt films, the songs are rarely separate from the personalities who enacted them. Songs in his films often take place in locations inhabited by the characters in his

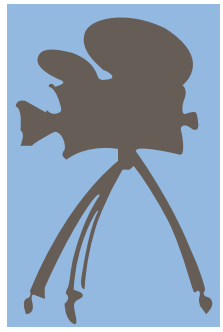
films. A fine example is the romantic duet Sun sun sun sun zaalima. The song is set in the stark and unromantic atmosphere of a garage with a car providing the centre-piece, but the way the two lovers circle each other within this restricted space is a brilliant piece of choreography. Further, Guru Dutt was very particular in sticking to the vocabulary of his characters even in the songs. The song and dance number in Aar Paar erupts spontaneously between Kalu and Nikki in Lalaji's garage: Sun Sun sun sun zalima, Hamko tumse pyar ho geya. In Mr. and Mrs. 55, Johnny declares his love to the petty steno typist by carving a song and dance out of the very office space where she works. Or Preetam tells his friend Johnny about her love for Anita only in a regular tea drinking ritual and a simple bus ride: Aji dil pe hua aisa jadoo, Tabiat machal machal gai, Nazre jo mili kyaa kisi se, Ke haalat badal badal gai. Guru Dutt had a unique knack of being able to integrate the film songs into the story and make the story move forward even through the songs. Also, he began a lot of songs without introductory music, making it an extension of the dialogue. Hence, the songs never appear out of place.

Another musical convention that Guru Dutt follows in a way borrowed from the Hollywood musicals is his marvelous way of putting audience to the song and dance moments in the film for the purpose of shaping the response of the movie audience to the song and dance moments in the film. The song Kabhi Aar Paar lagga teer-e-nazar from the film Aar Paar Dutt creates a natural audience that spontaneously gathers around the impromptu singer, a construction singer on a building site. Along with all this, Guru Dutt took his talent for song picturizations to several notches above the commonplace. In the song Sakia aaj mujhe neend nahi Ayegi in Sahib Bibi Ghulam Dutt, all the accompanying dancers are in silhouette, while the courtesan's presence is distinctively lit. In full lights we see her as an artist to be admired, before the lust of the Babu takes her later to the dark and shadowy chamber. In the song Wakt ne kis kya hasen seetum hum rahe na hum tum rehe na tum in Kaagaz Ke Phool, only a single beam of light falling from the skylight above separates Suresh and Shanti. Only under the tortured burden of the song that reminds them of their unattained love, another Suresh and another Shanti embrace each other under the single beam of light.

Ipsita Barat

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Cinema Against Forgetting: Why I Love Lav Diaz

Afifa Akter

There are filmmakers whose works entertain us for a few hours, filmmakers who impress us with technical brilliance, and then there are filmmakers whose cinema quietly changes the way we perceive time, history, and humanity. For me, Lav Diaz belongs to the last category. Watching his films has never felt like simply watching stories unfold on a screen; rather, it has felt like entering an entirely different experience of existence, where time slows down, silence begins to speak, and forgotten memories emerge from the shadows. His cinema does not seek immediate gratification or easy emotional responses. Instead, it asks something much more demanding of its audience: patience. It asks us to surrender ourselves to the natural rhythm of life, to remain with suffering instead of escaping it, and to understand that some truths reveal themselves only when we are willing to wait. In an age where cinema is increasingly shaped by fast editing, rapid storytelling, and the constant pressure to entertain, Lav Diaz stands almost alone as a filmmaker who refuses to compromise with speed. His films, often stretching from six to ten hours, initially appear intimidating, but once I entered his cinematic world, I realized that their duration was never an indulgence. Time itself is his language. The extraordinary length of his films allows emotions to breathe naturally, allows landscapes to become characters, and gives history the weight that it deserves. Mainstream cinema often compresses life into neatly organized dramatic moments, removing waiting, silence, repetition, and contemplation. Lav Diaz restores those experiences. His films remind us that grief is not brief, trauma does not disappear within two hours, and healing is rarely immediate. As a student of Film and Television, I have admired many filmmakers whose works have profoundly influenced world cinema. I have been mesmerized by the spiritual imagery of Andrei Tarkovsky, moved by the humanism of Satyajit Ray, inspired by the visual poetry of Theo Angelopoulos, and fascinated by the hypnotic realism of Béla Tarr. Yet Lav Diaz occupies a unique place among them because his cinema transforms historical memory into an ethical responsibility. He does not merely tell stories; he preserves voices that history has attempted to erase. Born in Mindanao, Philippines, Diaz grew up within a society marked by colonialism, dictatorship, political violence, and social inequality. Rather than distancing himself from these realities, he made them the very foundation of his artistic practice. His films repeatedly return to the traumatic years surrounding Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship, not because he wishes to recreate historical events, but because he understands that history continues to exist long after official records have been written. The wounds of violence remain alive within ordinary people, within landscapes, within memories, and within silence itself. This commitment to remembrance is

perhaps the reason I admire him more than any other contemporary filmmaker. In many societies, painful histories are rewritten, suppressed, or gradually forgotten. Political regimes manipulate memory, replacing truth with convenient narratives. Lav Diaz resists this process of forgetting. His cinema becomes an archive of lived experience rather than official history. Every frame feels like an act of preservation, an attempt to ensure that forgotten voices continue to exist. Watching his films often feels like walking through abandoned places where invisible ghosts patiently wait to tell their stories. Among all his works, From What Is Before remains one of the most unforgettable cinematic experiences I have ever had. Set during the years preceding the declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines, the film does not portray political violence directly. Instead, it focuses on the subtle atmosphere before catastrophe arrives. Villagers continue their ordinary routines they farm, pray, celebrate festivals, and care for their families yet beneath these familiar rhythms an unsettling tension slowly develops. Strange disappearances occur. Fear quietly infiltrates everyday life. Communities become suspicious of one another. Diaz demonstrates that authoritarianism rarely arrives suddenly; it grows gradually within ordinary moments until one day society awakens to discover that freedom has already disappeared. This patient observation transformed the film into something much greater than historical reconstruction. It became an emotional experience of history itself. I did not simply understand the political circumstances intellectually; I felt their psychological weight. The long takes, the immense landscapes, the silence between conversations, and the lingering faces of ordinary villagers stayed with me long after the film ended. Another masterpiece, The Woman Who Left, revealed an entirely different dimension of Lav Diaz's artistry. Loosely inspired by Leo Tolstoy's short story God Sees the Truth, But Waits, the film follows Horacia, a woman released from prison after spending thirty years incarcerated for a crime she never committed. Such a premise could easily have become a conventional revenge story in another filmmaker's hands. Lav Diaz chooses a far more compassionate path. Rather than asking how Horacia might punish those responsible for her suffering, he asks whether a wounded human being can ever truly heal. Throughout the film, Horacia wanders through the city carrying decades of pain, loneliness, and injustice. Yet her journey gradually becomes one of spiritual transformation rather than vengeance. The film's haunting black-and-white cinematography creates a timeless atmosphere where every street, every encounter, and every silence carries emotional significance. Watching Horacia move through the world reminded me that genuine strength often lies not in revenge but in preserving one's humanity despite unimaginable suffering. It is hardly surprising that the film won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Its greatness emerges not through spectacle but through empathy. If From What Is Before explores collective trauma and The Woman Who Left examines personal suffering, then A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery demonstrates Lav Diaz's extraordinary ambition as a cinematic historian and poet. Running nearly eight hours, the film reconstructs the Philippine Revolution through an astonishing fusion of historical events, mythology, folklore, philosophy, and political reflec-

tion. Historical figures coexist alongside mythical beings, while reality continuously dissolves into legend. Watching the film feels less like observing history than wandering through an ancient epic poem whose memories continue haunting the present. Diaz understands that nations are built not only through documented events but also through myths, stories, and collective imagination. Every revolution produces ghosts. Every society inherits unresolved grief. Through this remarkable film, history becomes something alive rather than something completed. Perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of Lav Diaz's cinema remains its extraordinary duration. Many viewers inevitably ask why his films are so long. Yet after spending time within his cinematic universe, the answer becomes remarkably simple: because life itself is long. Because grief is long. Because memory is long. Because history cannot be reduced to narrative efficiency. The duration of his films is never a formal experiment for its own sake. It becomes an ethical experience. When his characters walk across vast landscapes, we walk beside them. When they wait, we wait. When they remain silent, we share that silence. This creates an extraordinary sense of presence that contemporary cinema rarely achieves. We stop observing characters from a distance and instead begin inhabiting their world. The passage of time becomes a moral lesson in empathy. Another aspect of Diaz's cinema that profoundly fascinates me is his visual style. Many of his greatest films are photographed in luminous black and white. This decision is never nostalgic; it is philosophical. By removing colour, Diaz strips away distraction and reveals emotional truth. His landscapes appear suspended somewhere between memory and dream. Faces become sculptural, carved from light and darkness. Every frame possesses the stillness of a photograph and the dignity of a painting. The monochrome imagery creates a timeless quality where past and present coexist simultaneously, reminding us that history never truly disappears. It simply continues to exist beneath the surface of everyday life. Perhaps what I admire most, however, is Diaz's unwavering commitment to ordinary people. His protagonists are rarely political leaders, military heroes, or historical celebrities. Instead, he centres his films upon farmers, teachers, workers, prisoners, mothers, widows, fishermen, and wanderers those individuals whose lives rarely appear within official historical narratives. This artistic choice is profoundly political because it insists that history belongs not only to those who write it but also to those who endure it. By granting these forgotten individuals cinematic space, Lav Diaz restores their dignity and reminds us that every ordinary life possesses historical significance. In today's world, where images disappear within seconds, attention spans continue shrinking, and historical memory is constantly threatened by digital acceleration, Lav Diaz's cinema feels almost revolutionary. His films resist simplification. They resist consumption. Most importantly, they resist forgetting. They remind us that some truths require patience, some wounds require remembrance, and some stories deserve to unfold at the pace of life itself. Ultimately, I love Lav Diaz because he reminds me why cinema matters. Not merely as entertainment. Not merely as spectacle. But as memory, testimony, compassion, and resistance. Through From What Is Before, I





learned how fear quietly enters society. Through The Woman Who Left, I discovered the profound complexity of forgiveness. Through A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery, I realized that history is inseparable from myth and collective memory. Across all his films, Lav Diaz has taught me that cinema possesses the extraordinary ability to preserve what societies choose to forget. Many filmmakers create unforgettable images; Lav Diaz safeguards forgotten lives. Many directors tell compelling stories; Lav Diaz protects memory itself. Every time I finish one of his films, I leave with the feeling that I have not merely watched cinema I have wandered through history, listened to the voices of the forgotten, and experienced the quiet heartbeat of humanity itself.



The Boy Who Became the Historian of a Nation: Born in 1958 in Mindanao, Philippines, Lav Diaz grew up in a country haunted by colonialism, dictatorship, poverty, and social inequality. These historical wounds would later become the foundation of his artistic vision. Unlike filmmakers who pursue spectacle or commercial success, Diaz turned his camera toward those whom history had neglected the farmers, widows, prisoners, teachers, workers, and ordinary villagers whose lives rarely appear in official narratives.His cinema is deeply rooted in the political history of the Philippines, particularly the brutal years surrounding Ferdinand

Marcos' Martial Law regime. Yet despite its political engagement, Diaz's work never becomes propaganda. He is less interested in political slogans than in the emotional consequences of history. His films ask what violence leaves behind, how memory survives oppression, and whether healing is ever truly possible.Watching Lav Diaz is like reading the unwritten history of a nation.

Cinema as an Archive of Memory

One of the reasons I admire Lav Diaz so deeply is his refusal to let societies forget.History has an unsettling habit of being rewritten. Governments erase inconvenient truths. Dictatorships suppress memories. Nations often bury painful chapters beneath narratives of progress. Diaz's films stand in opposition to this collective amnesia. They preserve voices that might otherwise disappear.His cinema becomes an archive not of official events, but of lived experiences.

Every silence in his films carries history.

Every landscape remembers.

Every face bears the weight of generations.

Rather than reconstructing history through dramatic spectacle, Diaz reconstructs its emotional atmosphere. He allows us to inhabit time itself.

From What Is Before: The Silence Before Catastrophe

Among Lav Diaz's masterpieces, From What Is Before (Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon, 2014) remains one of the most haunting cinematic experiences I have ever encountered.

Set in a rural village before the declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines, the film does something extraordinary: it focuses not on dictatorship itself, but on the subtle atmosphere that precedes it. Ordinary villagers continue farming, praying, gossiping, and living seemingly uneventful lives. Yet beneath the surface, fear slowly accumulates. Strange incidents occur. Suspicion grows. Communities begin to fracture.

The title itself From What Is Before is



deeply poetic. Diaz reminds us that catastrophes rarely arrive suddenly. They emerge gradually, infiltrating everyday life almost invisibly.

The film's remarkable patience allows us to experience history emotionally rather than intellectually. We do not simply learn about authoritarianism we feel its quiet arrival.

The Woman Who Left: Forgiveness







Beyond Revenge

Inspired loosely by Leo Tolstoy's short story God Sees the Truth, But Waits, The Woman Who Left (Ang Babaeng Humayo, 2016) follows Horacia, a woman released from prison after serving thirty years for a crime she never committed.

What could have become a conventional revenge thriller instead evolves into something profoundly compassionate. Horacia wanders through Manila carrying decades of grief, anger, and loneliness, yet the film refuses simple notions of justice.

Diaz asks a far more difficult question:

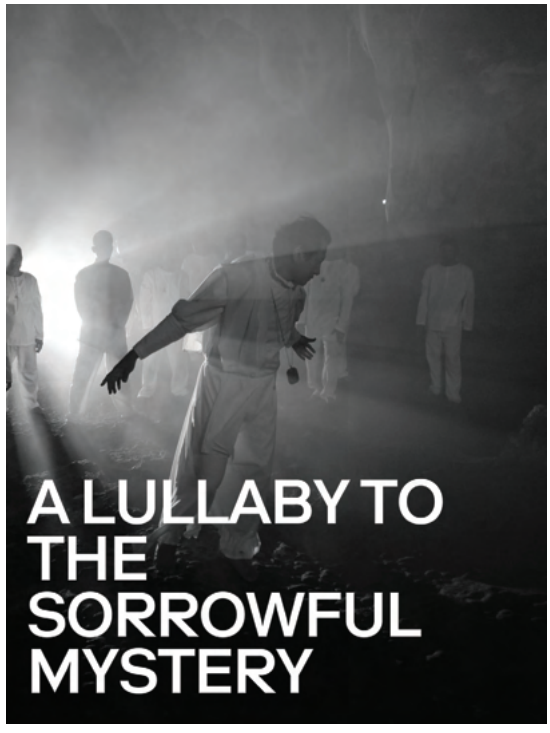
Can a wounded soul truly heal?

Shot in luminous black-and-white, every frame feels suspended between memory and reality. It is a film about injustice, certainly but also about grace, dignity, and forgiveness. Its emotional power earned it the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival, making Lav Diaz one of the most celebrated contemporary auteurs.

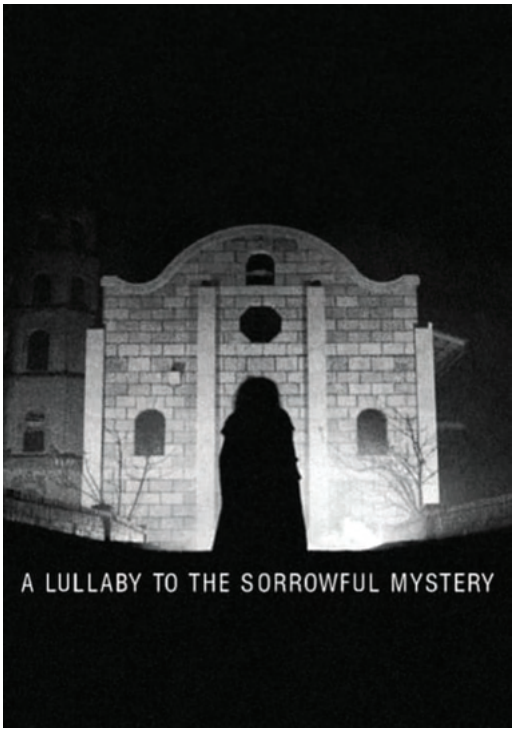
A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery: History as Myth

Running nearly eight hours, A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery (Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis, 2016) is perhaps Diaz's most ambitious work.

The film intertwines the Philippine Revolution with mythology, folklore, and political philosophy. Historical figures walk alongside mythical



creatures. Reality merges with legend. The



Diaz understands that nations are built not only by political events but also by stories. Every revolution creates ghosts. Every history leaves unfinished mourning.

Time as Cinema's Moral Language

Perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of Lav Diaz's cinema is its duration.
People often ask why his films are so long.

The answer is surprisingly simple.

Because grief takes time.

Because healing takes time.

Because history takes time.

Mainstream cinema often removes waiting, repetition, silence, and contemplation. Diaz restores them. When his characters walk across empty landscapes, we walk



boundaries between memory and imagination dissolve.Watching it feels less like watching a film than wandering through an epic poem.

beside them. When they wait, we wait. Their experience becomes ours.

His long takes transform spectatorship into empathy.



Time itself becomes an ethical experience.

Why Lav Diaz and his story telling Matters?

We inhabit an age defined by acceleration. Social media compresses attention spans. News cycles move rapidly. Historical memory fades almost instantly.

Lav Diaz resists this culture of speed.

His films remind us that some truths cannot be understood quickly.

Some wounds require patience.

Some stories deserve eight hours.

Some memories refuse to disappear.

In this sense, Diaz's cinema is an act of resistance not merely against political oppression, but against forgetting itself.

Afifa Akter

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Watching some of his films and studying After: Vittorio De Sica'

A M Mamunur Rashid

In 1976, when I was a student of class nine, I watched Vittorio De Sica's 'Sunflower' with my friends at Madhumita Cinema in Dhaka. Due to my poor English, I could not understand most of the dialogues, but the universal language of creative art took me deep into the film. I returned from the hall fascinated. At that time, I knew nothing about D'Sica, nor about world cinema except the films of the Indian subcontinent. After the matriculation examination in 1977, I used to go to the libraries of various foreign cultural centers in Dhaka with two friends and got used to rummaging through various books, and then I enrolled in French and Russian language courses. Although I could not learn French for more than a week, I tried to learn Russian for 6 months. For various reasons, I did not learn Russian too, but I got the opportunity to watch a lot of Eastern European and French films thanks to my language course.

I was admitted to the Institute of Fine Arts in 1978. There, at the initiative of my senior batch brothers, our institution often would screen the best films from different countries with the help of their cultural centers. Since there was no Italian cultural center in Dhaka, there was not much opportunity to watch Italian films. In 1979, I joined the Bangladesh Film Society (BFS) and since then I have had the opportunity to watch films by famous and contemporary filmmakers from many countries every week, but I did not have much opportunity to watch Italian films.



Vittorio De Sica

Perhaps in 1981 or 1982, when D'Sica's 'Two Women' was screened at the Madhumita or Gulistan Cinema Hall in Dhaka, I got the opportunity to see it.

In 1987, when I went to study film at the FAMU in Prague, the door opened for me to see the best works of many great filmmakers from the world. Along with many great talented filmmakers from the world, Vittorio D'Sica also fascinated me. Watching some of his films and studying After: 'D Sica'

D'Sica was a stage actor, screenwriter,



Vittorio De Sica

theatre producer, silent film actor, comedian, film actor, screenwriter, filmmaker and producer. He was one of the most successful founders of the neo-realist movement in film. D'Sica became a filmmaker through his firsthand experience of World War I and World War II.

Although Satyajit Ray was inspired by Jean Renoir, he chose D'Sica's "The Bicycle Thief" as his text film before making his first film. He even said that he had seen "The Bicycle Thief" over a hundred times.
De Sica, one of the most successful and great filmmakers of Italian and world cinema, was born on 7 July 1901 into a lower-middle-class family in the suburb of Sora in Lazio, near Rome. His father, Umberto De Sica, was a man from the village of Giffoni Valle Piana Campania, a journalist in his early life and later an employee of the Bank of Italy, his mother, Teresa Manfredi, was from Naples. De Sica was baptized as “Vittorio Domenico Stanislawa Gaetano Sorano De Sica" in the church of San Giovanni Baptista in the town of Sora. De Sica spent his childhood in Naples. His family moved to Florence in 1912, and settled permanently in Rome when World War I broke out in 1914 (although Italy switched sides in 1915, joining the Anglo-American-Russian Axis at I World War). At the age of 15, De Sica began acting in amateur plays staged in hospitals for convalescent soldiers. In 1917, he began studying to become an accountant. When World War I ended in 1918, De Sica was 17 years old. Through family friend Eduardo Bencivenga, he was offered a small role in Alfredo D'Antoni's The Clemenceau Affair. His father had a close relationship with Eduardo Bencivenga, and De Sica dedicated his film `Umberto D’ to Eduardo. De Sica's interest in cinema began with his father, who occasionally played in silent films instead of as a pianist.

Vittorio De Sica described his childhood family circumstances as "sad and aristocratic poverty".

Theatre and silent films:

De Sica began his career as a theatre actor in the early 1920s, and in 1923 joined Tatiana Pavlova's theatre company. He worked with Pavlova for two years and toured South America. De Sica was awarded the Laureate Award as a stage actor in 1923. During this time, he made his debut as a romantic hero in Ferenc Molnar's play ~Gli occhi azzuri dell'Imperatore". During this time, he met the Livorno actor Umberto Melnati, with whom he formed a successful comedy duo and worked together in many films and plays. In 1925, he joined Manzini's company Italia Almirante and soon became known as the second best in his team. Two years later he joined the company of Luigi Almirante, Sergio Tofano and Giuditta Rissone.

From 1925 to 1940, before making his directorial debut with the film "Rose Scarlatte (Red Rose)", with the help of producer Giuseppe Amato, De Sica worked as a leading actor in numerous successful stage and radio plays and revues also in films. After joining various theaters, he formed his own theater company. During this time, he met several famous screenwriters and Directors, among them was, Luchino Visconti.

De Sica continued his theater and film career together: he worked in films in the summer and on stage in the winter. Although his career as an actor began in 1917 with a small role in a silent film, he worked in films, musicals and traveling theater companies throughout the 1920s. He then rose to stardom in Italy with Mario Camerini's Gli uomini, che mascalzoni beschi (1932; 'What Rascal Men Are!'), in which his song "Parlami damore Mario" became a huge hit and remained his signature song for many years. De Sica's subsequent roles throughout the 1930s established him as a romantic leading actor, particularly skilled in light comedy; many critics compared his on-screen persona to Cary Grant. His notable works in the 1930s included "I'll Give a Million (1935)", "Il Signor Max (1937)", "Department Store (1939)", and "Manon Lescaut". Between 1931 and 1940, he acted in 23 films and directed several. During his 55-year career, De Sica directed 35 films and acted in over 150 films.

Meanwhile, on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, starting World War II. In September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan formed a military alliance through a Tripartite Pact, which formally established the Axis Powers. In 1941, the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and China formed the Allies. Later, France and, gradually, more than fifty countries from all continents joined the Allies. In September 1943, defeated Italy effectively fell under the control of American troops. In 1945, World War II ended with the unconditional surrender of both Germany and Japan.

A meeting in Verona in 1934 with screenwriter and filmmaker Cesare Zavattini (1902–1989) changed De Sica's career. Their first collaboration began with "A Bambini ci Guardano (1944; The Children Are Watching Us)". They both shared a common interest in the future of post-war Italian cinema, and over the years they became inseparable collaborators, producing some of the most acclaimed films of the post-war neo-realist era, such as "Shoe

Shine" and "Bicycle Thieves", both of which brought De Sica international recognition.

Neo-realism: This movement had its roots in the 1920s as a protest style of artists and writers in the worldwide movement against imperialist aggression and the oppression of fascist regimes. It emerged with great force after the fall of fascist regimes at the end of World War II. Neo-realism is similar in its general goals to the earlier Italian movement Verismo (realism). After World War II, it influenced European cinema and spread around the world. Filmmakers were not limited to studios, but went to ordinary people to capture their real images, and those ordinary people became the characters and actors in the films. The neo-realist movement in film paralleled the Italian literary movement. The style of the films was documentary-like objectivity; the actors were ordinary people involved in ordinary situations or looked like ordinary people, unlike Hollywood stars. Although neorealist productions were often crude and hastily made, their radical departure from the escapist idealization of conventional filmmaking and their boldness in presenting contemporary subject matter had an international impact.

The first such film was Roberto Rossellini's "Open City (1945)", an anti-fascist film that highlighted the brutal decisions imposed on Italians by the Nazi occupation. Rossellini's "Paisan (1946)", a six-part film about the war in Italy, had a similarly tragic appeal. Other important neorealist films were Luchino Visconti's "La Terra Trema (1948; 'The Earth Trembles')", a story of poor Sicilian fishermen and which used no professional actors. This was joined by Vittorio De Sica's "Shoeshine (1946)" and "The Bicycle Thief (1948)", which depicted the daily lives of working-class Italians. After 1950, Italian cinema moved away from realism and towards fantasy, symbolism and literary themes.

Despite critical acclaim, the films of the Italian neo-realist movement never achieved widespread popularity. De Sica's last film in the genre, "Umberto D", was a tragicomedy about a lonely old man's dog and his housekeeper's bitter struggle to save his home. He then turned his attention to making art-house films, with commercial success in mind; De Sica's entry into commercial cinema was primarily intended to reduce his reliance on his acting income and loans from friends to finance his film productions.

His Hollywood re-entry began with the film 'Stazione Termini' (1953; Indiscretion of an American Wife). It was a film produced by David O. Selznick, starring Montgomery Clift and Jennifer Jones, and written by Zavatini, Ben Hecht and Truman Capote. During this time, De Sica acted in many other films.. Sophia Loren, the Italian beauty who became famous mainly for her roles in De Sica's films 'L'Oro di Napoli' (1954; The Gold of Naples), 'La Chiosciara' (1961; Two Women), 'Yeri, Ozzi, Domani' (1963; Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow), and 'Matrimonio all'italiana' (1964; Marriage, Italian Style).

Widely considered one of the most influential filmmakers in the history of cinema, De Sica won four Academy Awards: "Siusia" and "Bicycle Thieves" (honorary), while "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" and his last film "Il Giardino dei Finzi" (The Voyage) won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. In fact, the massive critical success of "Siusia

(Shoeshine)" (the first foreign film to be recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences) and "Bicycle Thieves" helped establish the permanent "Best Foreign Language Film Award". Both films are considered part of the classics of cinema. In 1952, "Bicycle Thieves" was ranked as the greatest film of all time in a poll of filmmakers and critics by "Sight and Sound" magazine and was listed as one of the 15 most influential films in the history of cinema.

De Sica was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role as Major Rinaldi in American director Charles Vidor's 1957 adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's `A Farewell to Arms'. The film was critically panned and flopped at the box office, although De Sica's performance was considered the film's main attraction.

De Sica's later works combined his neo-realist classical style with techniques learned in Hollywood. The Oscar-winning Best Foreign Language Film, Il Giardino dei Finzi-Continis (1970; The Garden of the Finzi-Continis), was a highly successful adaptation of Giorgio Bassani's classic novel about the extermination of Jews in the city of Ferrara during the Holocaust.

Sunflowers (1970) (original Italian title: I Girasoli) is his famous romantic anti-war tragedy. A simple story about a hospital volunteer, "Una Breve Vacanza (1973; A Short Vacation)", was made in De Sica's neo-realist film style. De Sica's last film, Il Viaggio (1974; The Voyage), was an adaptation of a short story by Luigi Pirandello and starred Richard Burton alongside De Sica's favorite actress Sophia Loren.

At this point in his career, De Sica had reached the height of his commercial success and was known as an international director, able to work in both Hollywood and Rome. He also continued to work as a successful actor, playing many notable roles during this period, including his Academy Award-nominated performance in `A Farewell to Arms' (1957) and his memorable portrayal of a petty thief-spy in Roberto Rossellini's `Il Generale della Rovere (1959)'.

De Sica won an Oscar for the film. De Sica has won many Oscars in his film career. and was honored at many of the world's premier film festivals, including Cannes, Moscow, BAFTA and Berlin.

Legacy:

The famous American film critic Pauline Kael recalled:

When 'Shoeshine' was released in 1947, I went to see it alone. It had been preceded by a terrible quarrel between a lover and a lover that left people in an indescribable state of despair. I left the theater, tears streaming down my face, and then I heard the irritated voice of a college girl complaining to her boyfriend, "I just don't understand what was so special about this movie." I was walking down the street, crying uncontrollably, and I wasn't sure whether my tears were for the tragic scene on screen, for the disappointment I felt for myself, or for the isolation I felt from those who couldn't experience the brilliance of 'Shoeshine.' Because if people can't feel 'Shushain', what else can they feel? ... Later I found out that the man I had a fight with had also gone to see the film that night and came out crying. Still, our tears for each other and for 'Shushain' could not unite us.

Life, as 'Shushain' shows, is so complicated that there can be no easy ending.

While writing this quote, I remembered this: “In 1988, in Prague, my classmate Sanjay Sahani and I were associated with the Indian Film Festival organized by the Indian Embassy. After the screening of Satyajit Ray’s ‘Pather Panchali’, I could hear the sound of many crying and saw most of the audience leaving the hall in tears.

Kayl, quotes Orson Welles: “I feel that I have no rival in directing the camera. But I cannot do what De Sica can do. I recently watched his film 'Shoeshine' again and the camera disappeared, the screen disappeared, there was only life..."

André Bazin wrote "De Sica's Neapolitan charm, thanks to the cinema, became the most widespread message of love heard in our time since Chaplin."

A few famous films by Vittorio De Sica in brief:

"The Children Are Watching Us" (Italian: I bambini ci guardano) is a 1944 tragic drama film. This is the first work of De Sica with the famous screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, who later became immortal as one of the greatest neo-realist pairs in the history of world cinema. The story of the collapse of the family, the family crisis, the mother who cannot take responsibility for the family and runs away, leaving her husband and child behind. The devastating consequences of this immature decision of adults deeply affect the innocent child. Realistic portrayal: The film avoids over-dramatization and portrays the real and sensitive lives of ordinary people. This film is a milestone in the Italian Neo-Realism movement.

Shoeshine (1946): The story of the friendship between two young shoe shiners in post-World War II Rome who are tortured by the occupying US soldiers and face harsh realities. The film won a special Oscar at the Academy Awards.



Shoeshine (1946)



The Children Are Watching Us (1944)



Shoeshine (1946)



Bicycle Thieves (1948)

The Bicycle Thieves (1947): The heart-breaking story of a poor unemployed man who pawns his wife's bedsheet, a wedding present, to buy a bicycle to qualify for a job. It is stolen on the first day of purchase and he sets out to find it with his young son, his life turned upside down after the theft. Inspired by Charlie Chaplin's films and King Vidor's The Crowd, De Sica used amateur actors and actresses and shot in various locations to create a film set in the post-war period. The film has touched audiences around the world and has become an integral part of the international film industry. It is widely regarded as one of the greatest films of all time.

Miracle in Milan (1951): A wonderful social fairy tale about poor orphans.

Umberto D. (1952): A tragicomedy about a retired old man and his beloved dog, and a young maid who takes pity on them both. The performances of the amateur actors were widely praised. According to some critics, 'Umberto D.' was the last neo-realist film.



Umberto D. (1952)

'The Gold of Naples' was a multi-episode comedy starring Silvana Mangano, Eduardo De Filippo, Paolo Stoppa, Toto and a young woman discovered by the director. Actress Sophia Loren. De Sica played himself in one notable episode; he played a Count who suffered from a severe gambling addiction. It was a satirical self-mockery of De Sica's real-life gambling woes. Often short of cash, he would often take on menial commercial jobs (such as David O. Selznick's international production of Terminal Station) to pay off his mounting debts.

The Roof: Among his personal efforts during this difficult period was `The Roof', a neo-realist love story in which a couple struggles to find a home to live in. From here he returned to form through several collaborations with Sophia Loren.

The Two Women: Adapted from a novel by Alberto Moravia, La Chiosciaria (The Two Women) is notable for its restrained portrayal of issues such as the rape of women by soldiers during wartime. Sophia Loren's performance was particularly commendable and she won the Academy Award for Best Actress, the first ever given to a foreign film actress.



Two Women (1960)



Two Women (1960)

Sunflowers (1970): (original Italian title: I Girasoli) is his famous romantic anti-war tragedy. It stars two legends of Italian cinema, Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni. Antonio (Marcelo) and Giovanna (Sophia) fall in love and marry during World War II. Just 12 days after their wedding, Antonio is sent to fight on the Russian front. He is presumed dead after the horrors of the war. When the war ends, Giovanna goes to Russia and begins searching for Antonio. Giovanna discovers that Antonio is alive, but has lost his memory. He is living a happy life in Russia with a new wife and children. Key Features Anti-war theme: The film portrays the horrors of war and the tragic separation of families and loved ones due to it. Sunflower's soundtrack is unprecedented: The film's heart-warming soundtrack was composed by Oscar-winning composer Henry Mancini, which is still very popular today. Superb cinematography: Some scenes filmed in the vast sunflower fields of the Soviet Union (Ukraine) and Italy leave a deep impression on the audience.



Sunflowers (1970)

The Lottery (1970): was a satirical portrayal of Italian patriarchy, in which Loren played a circus worker who offers herself as a prize in a fair lottery.

Marriage Italian-Style: Starring Sophia Loren opposite Marcello Mastroianni, was a satirical analysis of marriage. The film's sophistication and strong sense of the passage of time mark it as a deeply personal film.



Marriage Italian Style (1964)

However, these subsequent successes were short-lived and, with the exception of The Garden of Finzi-Continis in 1970, De Sica's final years were a period of slow decline.

Death: A Roman Catholic and humanist (communist), De Sica died on 13 November 1974 at the Neuilly-sur-Seine Hospital in Paris after surgery for lung cancer.

Nearly fifty-two years after his death, his films remain part of an artistically rich
period in film history. Few European filmmakers Like Vittorio De Sica, has managed to combine artistic ambition with genuine popularity.

Personal life: His addiction to gambling was well-known, and because of this, he often lost large amounts of money and took on jobs that would not have interested him otherwise to make up for it.



Marriage Italian Style (1964)

He never made a secret of his gambling; in fact, he reflected it in his own film roles, such as Count Max (which he starred in but did not direct) and The Gold of Naples and Rossellini's General della Rovere, in which De Sica played the title role.

In 1937, Vittorio De Sica married actress Juditta Rissone, who gave birth to their daughter Emilia (10 February 1938 – 23 March 2021). In 1942, on the set of Un Garibaldino al Convento, he met Spanish actress María Mercader (cousin of Leon Trotsky's assassin Ramón Mercader), with whom he became involved. De Sica never separated from his first family: he lived a dual family life, with double celebrations on holidays. It is said that, on Christmas and New Year's Eve, he would set the clocks back two hours at Mercader's house so that he could have drinks with both families at midnight. Risonne agreed to maintain the pretense of a marriage so as not to leave his daughter fatherless. After finally divorcing Risonne in France in 1954, he married Mercader in Mexico in 1959, but the marriage was not considered valid under Italian law. In 1968, he obtained French citizenship and married Mercader in Paris. In the meantime, he had two sons with her: Manuel (1949–2014), a musician and composer, and Christian (born 1951), who followed in his father's footsteps and became an actor and director. When Christian was 18, the brothers learned that they had a half-sister and began communicating. Christian's son and Vittorio's grandson, Brando De Sica, continued the lineage and became an actor and film director.

Vittorio De Sica's filmography:

• Red Roses (1940) Maddalena, Zero for Conduct (1940) • Teresa Venerdi (1941).
• A Garibaldian in the Convent (1942) • The Children Are Watching Us (1944).
• The Gates of Heaven (1945) • Shoeshine (1946) • Heart and Soul (1948).
• Bicycle Thieves (1948) • Miracle in Milan (1951)• Umberto D. (1952).
• Terminal Station (1953) • The Gold of

Naples (1954)• The Roof (1956).
• Anna of Brooklyn (1958) • Two Women (1960) • The Last Judgment (1961).
• Boccaccio '70 (1962) • The Condemned of Altona (1962) • Il Boom (1963).
• Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (1963)• Marriage Italian Style (1964) Un Mon Nuovo (1966) • After the Fox (1966)• Woman Times Seven (1967)• The Witches (1967).
• A Place for Lovers (1968)• Sunflowers (1970)• The Garden of the Finzi-Continis (1970) • Man and Wife (1970)• Low Chiamarimo Andrea (1972)• A Brief Vacation (1973)• The Voyage (1974).

Honors and awards received:
Vittorio De Sica was awarded the Interfilm Grand Prix at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1971.
"Miracolo a Milano" won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival
"Umberto di" was an official selection at the Cannes Film Festival
"Stazione Termini" was an official selection at the Cannes Film Festival
"L'Oro di Napoli" was an official selection at the Cannes Film Festival
"Il Teto" won the OCIC Award at the Cannes Film Festival
"Anna di Brooklyn" was an official selection at the Berlin International Film Festival
"La Chiosciara" was an official selection at the Cannes Film Festival
"Matrimonio all'italiana" was an official selection at the Moscow International Film Festival
"Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini" was the winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival.
"Shoe Shine" Berlin International Film Festival Interfilm Award winner - Otto Dibelius Film Award 1946 "Nastro d'Argento" Award for Best Director
"Shoe Shine" Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film (Honorary)
1949 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film for "Bicycle Thieves".
BAFTA (British Academy Award) Best Film of 1950: Bicycle Thieves
1965 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film for "Ieri, oggi, domani (Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow)".
1972 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film for "Il Giardino dei Finzi-Continis" The Garden of the Finzi-Continis.
De Sica was as relevant in his time, as he is today, and will be in the future. My heartfelt tribute to the memory of this great artist!

AM Mamunur Rashid

A.M. Mamunur Rashid is a painter, illustrator, graphic designer, screenwriter, cultural activist, film society activist, and film critic. A Fine Arts graduate, he studied documentary filmmaking at FAMU, Prague.

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Versatile Artist
Khan Ataur Rahman

Rafiquzzaman

Introduction

Khan Ataur Rahman. To his friends and well-wishers, he was simply Khan Ata. To his colleagues and companions in everyday work, he was the beloved Ata Bhai. Tall in stature, with a faint smile always lingering at the corner of his lips and an intelligent gaze, he always seemed to be searching for something. There was a certain dignity in his manner and bearing. Whether he was walking alone or standing among a crowd, he was instantly recognizable. The reason was simple: he was an exceptional individual among countless others. It was his work that made him so distinctive. His thoughts and ideals, his intellect, his outlook, his pursuit of knowledge, his refined taste, his deep compassion and love for people, especially ordinary people, his patriotism, and his strong sense of responsibility made him stand apart from everyone else.



Khan Ataur Rahman

Khan Ataur Rahman was a man of extraordinary versatility. He was a radio artiste, programme announcer, newsreader, newspaper columnist, translator, essayist, singer, lyricist, composer, music director, music teacher, stage actor, story, dialogue and screenplay writer, actor, director, and producer. In the cultural arena of Bangladesh, Khan Ataur Rahman was his own greatest competitor. Throughout his life, he worked selflessly for the advancement of pure culture. Particularly after the untimely death of writer and filmmaker Zahir Raihan in 1972, he found himself increasingly alone. Their journey together had begun in 1958 when Khan Ataur Rahman acted in Jago Hua Savera, where Zahir Raihan served as assistant director. They continued working together until Jibon Theke Neya, directed by Zahir Raihan in 1970, on the eve of Bangladesh's Liberation War.

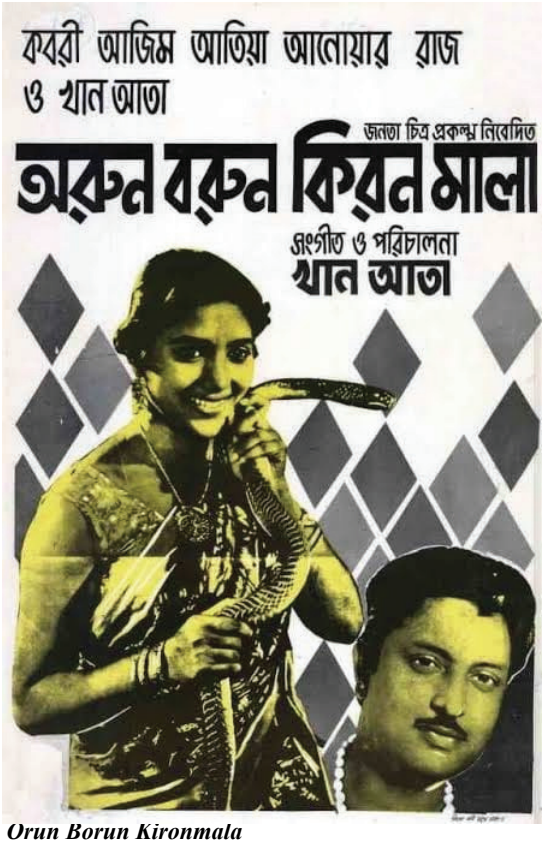
Their thoughts, ideals, intellect, and outlook on life were remarkably similar. That is why they complemented each other



Kokhono Aseni

so perfectly. In every branch of Bangladesh's cultural sphere, his creative and active participation added a new dimension to the country's cultural development. In every field of his work, audiences discovered a new Khan Ataur Rahman through his creations. For this very reason, Khan Ataur Rahman remains an extraordinary and truly versatile artist. Khan Ataur Rahman was born on 11 December 1928 in the village of Ramkantapur, Singair Upazila, Manikganj. His father was Ziarat Hossain Khan and his mother was Jahura Khatun. He was the fourth among five brothers and sisters. His father, Ziarat Hossain Khan, was a police officer, while his mother was a homemaker. At that time, his father was a graduate, which was a rare distinction. He also possessed remarkable proficiency in both English and Bengali literature. His mother, Jahura Khatun, belonged to a family of pirs (Sufi spiritual leaders). His maternal grandfather and uncles served as caretakers of the shrine of the Five Pirs in Dhamrai. During the annual Urs celebrations, religious musical performances were held at the shrine, and young Khan Ataur Rahman took part alongside his grandfather and uncles. His mother affectionately called him "Miya." It may be said that his entry into the world of culture began through his participation in the music performed at the shrine.

By performing the song "Mon Poboner Dinga Baiya Bondhur Deshe Jai" ("Sailing the boat of my heart's wind toward my beloved's land"), he won first place in the Dhaka District Music Competition. At that time, he was a third-grade student. The year was 1937. Around the same period, after watching a jatra performance, he tried to practise archery, but the arrow accidentally struck the corner of his mother's eye. He passed the Matriculation examination from Dhaka Collegiate School in 1944 with distinction and completed his Intermediate from Dhaka Intermediate College in 1946, also with distinction. While study-



Orun Borun Kironmala

ing at Dhaka Collegiate School, he began acting in stage plays. It is particularly noteworthy that he played female roles in several productions. Among them, his performances as Aleya in Nawab Sirajuddaula and Henrietta in Michael Madhusudan's play earned him considerable praise.

After completing his school and college education, he enrolled at Dhaka Medical College at his father's wish. However, medicine could not hold his interest. His heart was drawn toward music, and he was equally passionate about acting. Driven by this dream, he decided to leave for Bombay. No sooner had he made up his mind than he put it into action. Seizing the opportunity, he secretly took 60 taka from his mother's box and ran away from home, intending to go to Bombay. However, while waiting at Fulbaria Railway Station, he was caught by his brother-in-law. After being scolded and reprimanded, he was compelled to return home, and that journey came to an abrupt end.

Abroad

In 1947, Khan Ataur Rahman enrolled in the B.Sc. programme at the University of Dhaka. While studying there, he was awarded a scholarship to study photography in London. However, instead of going to London, he once again tried to go to Bombay with the dream of becoming a film actor. His efforts finally succeeded in 1949, and he secretly left for Bombay.

After arriving in Bombay, he would stand outside the gates of film studios, watching actors, directors, and technicians coming and going, dreaming of the day when he



Choto Bou

too would be able to enter those studios and become one of them by acting in films.

At night, he slept on the footpaths. During the day, he wandered around the streets of Bombay. One day, with the help of cameraman Jal Irani, he found an opportunity to work as an apprentice. However, the job did not satisfy him. He continued searching for an opportunity to act. In January 1950, he left Bombay for Karachi. His intention was to travel on to Lahore and pursue acting in films. By then, however, he had no money left.

At that time, Syed Waliullah was the News Editor of Radio Pakistan, while Fateh Lohani and Kazi Khalek were newsreaders. With their assistance, Khan Ataur Rahman secured a job as a newsreader at Radio Pakistan. During this period, he came under the guidance of the renowned sarangi maestro Ustad Jahur Khan and received systematic training in music from him. Whenever he had the opportunity, he travelled to Lahore in the hope of finding a role in films. Although he could not immediately establish himself in films, he found opportunities in theatre in Karachi as both an actor and a director.

To mark the inauguration of the East Pakistan Association in Karachi, it was decided to stage the play Nawab Sirajuddaula. Khan Ataur Rahman resigned from his job at Radio Pakistan. Besides directing the play, he also performed the title role. Other actors included Syed Waliullah and S. M. Sultan. This was in 1951. The production was successfully staged and received widespread appreciation. Using part of the money raised from the play, together with the savings from his job, Khan Ataur Rahman and S. M. Sultan set out for London. Upon arriving in London, another



Soye Nadia Jage Pani (1968) - First Urdu film of Khan Ata, a portrayal of rural gypsy life.

Soye Nadia Jage pani

period of uncertainty began. He had no work and did not know what he should do. Meanwhile, his pocket was almost empty. At last, whatever little money they had left was used to buy painting materials for S. M. Sultan. Bengali friends in London organized an exhibition of Sultan's paintings. The proceeds from the exhibition sustained them for a few days.

Later, Khan Ataur Rahman took a job washing dishes in a hotel. In 1953, he enrolled in the Drama Department of the City Literary Institute. That same year, he was elected President of the Pakistan Students' Federation in London. In 1954, with a UNESCO scholarship, he travelled to Holland, where he participated in an educational tour on international relations. In 1955, he returned to London and accept-

ed a job teaching mathematics and English at South Henky Day College. At the same time, he worked in the News Department of the BBC. During this period, he became associated with several theatre companies in London. Among the most notable were the R.B. Theatre and Ivan MacLare's Theatre Royal.

In 1957, he purchased a motorcycle on instalments. After paying several instalments, he and his friend Ali Imam embarked on a remarkable journey, travelling across many countries by motorcycle before finally reaching Karachi. After arriving in Karachi, he sold the motorcycle and returned to his homeland, Dhaka, a completely transformed Khan Ataur Rahman. Soon after his return to Dhaka, he joined the then Pakistan Observer newspaper. Thus began a new chapter of his life, as a journalist. At the same time, he became busy as a radio announcer, reciter, lyricist, composer, and radio drama artiste. Despite being occupied with so many responsibilities, he never stopped searching for an opportunity to act in films.

Professional Career

The opportunity to act in films came to Khan Ataur Rahman in 1958. Director A. J. Kardar began preparations to make a film titled Jago Hua Savera, based on the lives of fishermen living along a riverine region. Khan Ataur Rahman played the lead role in the film. Opposite him starred Kolkata actress Tripti Mitra. It was through Jago Hua Savera that Zahir Raihan began his career in cinema. He served as the assistant director of the film. From there began the close friendship and lifelong bond between the two.

Khan Ataur Rahman had a brother named Anis, who died prematurely. To keep his brother's memory alive, he adopted the screen name "Anis" and made his acting debut in Jago Hua Savera under that name. He continued to appear under this name in several subsequent films. Later, when he began directing films and established himself as a lyricist, composer, and music director, the name Khan Ataur Rahman became widely known to audiences. In Edesh Tomar Amar (1959), directed by Ehtesham, he played the hero under the screen name Anis. As Khan Ataur Rahman, he also served as the lyricist, composer, and music director of the film.

One of the songs in the film was to be sung by the renowned folk singer Abdul Alim. However, a problem arose during the recording. Despite repeated attempts, the song could not be recorded satisfactorily. It was getting very late at night. Many people, including the then Managing Director of the Film Development Corporation (FDC), Nazir Ahmed, were present in the recording studio. In those early days of filmmaking in the country, the launching ceremony, song recording, and shooting of any new film were considered festive occasions.

Abdul Alim became nervous because of the presence of so many people and began to perspire. Yet playback singing was not new to him. Seeing the singer's condition, the music director requested everyone present in the studio to step outside for a while. After everyone left, the song was successfully recorded in a single take. Abdul Alim embraced the music director with gratitude and said, "Today you have saved both my honour and my career."

In Kakhono Aseni (1961), the first film directed by Zahir Raihan, Khan Ataur Rahman

acted in the film and also served as its music director. The same year, in Je Nodi Moru Pothe (1961), directed by Salahuddin, he not only acted but also worked as the lyricist and composer. Zahir Raihan and Kalim Sharafi jointly produced Sonar Kajol (1962). In this film as well, Khan Ataur Rahman worked as the lyricist and music director. He also served as the music director for Salahuddin's Surjyasnan (1962).

In Zahir Raihan's Kacher Deyal (1963), he acted, wrote the lyrics, composed the music, and served as the music director. He also provided playback vocals for one of the songs, which was picturized on himself. He was the music director for three films released in 1964: Dui Diganta, directed by noted journalist and filmmaker Obaidul Huq; the Urdu film Milan, directed by Rahman; and Zahir Raihan's Urdu film Sangram.

From 1964 onward, Khan Ataur Rahman began producing and directing his own films. At the same time, he continued to work regularly on other productions. Over the course of his career, he made 21 full-length feature films and 9 short films and documentaries. For all the films he produced and directed, he himself wrote the dialogues and screenplays, composed the songs, and served as the music director. In several of them, he also acted. His first directorial venture was Onek Diner Chena (A Longtime Acquaintance). The two principal roles were played by Hasan Imam and Sultana Zaman. Before entering films, Hasan Imam had worked in a bank and was active in the theatre. He served as the music director for Sagar (1965), directed by Ehtesham, and for Bahana (1965), directed by Zahir Raihan. He also composed the music for the Urdu films Aakhri Station (1966),



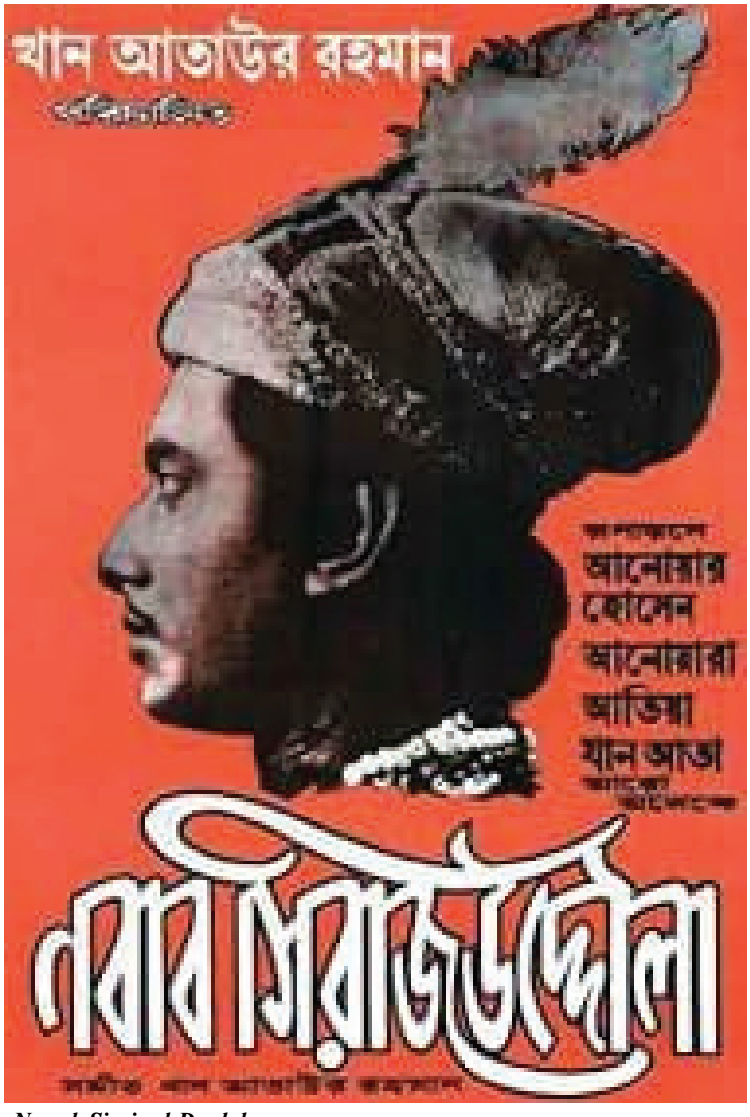
Shujon Shokhi

directed by the distinguished West Pakistani Urdu poet, lyricist, and storyteller Saroor Barabankvi, and Mala (1966), directed by Mustafiz.

Based on the life story of Bhawal Raja, Khan Ataur Rahman made the film Raja Sannyasi (1966).

During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, the defence of the then East Pakistan became increasingly uncertain. Against this backdrop, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, presented his historic Six-Point Programme before the Government and the people of Pakistan, demanding autonomy for the region. The Six-Point Programme sparked a massive political movement in East Pakistan, which later evolved into the movement for Bangladesh's independence.

Inspired by this movement, Khan Ataur Rahman made the film Nawab Sirajuddau-



Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah

la in 1967. The film was produced in both Bengali and Urdu. Following the release of Nawab Sirajuddaula, the movement in East Pakistan gained even greater momentum. The Urdu version of the film was also warmly received by audiences in West Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, Sindh, and the Frontier Province, where it generated considerable enthusiasm. Anwar Hossain portrayed the title role of Nawab Sirajuddaula, while Khan Ataur Rahman himself played the role of Mohanlal. Their deeply emotional and heartfelt performances, depicting the struggle to defend the freedom of their homeland, profoundly stirred the thoughts and emotions of audiences and contributed to the growing political consciousness of the time.

In 1968, he directed the Urdu films Soye Nadiya Jage Pani and Arun Barun Kiranmala. He also produced Sat Bhai Champa, which was directed by Dilip Som. In 1969, Zahir Raihan directed Moner Moto Bou. Khan Ataur Rahman wrote the songs, composed the music, and served as the music director for the film. The same year, he directed the film Jowar Bhata. The following year, he produced Apon Por, which was directed by editor Bashir Hossain. The film introduced Jafar Iqbal as its leading actor, while singer Abida Sultana made her debut as a playback singer. He also worked as one of the music directors for Qasam Us Waqt Ki, directed by A. J. Kardar. Against the backdrop of the 1969 Mass Uprising, Zahir Raihan directed Jibon Theke Neya. In this landmark film, Khan Ataur Rahman acted, wrote the lyrics, composed the music, sang one of the songs, and served as the music

director.

The song he sang for this symbolic film against dictatorship became a rallying cry of the movement. The song was "E Khancha Bhangbo Kemon Kore" ("How Shall I Break This Cage?"). After Bangladesh achieved independence, Jibon Theke Neya was selected for screening at the Moscow International Film Festival in 1972. However, the film had no subtitles, and members of the festival jury raised objections. Khan Ataur Rahman, who was a member of the Bangladeshi delegation to the festival, stepped forward. With the jury's permission, he provided a live English narration of the film from the opening scene to the closing scene during the screening.

When the screening ended, the audience rose to their feet and applauded. They praised Khan Ataur Rahman's courageous initiative and warmly congratulated him. In this way, on that occasion, the name of the newly independent, war-ravaged Bangladesh was brought to the attention of the international community with great honour. After the general elections in the then East Pakistan, Zahir Raihan began work on the film Let There Be Light. Before the film could be completed, the Liberation War of Bangladesh broke out, and he joined the war effort. After independence, when he returned to the country to search for his elder brother, the martyred journalist and writer Shahidullah Kaiser, he himself disappeared. As a result, Let There Be Light remained unfinished.

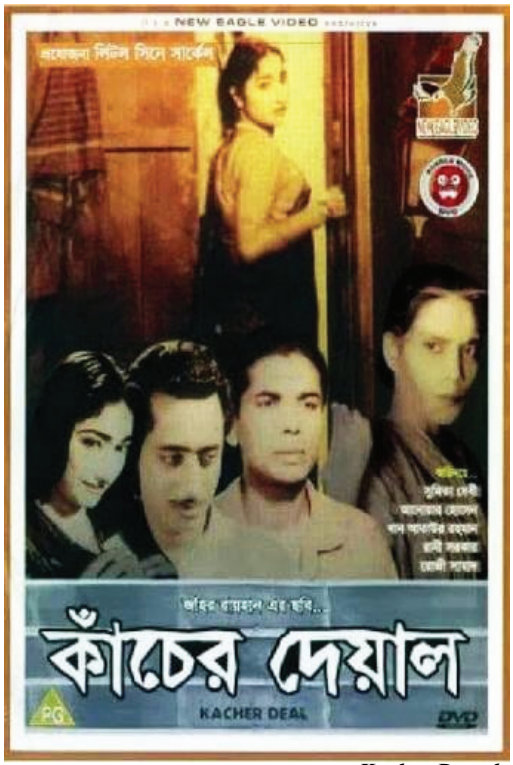
Khan Ataur Rahman served as the music director of the film. At the same time, Khan Ataur Rahman made the film Sukh Dukkho (Joy and Sorrow), which was released in 1971. After the Liberation War, he directed



Matir Maya

Jhorer Pakhi (Bird of the Storm), a film produced by him. It was directed with the assistance of C. B. Zaman, and it marked the first appearance of the leading actor Razzak in a film produced under the Khan Ata Productions Ltd. banner. Reflecting the realities of post-war Bangladesh, particularly the frustrations and hardships faced by freedom fighters, he made the film Abar Tora Manush Ho (Become Human Again) in 1973.

Following its release, the film generated considerable debate, both in support of and against its subject matter. The following year, he made Tritratna. In the same year, he worked as the lyricist and music director for Bhaibon, directed by Ali Kawsar. He made the popular film Sujan Sakhi in 1975. The performances of Kobori and Farooque,



Kacher Dewal

along with the film's songs, repeatedly drew audiences to cinema halls. That same year, when the legendary subcontinental music director Kamal Dasgupta, who had been composing the music for Keno Emon Hoy, directed by Amal Bose, passed away, Khan Ataur Rahman completed the film's background score.

Thereafter, he directed the films Matir Maya (1976), Din Jay Kotha Thake (1979), Arshinagar (1983), Hisab Nikash (1985), Porosh Pathor (1987), and Lal Golap (1990). Among these, only Din Jay Kotha Thake achieved moderate commercial success. The others failed at the box office. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and the fall of his government, Bangladesh's political environment once again shifted toward the pre-independence atmosphere, accompanied by the rise of cultural degeneration. The film industry became increasingly dominated by imitation, vulgarity, violence, and the influence of black money. In such an environment, producers and directors with refined artistic sensibilities, like Khan Ataur Rahman, gradually found themselves pushed to the margins.

One after another, many of them took up different professions simply to survive. Khan Ataur Rahman, however, remained devoted throughout his life to the pursuit of genuine culture. To support his family and keep his production company running, he established a music recording studio. He also produced a number of short films and documentaries commissioned by the Shishu Academy and several other institutions.

Unable to contribute to culture in the way he had always wished, he gradually became mentally and physically exhausted. Finally, in 1994, with the support of a producer, Khan Ataur Rahman began work on a new film. On 16 December, poet Sufia Kamal formally inaugurated the Liberation War-based film Ekhono Onek Raat (There Is Still a Long Night Ahead). However, the film took a considerable amount of time to complete. It was eventually released on 12 December 1997. Before its release, the Censor Board and the Appeal Board raised objections to several scenes in the film and approved its release only after those portions had been cut. Such treatment in the final years of his life caused him deep pain.

Ironically, Khan Ataur Rahman himself had once served as a member of the Censor Board and was well acquainted with its rules and regulations. Before the film could



Jibon Theke Neya

be released, the grief-stricken Khan Ataur Rahman passed away on 1 December 1997.

Short Films and Documentaries

For the short films and documentaries directed by Khan Ataur Rahman, he himself prepared the concept, screenplay, dialogues, narration, lyrics, musical compositions, and music direction.

These include:

1. Danpite Chele (The Mischievous Boy) for the Bangladesh Shishu Academy.
2. Biye in Bangladesh (Marriage in Bangladesh).
3. Rojnamcha of the Tea Gardens.
4. The Bengali Poet Jasim Uddin.
5. Abbas Uddin: The Bird of Song.
6. Jute.
7. Two Leaves and a Bud.
8. Meet Bangladesh.
9. The Impact of the Farakka Barrage on Bangladesh, produced for the Bangladesh Water Development Board.
10. Writing

Juger Byabodhan (The Gap of the Times), Smritir Pakira (The Birds of Memory), and Koyekti Shishir Bindu (A Few Drops of Dew) are among Khan Ataur Rahman's published books. Early in his career, he worked as a journalist for the then Pakistan Observer newspaper. In 1960, together with Fazle Lohani, he became associated with Agtya Publications. He also served as the Dhaka correspondent for the Karachi-based Eastern Film magazine. Throughout his life, he wrote columns and essays for various newspapers and magazines. He also left behind many unpublished poems. For radio, he worked as a newsreader, scriptwriter, presenter, reciter, creator of musical dramas, and actor in radio plays.



Triratna



Ekhono onek raat

Patriotism

On 7 March 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered his historic speech at the Race-course Maidan, declaring: "This time the struggle is for our liberation. This time the struggle is for our independence."

Khan Ataur Rahman later recalled: "At that time, I was the President of the East Pakistan Film Producers' Association (1970–71). On the evening of 25 March, at 7:00 p.m., I gathered the members who were in Dhaka and convened an emergency meeting of the Association at my production office at 64 North South Road, Kakrail. Those present at the meeting included Abdul Jabbar Khan, Professor Salahuddin Ahmed, Mosharraf Hossain Chowdhury, Iftekharul Alam, Kazi Zahir, Alamgir Kumkum, Haider Ali, Zahir Raihan, Mustafizur Rahman, Azizur Rahman Buli, S. M. Parvez, Abul Khair, A. R. Khan, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, Fakhrul Alam, Abdul Hamid, Sirajuddin, A. A. Siddiqui, Obaidul Islam Milan, Ibne Mizan, Nurul Azim, Raunak Chowdhury, and Niranjan Saha.

In view of the country's political situation, we discussed whether the Association should continue under its parent office in Lahore or become independent. After deliberating both in favour of and against independence, at 9:00 p.m., we unanimously decided that, effective from 25 March, the East Pakistan Film Producers' Association would henceforth be known as the Bangladesh Film Producers' Association."[1]

* * * * * *

Regarding Khan Ata, one of his close associates wrote:

"When I sit down to write about Ata Bhai, what comes to my mind more than his achievements in cinema, music, acting, or any other field is his humanity. During those terrifying days of 1971, I had the opportunity to remain by his side and realize what a truly great human being he was.

From the beginning of the movement in March 1971, when the united community of artists became actively involved, he was deeply engaged in it.

Many people perhaps do not know how he participated in the Liberation War while remaining in Dhaka. Reel after reel of patriotic songs was secretly recorded and smuggled across the border, and many of those songs were later broadcast from the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

Through us, he also collected various kinds of medicines and arranged for them to be delivered to the freedom fighters.
Ata Bhai never wanted publicity for any of these activities, nor did he ever speak about them.

Around July 1971, I once said to him, 'Ata Bhai, why don't you cross over and join the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra?'

Before I could finish, he interrupted me and said, 'It is not true that one can participate in the war only by crossing the border. A great deal of work is also being done from here. Most importantly, I cannot simply leave. I have my own family, my elderly mother, and all of you who are working with me. You all have families as well. How can I abandon all of you in such a helpless condition and leave?'"

He continued:

"Another incident comes to mind. It was probably the 2nd or 3rd of April, when the curfew was relaxed for a few hours. During that brief break, he found my house, came to me, placed some money in my hands, and said, 'Keep this, and distribute it among the others.'

Afterwards, for many months, no film work was possible. Yet he kept our entire production unit together and continued paying us every month.

One by one, he sold his cars. He sold the carpets and furniture from his office. But he never once said to a single member of the unit, 'You should leave because I can no longer afford to keep you.'

Despite immense hardship, he continued to stand by us and kept everything going.There are many more examples of his humanity that remain unknown even today.Only those who received his help know how he quietly provided financial and moral support to many impoverished artists and cultural workers in this country. Ata Bhai never sought recognition for these acts, nor did he ever publicize them."[2]

Apart from this, during the mid-1960s, he played a significant role in the movement against the production of Urdu-language films in East Pakistan. He addressed a protest meeting held at Paltan Maidan on the issue.

Although he opposed the dominance of Urdu films in the region, he directed only one Urdu film, Soye Nadiya Jage Pani. He also had the Bengali film Nawab Sirajuddaula dubbed into Urdu and released it commercially for audiences in what was then West Pakistan.

Music

Music was the very soul of Khan Ataur Rahman. He was born into music, and from the beginning of his life until the very end, he lived within the world of melody.He wrote countless songs for radio, television, and films. He composed them and served as their music director. To him, music was never merely a form of entertainment. Through music, he spoke about people and about his country. The lyrics of his songs are notable for their purity and simplicity of language. Their melodies were always appropriate to the setting and situation, and they were never overloaded with excessive instrumental arrangements. Speaking about this, his wife, the distinguished singer Nilufar Yasmin, said:

"He approached every creative endeavour with complete sincerity. Whether it was writing songs for films, radio, or television, composing music, teaching songs, singing, acting, or directing, he was deeply committed in every field. He never looked down upon any form of artistic work. He showed immense respect for artists and was always careful to preserve their dignity. After independence, while making the film Abar Tora Manush Ho, he decided that Shahnaz Rahmatullah would sing one of its playback songs. The recording was to take place at the Film Development Corporation (FDC). Many people objected to his decision, but he paid no attention to their opinions. He simply said, 'No one except Shahnaz can bring out the emotional depth this song requires.' He personally drove to bring Shahnaz to the FDC studio, and after the recording, he himself drove her back home. He was exceptionally caring toward new artists and always encouraged them. It may be said that he guided them by holding their hands. Both of us were singers, and we had profound respect for each other's artistic identity. This is what made Khan Ataur Rahman different from everyone else."[3]

At the Bangladesh Television (BTV) studios in the RAJUK Building, he was responsible for training new singers. Under the auspices of the Bangla Academy, he composed melodies for several lyrical poems written by the renowned poet Kaykobad. Recordings of these songs were played at various programmes organized by the Academy and received wide appreciation. He composed background scores that harmonized with the scenes, characters, locations, and natural settings of his films. At times, he also incorporated melodies from songs by Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam into his background scores. For example, in his film Jowar Bhata, he used the melody of Rabindranath Tagore's song Gram Chhara Oi Ranga Matir Path as part of the background music. Many of the songs he wrote and composed gained widespread popularity, especially his patriotic songs and songs composed for films.

Among his film songs are:

- *"Pothe Pothe Dilam Choraiya" – Surjyasnan (1962)*
- *"Shyamol Boron Meyeti Dagor Kalo Aankhiti" – Kacher Deyal (1963)*
- *"Hazar Sal Ka Bujha Dhor Ghamaya" – Sangam (1964)*
- *"Tum Salamat Raho Muchkorawo Hasa" – Milan (1964)*
- *"Taro Ki Chhaiya Chhaiya" – Sagar (1965)*
- *"Chhuti Hati Chhari Nagari Bodhuya Hay Sansar" – Mala (1966)*

• *"Eki Sonar Aloy Jibon Bhoriye Dile" – Moner Moto Bou (1969)*
• *"Mon Jodi Bhenge Jay Jak" and "O Je Mayere Ma Bole Keu Dake Na" – Jowar Bhata (1969)*
• *"E Khancha Bhangbo Ami Kemon Kore" – Jibon Theke Neya (1970)*
• *"Amader Bondi Kore Jodi Ora Bhabe" – Sukh Dukkho (1970)*
• *"Byathar E Agun Jodi Jwole", "Adharer Alo", and "Ami Ek Nir Hara Jhorer Pakhi" – Jhorer Pakhi (1973)*
• *"Ek Nodi Rokto Periye Banglar Akashe Roktimo Surjo Anle Jara" – Abar Tora Manush Ho (1973)*
• *"Shob Sokhire Par Korite", "Agun Jweler Nebhanor Manush Nai", "Jar Noyone Jar Bhalo Lagchhe Bhalo", and "Hayre Kothay Bole Gache Bel Pakile" – Sujan Sakhi (1975)*
• *"Din Jay Kotha Thake", "Mayer Moto Apon Keu Nai", and "Mon Majhi Tor Boitha Nere" – Din Jay Kotha Thake (1979)*
• *"Hayre Abar Mon Matano Desh" – Danpite Chele (1980)*

Awards and Honours

Throughout his life, Khan Ataur Rahman devoted himself quietly and selflessly to the pursuit of genuine culture. He never worked in expectation of praise. Yet recognition and awards serve to encourage every artist.

The films that received awards and honours include:

Soye Nadiya Jage Pani
Received a Certificate of Merit at the Moscow International Film Festival.

Nawab Sirajuddaula
Received a Certificate of Merit at the Tashkent International Film Festival, as well as the Pakistan Nigar Award.

Abar Tora Manush Ho
Won the Bangladesh Film Journalists' Association (BACHSAS) Award for Best Screenplay, along with awards in several other categories.

Sujan Sakhi
Won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay. Kobori received the Best Actress award, and Nilufar Yasmin won the Best Female Playback Singer award for the song Agun Jweler from the Bangladesh Film Society (BACHSAS).

Ganges and Ganges
Received awards for Best Documentary as well as the Bangladesh Film Journalists' Association (BACHSAS) Award.

Danpite Chele (The Mischievous Boy)
Won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay, Best Lyricist, and Best Child Artiste (Master Shakil).

In West Bengal, at a programme organized in Kolkata by Raymongal, an organization established in memory of Satyajit Ray, Khan Ataur Rahman was honoured alongside Tapan Sinha and Shyam Benegal. On that occasion, he was presented with the Satyajit Ray Platinum Jubilee Medal. He also delivered a lecture on Satyajit Ray.

In addition, Khan Ataur Rahman represented Bangladesh at international film festivals held in Moscow, Tashkent, and several other countries.

Evaluation

Most of the films directed by Khan Ataur Rahman were social dramas. They contain emotion, struggle, and love. His stories primarily portray the lives, joys, sorrows, and everyday experiences of the Bengali middle and lower-middle classes. However, three of his films stand apart from the rest. These are the historical film Nawab

Sirajuddaula, the post-Liberation War film Abar Tora Manush Ho, and Ekhono Onek Raat. Nawab Sirajuddaula played a significant role in inspiring the Bengali people in their struggle for liberation. The leader of the independence movement, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, also watched the film.

Abar Tora Manush Ho depicts the frustrations experienced by freedom fighters immediately after the Liberation War while also pointing toward the path of true liberation. Ekhono Onek Raat portrays how the very people who had risked their lives with weapons in hand to liberate the country were later neglected by the nation they had fought to free. The film was released in 1997, after the death of its director.

Critical Assessments of Khan Ataur Rahman's Films

Regarding the background and motivation behind Nawab Sirajuddaula, director Khan Ataur Rahman wrote in an essay titled "Nawab Sirajuddaula and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib":

"While describing the background to the making of this film, I portrayed Sirajuddaula on screen as a symbolic representation of the popular leader of the 1960s, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."[4]

* * * * * *

"Nawab Sirajuddaula was made against the backdrop of the intense political climate of the time. It is based on Nawab Sirajuddaula's bloody struggle to defend the independence of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, and on the tragic consequences of that struggle.

The film's message is as powerful as Khan Ataur Rahman's skill as a filmmaker is evident throughout. Blending imagination with dramatic elements, the historical film Nawab Sirajuddaula stands as a vivid symbol of our independence and national consciousness."

Anupam Hayat commented:
"More than its cinematic techniques, the film was driven by dramatic emotion. Yet audiences found in Nawab Sirajuddaula the very essence of the spirit of liberation."[5]

* * * * * *

The gigantic socio political upheaval highlighted by the war of National Liberation seems to be made little or no impression on a majority of there on films, only a few films like Abar Tora Manush Haw' or Kar Hshi Ke Hashey;' by Anonda made some attempts at satirising some aspects of post liberation socio-political chaosn even though within the then governments permitted limits6

* * * * * *

"A slightly better finished product with an over message to the Youngers generation of post liberation Bangladesh. the simplistic sermons call upon young hoodlums to land over their firearms and return to classes conforming to the establishmentaria propaganda that ignores the basic physical and chemical law of post war violence and juvenile delinquenely only some uninhibited performances from new comers present the solitary refreshing feature'7

* * * * * *

"Among the Bangladeshi filmmakers who demonstrated commitment, sincerity, and creative vision in portraying the problems of the post-1971 Liberation War period and suggesting ways to overcome them, one of the foremost is Khan Ataur Rahman through his film Abar Tora Manush Ho.

In this film, the director appeals to the freedom fighters not to lose their way because of the erosion of moral values, but instead to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation."[8]

* * * * * *

"The commercially successful film Sujan Sakhi is set against a rural backdrop and explores the emotions of adolescent love. Sujan Sakhi has therefore been recognized as a well-crafted and entertaining film."[9]

In the Eyes of Intellectuals

"Khan Ataur Rahman brought the historical narrative of Nawab Sirajuddaula to the screen and himself portrayed the character of Mohanlal. The characters of Sirajuddaula, Gholam Hossain, Mohanlal, Mir Madan, and Aleya become so deeply united by their love for the country that the distinction between the Nawab and his followers virtually disappears. Out of selfless devotion, Gholam Hossain and Mohanlal seem to transcend even the Nawab himself. Just as a skilled sculptor can repeatedly reshape a lump of clay into an elephant, a horse, a tiger, or a bear, a truly gifted actor can dissolve his own identity and assume any character. As an actor, Khan Ataur Rahman demonstrated this ability in many films. Yet he did not have to transform himself greatly to play Mohanlal, because Mohanlal's sincere love for his country was the same sincerity with which Khan Ataur Rahman loved cinema and his own culture. The historical Mohanlal could not ultimately withstand the conspiracies of the British and their local collaborators. Nevertheless, the sacrifice of the defeated Mohanlal remains forever alive in the hearts of Bengalis. Although the Mohanlal of our film industry could not prevent the decline of Dhaka's cinema, we must always remember his sincerity and his love with deep respect. The Mohanlal of history embraced martyrdom on the battlefield before witnessing the Nawab's defeat. The only difference is that the Mohanlal of our cinema was left behind when men like Zahir Raihan and Alamgir Kabir, the Sirajs and Mir Madans of our film industry, disappeared before him."[10]

Another tribute reads:

"We admired him from a distance. His towering stature, his resonant voice, his tall physique, and his intellectual depth combined to make him, in our eyes, a truly great man. Music, literature, acting, newsreading, film direction, and songwriting were all fields in which he moved with remarkable ease. Yet there was no trace of arrogance in him. He carried within him a profound love for his country, for the soil of his homeland, and for his friends and loved ones. If anyone betrayed that love, he could never forgive them."

"I had the good fortune of coming to know the legendary Khan Ataur Rahman closely when I was serving as the Director General of the Bangla Academy. Democracy had only recently been restored in the country. The great poet Kaykobad had written a number of lyrical poems. According to some literary critics, these lyrical poems represent his finest work. It is worth mentioning that while Rabindranath Tagore's Manasi was published in 1890, Kaykobad's Ashrumala appeared only five years later, in 1895. Yet Kaykobad came to be known chiefly as the author of the epic Mahashmashan, a distinction of which he himself was very proud. For some reason, it occurred to us that if the poems of Ashrumala were set to music, they would deeply

move the hearts of people. The poet whom we had confined to library shelves under the label of an epic poet might once again come alive in the public imagination through a more compassionate appreciation of his work. When I discussed the idea with Ata Bhai, he was delighted. Throughout his life, whether in making Nawab Sirajuddaula or delivering his unforgettable performance in Jibon Theke Neya, he had pursued a lifelong artistic mission. It seemed to him that this project of setting Kaykobad's poems to music was another expression of that same mission. He took the poems with him. Within a short time, twelve of Kaykobad's poems had been transformed into songs through his melodies. He recorded them with the voices of Nilufar Yasmin and Subir Nandi.

Bangla Academy published the album, and the then Minister of Culture, Jahanara Begum, readily allocated the necessary funds for its production. An official launching ceremony was also held, where Subir Nandi and Nilufar Yasmin performed the songs composed by Ata Bhai. Through Kaykobad's lyrical poetry, Ata Bhai and I grew very close. In time, that relationship matured into a profound bond of the spirit. The affection I received from him is beyond comparison. He also composed music for one of my songs for Bangla Academy. It was frequently played during the Academy's annual book fair, and Nilufar Yasmin's rendition of it became immensely popular. Neither the government nor the country's intellectual community gave him the recognition he truly deserved. His melodies enriched our national consciousness, and they will continue to inspire future generations. One day, perhaps, we shall be able to evaluate with complete objectivity his contribution to our national consciousness and to our struggle for independence. Only then will we discover Khan Ataur Rahman in the fullness of his own greatness. On that day, he will no longer remain merely a memory. He will be reborn in our collective consciousness."[11]

Not every person is creative, yet within every human being there exists an enduring creative spirit. Occasionally, however, there appears an exceptional individual whose entire existence, from the awakening of consciousness onward, is illuminated by creativity. Khan Ataur Rahman was one such extraordinary personality. From the 1960s until the end of the 1990s, for nearly four decades, he devoted himself tirelessly to leading Bangladesh's cultural and cinematic landscape. Extreme hardship, overwhelming darkness, poverty, deprivation, injustice, oppression, the helpless suffering of ordinary people, the many crises of individual and collective life, disappointment, failure, sorrow, pain, grief, and anguish never succeeded in halting the force of his creative spirit. If he was ever restrained, it was only by his profound reverence for beauty and life, and by his quiet attraction to their deeper meanings.

He was a devoted seeker and lifelong worshipper of truth, greatness, and beauty. His devotion and artistic pursuit were inseparably intertwined with an immeasurable sense of humanity. His compassion for the distressed and suffering reached the level of genuine empathy. A deeply humane sensibility is readily visible throughout his work. It reflects the simplicity, warmth, and fellow feeling of the ordinary people of rural Bengal. He was by no means unaware of the complexities and challenges involved in sustaining such an

ideal. In his professional life, Khan Ataur Rahman was the embodiment of dedication, concentration, sincerity, and perseverance. He regarded work as an inseparable part of life itself. There was never the slightest trace of carelessness in his approach to his work. Whether it was writing a screenplay, producing or directing a film, acting, writing lyrics, or composing music, his defining characteristic was to complete every task with meticulous care and excellence.

I had the rare privilege of observing this aspect of his personality at very close quarters. One particularly noteworthy aspect of his work during the 1980s was the making of factual short films and documentaries. Responding to requests from various government, non-governmental, and international organizations, he produced several outstanding documentaries of this kind. Among the most notable were Industry in Bangladesh, Songs and Dances of Bangladesh, and Bangladesh. During the 1980s and 1990s, he entrusted me with translating the English commentaries for several of these documentary films into Bengali.

Speaking of his qualities, it may be said that although Khan Ataur Rahman was a highly educated and accomplished writer who never lacked confidence in his own abilities, he never hesitated or felt embarrassed to invite others to contribute whenever he believed it would help complete a piece of work in the best possible manner. Such conduct is the natural hallmark of truly great and noble individuals. It was an inherent part of his character and his guiding principle.[12]

With Colleagues

Kobori

"I shared an excellent understanding with Ata Bhai. Both of us were deeply serious and emotionally committed when it came to our work. Perhaps that is why he understood me so well, and I understood him equally well. As Ata Bhai, he was extremely warm and affectionate, caring for us like an elder brother. At the same time, whenever we made mistakes, he would correct us firmly, but he would also do everything possible to help us overcome those mistakes. Outside the shooting floor, Ata Bhai was one kind of person; during shooting, he became someone entirely different, completely focused and intensely serious. Before filming began, he would carefully explain the character and its relationship with the other actors. Then, just before taking a shot, he would explain everything once again. Sometimes he would even perform the scene himself to demonstrate how it should be done. He had an exceptional ability to draw the best performance out of an actor. Every film produced under Ata Bhai's banner was clean, refined, and dignified. Through the camera, he sought to express the emotions of ordinary people. In particular, the joys and sorrows, the happiness and pain of human life found vivid expression through his skill as a filmmaker. He loved his country, and he loved its people. That is why he never knowingly did anything that could harm either the nation or its people. Because of certain personal limitations, there were times when he was compelled to do things against his own wishes, and those decisions always left him with a sense of regret. Those who worked with him, especially the members of the production unit, respected and even feared him because of his disci-

pline. Yet his gentle manner inspired them to do their work properly. When it came to artists, however, he was always exceptionally sincere, patient, and caring."[13]

Bobita

"Ata Bhai was a man of countless talents. To have known someone like him was itself a matter of good fortune. Those of us who worked with him and saw him from close quarters know what an extraordinary human being he truly was. Yet we failed to evaluate him as he deserved. Outwardly, he appeared stern and dignified, but inwardly he was simple and humble. If someone was inattentive during work, he would become angry. But when the work was done well, he would smile warmly and speak in the gentlest of tones. Ata Bhai worked in a highly systematic manner and placed great value on time. Whether another Khan Ataur Rahman, endowed with so many qualities, will ever be born into the cultural world of this country is something only the future can tell."[14]

Anowara

"The greatest achievement of my acting career was being given the opportunity to play the role of Aleya in Ata Bhai's film Nawab Sirajuddaula. It was after this performance that I became widely recognized. Before we began work, he looked at me and told me to walk with confidence and poise. Before shooting started, I tried my best to transform myself into Aleya. Then came the decisive moment. While performing the scenes under Ata Bhai's direction, I completely forgot that I was Anowara. After the film's release, whenever I watched Aleya in Nawab Sirajuddaula in the cinema, I felt not only astonishment but, even more, a deep sense of pride. Again and again, I found myself thinking that only a creative genius like Ata Bhai could have made such a transformation possible."[15]

Farooq

"Among ordinary people, the truly extraordinary was Khan Ataur Rahman. Every work of this gifted man has profoundly inspired me. I do not know whether there is another artist anywhere in the world who was at once a poet, writer, journalist, lyricist, composer, singer, music director, actor, and film director. Ata Bhai's last film was Ekhono Onek Raat. It was based on the lives of neglected freedom fighters. Because he sought to present the truth on screen, he had to face the hostility of the Censor Board. The film had to be cut repeatedly. Bearing this pain in an independent Bangladesh, he passed away only eleven days before the film's release. It was truly heartbreaking."[16]

Conclusion

In 1960, Zahir Raihan and Khan Ataur Rahman took the initiative to establish an organization called the Little Cine Circle. Their aim was to reshape the world of Bengali cinema. Although that dream was not ultimately realized through the Little Cine Circle itself, both men continued to pursue it independently. They believed that, after independence, a new era would dawn for the country's film industry. With that goal in mind, Zahir Raihan returned from the battlefields of the Liberation War with new plans and aspirations. However, after Zahir Raihan disappeared in 1972, those dreams were shattered. Following the political upheaval of 1975, Khan Ataur Rahman became increasingly isolated. What he did thereafter was, in many ways, simply a struggle to survive.

Khan Ataur Rahman was an exceptionally responsible and deeply introspective individual. He was always acutely aware of his own identity and principles. Given the stature and reputation he enjoyed in society, he could easily have used that influence for personal gain if he had wished. But his education, refined taste, and moral values prevented him from doing so. He was a man of independent spirit, immense self-respect, and a profound longing for love. Unable to accomplish all that he had hoped to achieve in his professional life, and gradually worn down by the circumstances surrounding him, he became mentally exhausted. And thus, one day, the Sirajuddaula of Bangladesh's worlds of music and cinema met his own tragic downfall.

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14. C. B. Zaman, Chief Assistant Director to Khan Ataur Rahman.

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16. C. B. Zaman, Chief Assistant Director to Khan Ataur Rahman.

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THE POET OF SILENCE AND SUFFERING

Kim Ki-duk's Films, Life, and Cinematic Philosophy

Abid Zaman

Few filmmakers have challenged audiences as profoundly as Kim Ki-duk. Celebrated for his minimalist storytelling, striking visual symbolism, and uncompromising exploration of human suffering, Kim emerged as one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary world cinema. His films often occupied the uneasy space between beauty and brutality, confronting viewers with stories of loneliness, violence, redemption, and spiritual transformation. Through a cinematic language built upon silence, imagery, and emotional intensity, he transformed deeply personal experiences into universally resonant works of art.



From Crocodile and The Isle to Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring, 3-Iron, and Pieta, Kim demonstrated a remarkable ability to move between realism and allegory while maintaining a uniquely recognizable artistic identity. His characters frequently existed on the margins of society—drifters, outcasts, laborers, and forgotten individuals struggling to find meaning in a world marked by isolation and inequality. Through their journeys, Kim explored fundamental questions about guilt, desire, forgiveness, and the possibility of redemption.

What distinguished Kim Ki-duk from many of his contemporaries was his uncon



ventional path into filmmaking. Unlike directors who emerged from prestigious film schools or established industry networks, Kim was largely self-taught. His experiences as a factory worker, a soldier, and a struggling painter profoundly shaped his worldview and artistic sensibility. These experiences provided him with a unique perspective on human suffering and resilience, themes that would become central to his cinematic vision.

Despite often generating controversy for his depiction of violence and sexuality, Kim's films earned widespread recognition at major international film festivals. His work received honors at Venice, Berlin, and Cannes, securing his reputation as one of South Korea's most internationally acclaimed filmmakers. Yet beyond awards and critical recognition, his significance lies in his ability to use cinema as a medium for philosophical inquiry, challenging audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about human nature and society.

This article explores the life, artistic philosophy, and cinematic legacy of Kim Ki-duk, examining how a self-taught artist from rural South Korea evolved into one of the most provocative and influential filmmakers in contemporary world cinema.

Growing Up on the Margins: Poverty, Labor, and Isolation

Kim Ki-duk was born on December 20, 1960, in Bonghwa County, a rural region of South Korea. Unlike many celebrated filmmakers who grew up surrounded by literature, art, or intellectual culture, Kim's early life was marked by economic hardship and limited educational opportunities. Raised in a working-class family during a period of rapid social and economic transformation in South Korea, he experienced firsthand the realities of poverty, labor, and social marginalization.

His formal education ended relatively early, and much of his youth was spent working to support himself rather than pursuing academic ambitions. These experiences exposed him to the lives of ordinary people struggling within the pressures of modern society. The sense of alienation, hardship, and emotional isolation that char-

acterized many of his later films can be traced directly to these formative years.

Before entering the world of art and cinema, Kim worked in factories and later served in the South Korean Marine Corps. Military life introduced him to discipline, authority, and violence elements that would later appear repeatedly throughout his filmography. Yet these experiences also deepened his awareness of human vulnerability and the psychological effects of power structures on individual lives.

Kim Ki-duk's artistic vision. Long before he entered the film industry, he had already encountered many of the themes that would define his work poverty, loneliness, violence, survival, and the search for redemption. The filmmaker who would later captivate international audiences was, at this stage, simply a young man struggling to understand both himself and the world around him.

From Painter to Filmmaker: Discovering the Language of Images

Kim Ki-duk's journey into cinema was



Unlike many filmmakers whose artistic development followed a clear and predictable path, Kim's journey was shaped by uncertainty and self-discovery. Living on the margins of society, he developed an acute sensitivity to those who existed outside conventional social structures. This empathy for outsiders would later become one of the defining characteristics of his cinema.

These early years provided more than personal experiences; they formed the emotional and philosophical foundation of

neither planned nor conventional. Unlike many filmmakers who studied directing, screenwriting, or film theory in academic institutions, Kim entered the world of cinema through visual art. His path to filmmaking emerged from a deep fascination with images and a persistent desire for self-expression, making his artistic development remarkably different from that of most contemporary directors.

In his early twenties, Kim spent several years serving in the South Korean Marine Corps before eventually pursuing painting.

During the 1990s, he traveled to Paris, where he lived for several years as a struggling artist. Supporting himself through the sale of his paintings, he immersed himself in European art and culture while continuing to develop his understanding of visual composition and symbolism. Although he had not yet become a filmmaker, these years proved crucial in shaping the aesthetic sensibility that would later define his cinema.

Life in Paris exposed Kim to a wider artistic world. Museums, galleries, and European cinema introduced him to new ways of thinking about visual expression. As a painter, he became increasingly interested in the emotional and symbolic power of images. He learned that a single visual composition could communicate ideas and emotions beyond the reach of words. This understanding would later become one of the central principles of his filmmaking.
Unlike directors who entered cinema through technical training, Kim approached film as a visual artist. He was drawn not primarily to dialogue or narrative structure but to the expressive possibilities of image, silence, and atmosphere. This perspective would eventually distinguish his films from much of mainstream Korean cinema, which often relied more heavily on conventional storytelling techniques.

Upon returning to South Korea, Kim began writing screenplays despite having little formal knowledge of filmmaking. His determination was remarkable. Through observation, experimentation, and self-education, he taught himself the fundamentals of screenwriting and cinematic storytelling. In a relatively short period, several of his scripts received recognition in screenplay competitions, providing him with his first opportunity to enter the Korean film industry.

For Kim, cinema represented more than a new artistic medium. It offered a way to combine painting, storytelling, philosophy, and human observation into a single form of expression. The lessons he learned as a painter attention to composition, symbolism, visual rhythm, and emotional resonance would become fundamental elements of his cinematic language.

These formative years marked the transformation of an aspiring artist into a filmmaker. More importantly, they established the foundations of a creative philosophy that would guide his entire career. Long before achieving international recognition, Kim had already begun developing a distinctive artistic voice one that favored images over words, intuition over convention, and emotional truth over narrative comfort.

Breaking Into Korean Cinema

By the mid-1990s, Kim Ki-duk had begun attracting attention within South Korea's film community as an unconventional and promising new talent. Armed with little formal training but driven by an intense artistic vision, he entered an industry that was itself undergoing rapid transformation. South Korean cinema was beginning to gain international recognition, yet few filmmakers approached storytelling in the manner that Kim would soon demonstrate.
His directorial debut, Crocodile (1996), immediately revealed a filmmaker interested in society's outsiders. Set among the marginalized communities living beneath Seoul's bridges, the film explored themes of survival, violence, and unexpected human connection. Although modest in

scale, it introduced many of the concerns that would define Kim's later work. The film's raw emotional energy and unconventional perspective attracted critical attention and announced the arrival of a unique new voice in Korean cinema.

Kim followed this debut with a series of ambitious projects, including Wild Animals (1997) and Birdcage Inn (1998). These films continued his exploration of alienation, desire, and social exclusion while demonstrating increasing confidence in visual storytelling. Rather than presenting polished narratives designed for mass appeal, Kim focused on emotionally complex characters whose lives existed beyond the boundaries of conventional society.



What made these early works particularly distinctive was their refusal to offer easy moral judgments. Kim's characters often inhabited ethically ambiguous worlds where violence coexisted with tenderness and cruelty existed alongside compassion. This complexity challenged audiences and critics alike, generating both admiration and controversy.

Although his films achieved only limited commercial success during this period, they established his reputation as an uncompromising artist. Critics recognized that Kim was pursuing a form of cinema guided not by market expectations but by personal vision. His willingness to explore uncomfortable aspects of human experience distinguished him from many of his contemporaries and laid the groundwork for his future international success.

By the end of the 1990s, Kim Ki-duk had accomplished more than the launch of a filmmaking career. He had established the artistic foundations of a body of work that would soon attract attention far beyond South Korea's borders. The stage was set for the film that would transform him from a promising national filmmaker into a significant figure in world cinema.

The Isle and the Emergence of a Provocateur

If Kim Ki-duk's early films introduced his artistic vision, The Isle (2000) announced his arrival on the international stage. More than a commercial release, the film became a defining moment in his career, attracting worldwide attention while simultaneously establishing his reputation as one of contemporary cinema's most controversial filmmakers. Through its unsettling imagery, emotional intensity, and unconventional storytelling, The Isle revealed both the

strengths and the complexities of Kim's artistic approach.

Set on a remote fishing resort composed of floating houses, the film tells the story of a mysterious woman and a fugitive man whose lives become intertwined through a relationship marked by desire, suffering, and emotional dependency. On the surface, the narrative appears simple. Yet beneath its sparse dialogue lies a deeply symbolic exploration of loneliness, human connection, and the destructive forces that often accompany intimacy.

What distinguished The Isle was its willingness to confront audiences with images that many found shocking. Graphic scenes of self-harm and physical suffering generated intense debate among critics and viewers. Some praised the film as a courageous artistic statement, while others condemned it as unnecessarily provocative. Regardless of opinion, however, few could ignore its impact. Kim had created a work that demanded attention and challenged conventional expectations of cinematic comfort.

Beyond the controversy, The Isle demonstrated many of the qualities that would become central to Kim's mature style. Silence plays a crucial role throughout the film, allowing gestures, expressions, and visual symbolism to communicate emotional meaning. Water functions as both a physical environment and a metaphorical space, representing isolation, transformation, and the fluid boundaries between desire and suffering. Every visual element contributes to an atmosphere that feels simultaneously realistic and dreamlike.

The film's reception at international festivals significantly expanded Kim's reputation outside South Korea. Critics and scholars began recognizing him as part of a new generation of Korean filmmakers whose work was attracting global attention. Yet Kim remained distinct even within this emerging movement. While many directors focused on social realism or



commercial storytelling, he pursued a deeply personal form of cinematic expression rooted in symbolism, spirituality, and emotional extremity.

More importantly, The Isle established Kim Ki-duk as a filmmaker unafraid of controversy. Rather than seeking universal approval, he embraced the possibility of discomfort, believing that cinema could provoke reflection through confrontation. This commitment to artistic risk would remain a defining characteristic throughout his career.

In many ways, The Isle represents the moment when Kim's artistic identity became fully visible. The themes of isolation, desire, violence, and redemption that had appeared in earlier works were now presented with greater confidence and sophistication. International audiences had discovered a filmmaker whose work could not easily be categorized, and world cinema had gained one of its most distinctive and debated voices.

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring: Cinema as Spiritual Meditation

While The Isle established Kim Ki-duk as a provocative filmmaker, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring (2003) revealed another dimension of his artistic vision. Widely regarded as his masterpiece, the film demonstrated that beneath the violence and emotional intensity often associated with his work lay a profound interest in spirituality, morality, and human transformation. Through its simplicity and philosophical depth, the film became one of the most celebrated achievements in contemporary Korean cinema.

Set almost entirely within a small Buddhist monastery floating on a secluded lake, the film follows the life of a monk from childhood to old age. Structured around the changing seasons, the narrative reflects the cyclical nature of existence itself. Each stage of life introduces new experiences, desires, mistakes, and lessons, illustrating the continuous process of growth and self-discovery that defines the human condition.



Unlike conventional dramas that rely heavily on dialogue and plot development, the film communicates primarily through observation and symbolism. Kim allows landscapes, gestures, and natural rhythms to convey meaning. The tranquil setting becomes more than a backdrop; it functions as a spiritual space where human actions are placed within the larger cycles of nature and time. Through this approach, the film achieves a sense of universality that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries.

One of the film's greatest strengths lies in its exploration of Buddhist philosophy. Themes of karma, attachment, suffering, and redemption are woven seamlessly into the narrative. Rather than presenting religious teachings directly, Kim dramatizes them through the experiences of his characters. As the young monk encounters desire, guilt, loss, and regret, viewers witness the consequences of human choices and the possibility of personal transformation.

Visually, the film exemplifies Kim's mastery of cinematic minimalism. The serene lake, changing seasons, and carefully composed images create an atmosphere of contemplation rarely found in contemporary cinema. Every frame reflects a balance between beauty and meaning, demonstrating the influence of Kim's background as a visual artist. His use of nature is particularly significant, transforming the environment into a silent participant in the narrative.

The film received widespread international acclaim and introduced many viewers to Kim Ki-duk's work for the first time. Critics praised its emotional restraint, philosophical richness, and visual elegance. More importantly, it challenged assumptions about Kim as merely a controversial filmmaker. Here was an artist capable of profound tenderness and spiritual reflection, using cinema to explore questions that have occupied humanity for centuries.

If The Isle established Kim as a provocateur, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring established him as a philosopher of cinema. Through its meditation on life, suffering, and renewal, the film demonstrated the full depth of his artistic vision and secured his place among the most significant filmmakers of his generation.

Silence as a Cinematic Language

Among the most distinctive characteristics of Kim Ki-duk's cinema is his use of silence. While many filmmakers rely on dialogue to reveal character motivations and advance narrative development, Kim often stripped language away almost entirely. In several of his most acclaimed works, speech is reduced to a minimum or disappears altogether, forcing viewers to engage with visual storytelling and emotional nuance.

This approach reached one of its purest expressions in 3-Iron (2004), where the protagonist barely speaks throughout the film. Rather than presenting silence as an absence, Kim transformed it into a communicative force. Gestures, body language, spatial relationships, and carefully composed images became substitutes for conventional dialogue. The result was a cinematic experience that invited audiences to interpret meaning rather than receive it directly.

Kim's fascination with silence can be traced partly to his unconventional path

into filmmaking. Unlike many directors trained in literary traditions or screenwriting programs, he entered cinema through painting and visual art. His films often resemble moving canvases, where composition and symbolism carry as much weight as narrative events. Silence allowed these visual elements to dominate the frame.

The technique also reflected Kim's broader skepticism toward social institutions and human communication. In many of his stories, language fails to bridge emotional distance. Characters are isolated, marginalized, or trapped within systems that render meaningful conversation impossible. Their silence becomes both a symptom of alienation and a form of resistance.

Critics frequently compared Kim's visual storytelling to that of filmmakers who emphasized imagery over dialogue, yet his use of silence remained uniquely his own. Rather than creating tranquility, silence in Kim's films often generates tension and ambiguity. It compels audiences to confront uncomfortable emotions without the relief of explanation.

This cinematic language helped distinguish Kim from his contemporaries in South Korean cinema. While directors such as Park Chan-wook and Bong Joon-ho became known for elaborate narratives and sharp dialogue, Kim developed a style built on absence, stillness, and visual metaphor. Silence was not merely a stylistic choice; it was the foundation of his artistic identity.

Pain, Violence, and Redemption

If silence formed the language of Kim Ki-duk's cinema, suffering provided many of its central themes. Throughout his career, Kim repeatedly explored physical and psychological pain, often depicting violence with a frankness that polarized audiences and critics alike.

Films such as Bad Guy (2001), The Isle (2000), and Pieta (2012) feature acts of cruelty that can be shocking in their intensity. Kim never treated violence as simple spectacle. Instead, he presented it as a transformative force destructive, unsettling, and yet often intertwined with the possibility of redemption. His characters inhabit worlds where suffering becomes a pathway toward self-discovery, forgiveness, or spiritual awakening.

This recurring concern with pain reflected Kim's view of human existence as fundamentally conflicted. His protagonists are frequently social outcasts: criminals, prostitutes, drifters, debt collectors, and individuals living at the margins of society. Rather than portraying heroic figures, Kim focused on people burdened by guilt, trauma, and moral ambiguity. Their journeys rarely follow conventional narratives of triumph. Redemption, when it arrives, is fragile and incomplete.

Religious imagery plays a significant role in these explorations. Christian symbolism appears throughout Kim's filmography, most notably in Pieta, whose title references Michelangelo's famous sculpture depicting the Virgin Mary holding the body of Christ. Yet Kim's engagement with spirituality was never confined to a single tradition. Buddhist themes of suffering, impermanence, and transcendence also permeate works such as Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring (2003), one of his most internationally celebrated films.

In that film, a floating monastery becomes a microcosm of human life, tracing the

cycle of innocence, desire, violence, remorse, and renewal. Unlike many of Kim's darker works, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring presents redemption as attainable through reflection and discipline. Nevertheless, the film remains consistent with his broader worldview: suffering is unavoidable, but it can serve as a catalyst for transformation.

The intensity of Kim's treatment of violence generated persistent controversy. Some critics accused him of exploiting brutality and misogyny, while others argued that his films confronted realities that mainstream cinema preferred to ignore. The debate became inseparable from his reputation. Admirers viewed him as a fearless artist willing to challenge audiences; detractors regarded his provocations as excessive and morally troubling.

Regardless of one's interpretation, violence in Kim Ki-duk's cinema was rarely gratuitous. It functioned as a mechanism through which he examined power, desire, shame, and the human capacity for change. His films suggest that redemption is possible, but only after individuals confront the darkest aspects of themselves and the societies they inhabit.

Controversies and Public Criticism

Kim Ki-duk's career was marked not only by artistic acclaim but also by persistent controversy. The same qualities that earned him recognition at major international film festivals his uncompromising vision, graphic imagery, and willingness to explore taboo subjects also made him one of the most divisive figures in contemporary cinema.

From the beginning of his career, critics questioned his portrayal of women and the dynamics of power within his films. Works such as Bad Guy and The Isle attracted accusations of misogyny due to their depictions of sexual violence, coercion, and exploitation. Detractors argued that Kim often subjected female characters to suffering without providing sufficient critical distance from the acts being portrayed. Supporters, however, contended that his films were intended to expose social brutality rather than celebrate it, emphasizing that his characters regardless of gender frequently existed within worlds defined by cruelty and marginalization.

The debate surrounding Kim's work intensified because his films resisted straightforward moral interpretation. He rarely offered explicit judgments on his characters' actions, preferring ambiguity over clear ethical conclusions. As a result, audiences and critics often disagreed sharply about whether his films condemned violence or merely represented it.

The most serious controversies emerged later in his career. In 2017, actress and former collaborator Seo Ji-yeon publicly accused Kim of physically assaulting her during the production of the film Moebius (2013) and alleged that he had pressured her into performing scenes that had not been included in the original script. The accusations received widespread attention within South Korea's film industry and became part of a broader national conversation about abuse of power in the entertainment sector.

Subsequent investigations and additional allegations from other women further damaged Kim's public reputation. While some legal proceedings resulted in fines related to misconduct, other allegations were not conclusively established in court. Never-

theless, the controversy significantly altered public perceptions of the director. Discussions of Kim's artistic legacy increasingly became intertwined with questions about his personal conduct and the ethical responsibilities of filmmakers.
The allegations also affected his professional standing within South Korea. Once celebrated internationally as one of the country's most distinctive auteurs, Kim found himself increasingly isolated from the domestic film industry. Several projects faced difficulties, and public support for his work declined considerably.

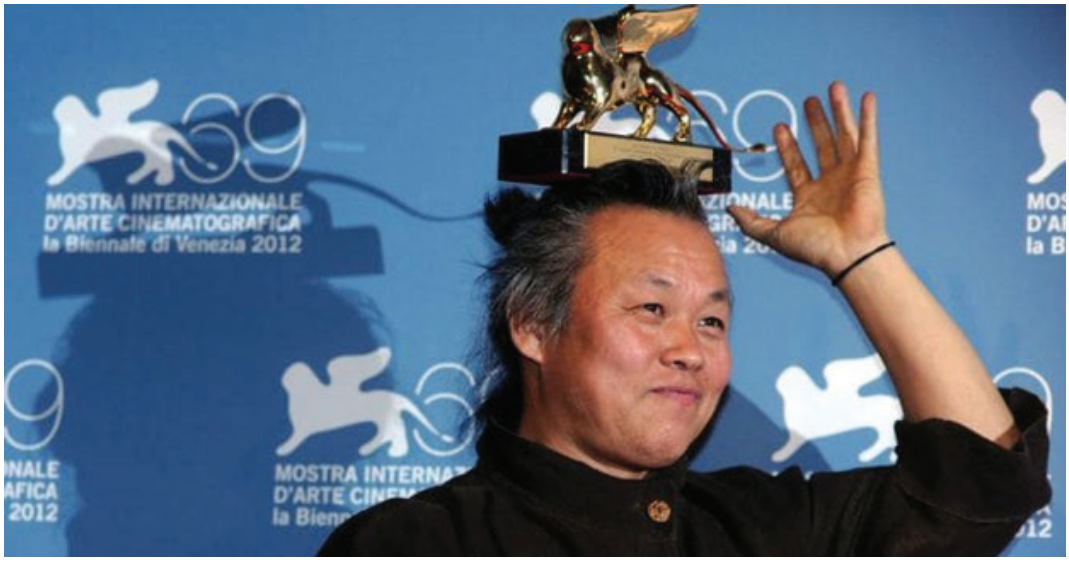
These controversies remain a central part of any assessment of Kim Ki-duk's life and career. For many observers, separating the artist from the allegations surrounding him has proven difficult, if not impossible. As a result, his reputation continues to be the subject of ongoing debate among critics, scholars, and audiences.

Legacy and Influence

Despite the controversies that surrounded his later years, Kim Ki-duk remains one of the most influential figures in the history of South Korean cinema. His rise from poverty and self-education to international recognition represents one of the most unconventional success stories in modern filmmaking.

Kim emerged during a transformative period for South Korean cinema, alongside directors who would later achieve global prominence. Yet his work occupied a unique position within this generation. While many filmmakers focused on historical memory, political themes, or genre innovation, Kim pursued intensely personal stories characterized by minimal dialogue, symbolic imagery, and emotional extremity. His films often felt detached from mainstream cinematic trends, operating according to their own distinctive logic and visual language.

Internationally, Kim played an important role in expanding awareness of South Korean cinema beyond Asia. Long before Korean popular culture achieved its current global reach, his films were being screened and celebrated at prestigious festivals



across Europe. Awards at Venice, Berlin, and Cannes introduced international audiences to a filmmaker whose style differed dramatically from both Hollywood conventions and traditional art-house cinema.

His influence can be seen in the continued interest in slow cinema, visual storytelling, and minimalist narrative structures. Younger filmmakers have cited his willingness to challenge audience expectations and reject commercial formulas as a source of inspiration. Even those who disagree with his methods often acknowledge the originality of his artistic vision.

Among his many works, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring has achieved particular longevity. Frequently included in discussions of the greatest South Korean films ever made, it remains one of the most accessible entry points into Kim's cinema. The film's meditation on spirituality, human weakness, and renewal has resonated with audiences across cultural and linguistic boundaries, ensuring its place as a modern classic.

Kim's death in 2020 closed a career that had spanned more than two decades and produced a body of work unlike any other in contemporary cinema. His films continue to provoke admiration, discomfort, reflection, and debate. For some, he was a visionary artist who transformed personal experience into powerful cinematic expression. For others, his work and personal controversies complicate any attempt at celebration.

What remains undeniable is Kim Ki-duk's significance in world cinema. Through silence, symbolism, and an unflinching examination of human suffering, he created films that challenged conventional storytelling and left a lasting mark on international film culture. His legacy endures not because it is universally accepted, but because it continues to inspire discussion about the possibilities and responsibilities of artistic expression.

Conclusion

Few filmmakers have followed a path as unconventional as Kim Ki-duk. Born into poverty in rural South Korea, educated largely outside traditional artistic institutions, and entering the film industry without formal training, he built a career that defied expectations at nearly every stage. His journey from factory worker and aspiring painter to internationally acclaimed filmmaker remains one of the most remarkable stories in contemporary cinema.

Throughout his career, Kim developed a cinematic style that was immediately recognizable. His films often relied on silence rather than dialogue, symbolism rather than exposition, and emotional intensity rather than conventional narrative structure. He was drawn to society's outsiders individuals living on the margins, burdened by loneliness, guilt, desire, and suffering. Through their stories, he explored questions of violence, spirituality, redemption, and the fragile nature of human connection.

The power of Kim's cinema lay in its refusal to offer easy answers. His films frequently challenged audiences, confronting them with uncomfortable images and morally ambiguous situations. For some viewers, this uncompromising approach represented artistic courage and originality. For others,

it crossed ethical boundaries and raised troubling questions about representation and responsibility. The controversies that surrounded both his work and his personal life ensured that his legacy would remain contested long after his death.

Yet controversy alone cannot explain Kim Ki-duk's enduring significance. Over more than two decades, he created a body of work that earned recognition at the world's most prestigious film festivals and helped establish South Korean cinema as a major force on the international stage. Films such as The Isle, 3-Iron, Pieta, and Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring continue to be studied, discussed, and debated by critics, scholars, and cinephiles around the world.

Kim's legacy ultimately resides in the tension that defines his career. He was celebrated and criticized, admired and condemned, embraced and rejected sometimes simultaneously. His films remain difficult to categorize because they exist at the intersection of beauty and brutality, compassion and cruelty, silence and expression. Whether viewed as masterpieces, provocations, or something in between, they continue to demand engagement from audiences willing to confront their complexities.

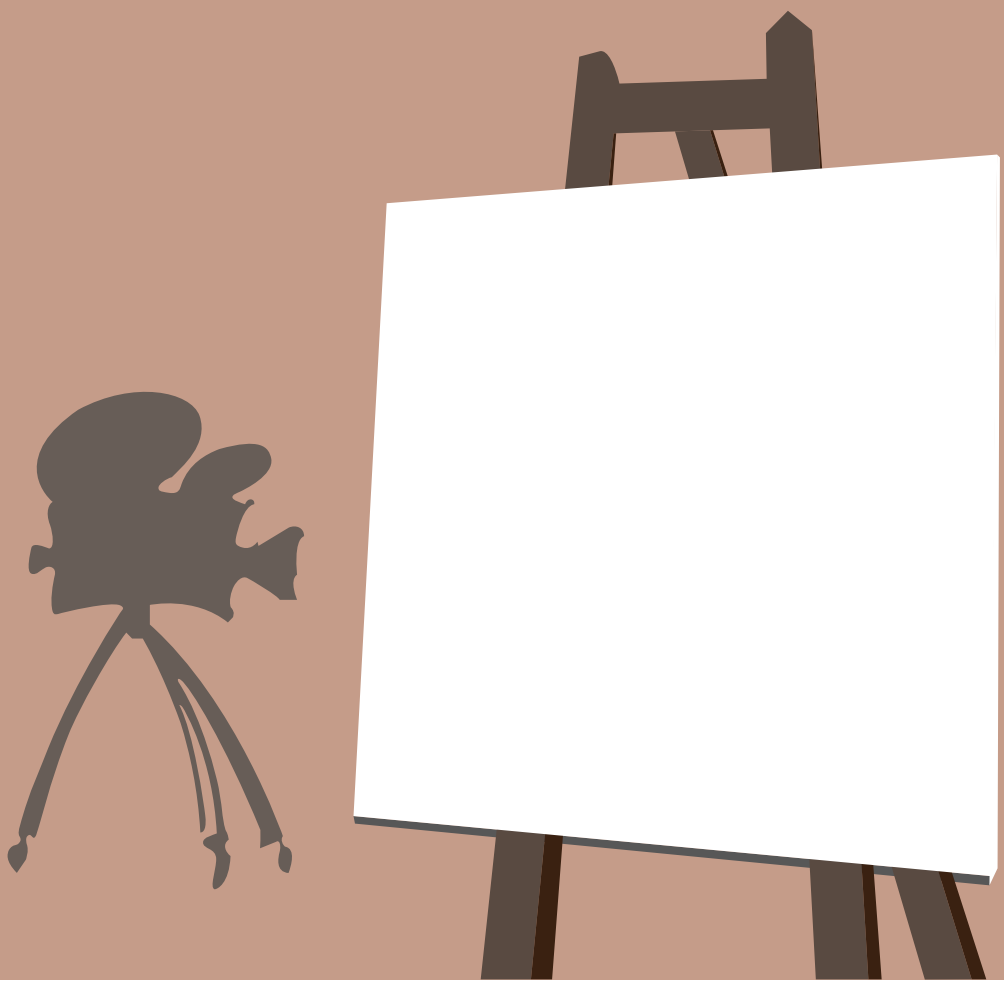
More than a filmmaker, Kim Ki-duk was a singular artistic voice whose work challenged conventional assumptions about cinema and human nature. His life and career demonstrate both the transformative potential of artistic vision and the complicated questions that arise when art, morality, and personal conduct intersect. As debates about his legacy continue, his place in the history of world cinema remains secure: not as an uncontested figure, but as one of the most distinctive and influential auteurs of his generation.

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On Silver Screen



Searching for Bonolota: A Journey Through Time, Memory, and Death

Afia Akter

There are films that tell stories, and then there are films that ask questions. Bonolota Sen belongs to a mystery Masud Hasan Ujjal does not adapt Jibanananda Das' famous poem into cinema; instead, he transforms it into a labyrinth where every corridor leads to another question rather than an answer.

When the credits roll, one mystery remains untouched:

Who is Bonolota Sen?

Bonolata, sitting face to face with the poet in the dark her eyes like a bird's nest, her face reflecting the delicate craftsmanship of Sravasti's forgotten art. She does not explain herself, nor does she need to. She simply remains when everything else has faded.

Is she the mythical woman who appears in the opening sequence, existing outside history and reality? Is she Jibanananda's own sister, whose memory silently haunts his loneliness? Is she the young woman who chooses cyanide over a life stripped of dignity? Is she the Dhaka University student carrying within herself the burden of another generation? Or is she the unnamed prostitute in the final scene, whose exhausted eyes somehow hold the same timeless tenderness that the poet once imagined?

Perhaps every one of them is Bonolota.
Or perhaps none of them is.
The film refuses to answer because Bonolota is never presented as a person. She becomes an idea a recurring human presence that appears whenever civilization begins to collapse. Like Jibanananda's own poetry, she survives through fragments, memories, faces, and absences.

Masud Hasan Ujjal understands something essential about poetry: a poem loses its soul



when translated literally. Instead of visualizing the poem, he visualizes its silence.

Throughout the film, Mohin emerges as one of the most enigmatic figures. He never entirely belongs to a single timeline. His movements, appearances, and encounters feel detached from conventional chronology. At times he seems like a wanderer, at others like a witness, and often like a traveller moving across different layers of time itself. Whether Mohin is literally a time traveller is almost irrelevant; what matters is the cinematic illusion the film constructs. Through him, different eras begin to bleed into one another, allowing history, memory, and imagination to coexist within the same frame.

His journey feels less like physical movement and more like travelling through the unconscious of Jibanananda Das.

The film constantly blurs the boundary between dream and reality. Every encounter feels like déjà vu. Every woman resembles another. Every road seems to lead back to an earlier memory. The narrative refuses linearity because memory itself is never linear.

In this sense, Jibanananda is not merely the subject of the film.

He is searching for himself.

The entire film becomes an internal pilgrimage where the poet walks through history trying to recover fragments of his own existence. Every Bonolota he encounters reflects another possibility of who he was, what he loved, and what he ultimately lost.

One of the film's most remarkable achievements lies in its treatment of death.

Masud Hasan Ujjal draws a subtle yet powerful parallel between the death of Jibanananda Das and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Neither death is portrayed merely as a biological ending. Both become symbolic sacrifices misunderstood by their own societies.

Like Christ, Jibanananda appears as someone whose deepest truths remain invisible during his lifetime. His suffering, alienation, and eventual death transcend biography and become spiritual metaphors. The film suggests that society often recognizes its prophets only after destroying them.





This parallel is never stated explicitly.

It exists through images.

Through silence.

Through recurring visual motifs.

And through poetry.

The visual language itself often feels closer to Andrei Tarkovsky than conventional South Asian storytelling. Time stretches. Empty spaces speak louder than dialogue. Rain, rivers, abandoned roads, mirrors, darkness, and light are never decorative elements; they become emotional landscapes. Each frame appears composed like a painting waiting to be read rather than merely viewed.

Masud Hasan Ujjal fills the narrative with literary echoes. References to Western poets and philosophical traditions appear organically throughout the film, placing Jibanananda within a much larger conversation about loneliness, mortality, modernity, and exile. Instead of presenting him as an isolated Bengali genius, the film quietly reminds us that his existential anxiety belongs to a universal literary tradition shared by poets across continents.

These references never function as intellectual exhibitionism. Rather, they expand the emotional geography of the film. Jibanananda's solitude begins in Bengal but ultimately belongs to humanity.

Perhaps the film's greatest strength is that it never attempts to explain its symbols.

Like poetry, it demands participation.

Every spectator discovers a different Bonolota.

Every viewing generates another interpretation.
This openness transforms the audience from passive viewers into active readers of cinematic poetry.

The cinematography embraces darkness without fear. Faces frequently emerge from shadows only to disappear again, suggesting that identity itself remains unstable. Sound design is equally restrained. Silence repeatedly interrupts dialogue, allowing absence to become as expressive as speech. Music appears not to manipulate emotion but to accompany memory.

The performances are similarly understated. Characters rarely announce their feelings. Instead, emotions remain

suspended between gestures, pauses, and unfinished conversations. This restraint perfectly matches the emotional universe of Jibanananda Das, where longing is always quieter than love itself.

The film also interrogates the relationship between women and representation. Every female character exists within different social realities myth, family, academia, despair, sexuality, and survival yet all become reflections of the same eternal feminine presence. Bonolota is simultaneously memory, desire, compassion, resistance, and history. She is never reduced to romance. She becomes civilization's forgotten face.

This multiplicity recalls what critics such as Bidhan Ribeiro have observed about the film: Bonolota Sen is less interested in narrating Jibanananda's biography than in constructing a cinematic consciousness shaped by poetry, memory, history, and imagination. Rather than offering factual certainty, it invites viewers into an interpretive experience where symbolism outweighs chronology and emotional truth becomes more important than historical realism.

Ultimately, Bonolota Sen is not a film one watches.

It is a film one inhabits.

Long after the screen fades to black, its questions continue to echo.

Who was Bonolota?

Who was Mohin?

Who was Jibanananda?

Perhaps the answer is hidden in the poet's own wandering soul.

Or perhaps the answer has always been us the audience searching endlessly for a face that can finally offer rest after "a thousand years" of walking through history.

Masud Hasan Ujjal has created a film that behaves like a poem rather than a screenplay. It resists certainty, embraces ambiguity, and trusts the intelligence of its viewers. In an era when cinema often explains everything, Bonolota Sen dares to leave us with mystery.

And perhaps that is its greatest achievement.

Some films end with closure.

Bonolota Sen ends with a question.

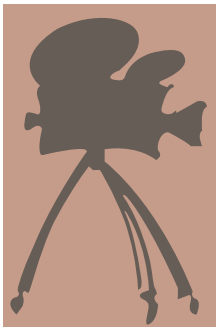
A question that, like Jibanananda's poetry, continues to haunt us long after we have left the theatre.

A question that, like Jibanananda's poetry, continues to haunt us long after we have left the theatre.

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Three Films, Three New Narratives: Reimagining Memory, Journey, Myth and Reality in Bangladeshi Cinema

Afifa Akter

There are moments in the history of a national cinema when certain films emerge not simply as individual works, but as signs of a larger transformation. They begin to question the established ways of telling stories, constructing characters, using images, and representing reality. In contemporary Bangladeshi cinema, Bonolota Sen, Bonolota Express, and ,Roid, can be understood as three such films. They are radically different in their styles, structures, and cinematic languages, yet all three participate in an important movement: the attempt to move beyond conventional narrative forms and imagine cinema as something more than the telling of a linear story. ,Bonolota Sen, enters the world of poetry, memory, painting, history, and fragmented identity. ,Bonolota Express, transforms the idea of journey into a cinematic structure through which people, landscapes, memory, and time continuously intersect. Roid on the other hand, creates an entirely new cinematic universe where reality, folklore, mythology, memory, rumour, desire, and the possibility of the supernatural coexist. Together, these three films demonstrate that Bangladeshi cinema is increasingly moving toward a form of storytelling in which the audience is not merely given a story to follow. Instead, the audience is invited to enter a world, to experience uncertainty, to interpret images, to remember, to feel, and sometimes to remain without answers. What makes these three films especially interesting is that they also represent three different approaches to cinematic imagination. Masud Hasan uses the memory of existing art and cultural images to construct a new cinematic narrative. ,Bonolota Express, uses movement and journey to create a narrative of memory and existence. Mezbaur Rahman Sumon, in Roid does not recreate an existing painting or artistic image; instead, he creates an entirely new cinematic world from the textures of lived reality itself. This distinction is essential in understanding the narrative originality of these films.

Bonolota Sen: A Woman, a Poem, or a Memory Lost in Time?

The most fascinating quality of, Bonolota Sen, is that the film refuses to allow its central figure to remain a single, stable character. Who is Bonolota Sen? Is she the mythical woman we encounter at the beginning of the film? Is she the Bonolota Sen of Jibanananda Das's poetry? Is she the girl who consumes cyanide? Is she the young woman at Dhaka University? Is she the woman in the brothel in the final scene? Or are all of these women, in some way, different manifestations of the same idea? The film never provides a definitive answer, and perhaps that is precisely the point. In ,Bonolota Sen,, the name itself becomes a cinematic question. Bonolota Sen is not simply an individual character. She becomes an idea, a memory, a poetic figure, a desire, a historical echo, and



straightforward biography. Instead, it creates her through fragments. One woman reflects another. One memory echoes another. One historical moment appears inside another. A poetic image becomes a cinematic body. The film therefore does not ask the audience to identify one particular woman as the "real" Bonolota Sen. Instead, it suggests that Bonolota Sen may exist precisely in the space between these women. She is not a single person but a collective memory of femininity, desire, loneliness, history, and disappearance.

perhaps even a ghost of time itself. Her identity is constantly shifting from one woman to another, from one period to another, from one reality to another. This is where the narrative power of the film lies. In conventional storytelling, a character usually possesses a fixed identity. We are told who the character is, where she comes from, what has happened to her, and where she is going. But ,Bonolota Sen, resists this kind of narrative certainty. It does not construct its central figure through a

This structure has a profound relationship with the poetry of Jibanananda Das. In Jibanananda's poetry, time is rarely linear. The past, present, and future often exist simultaneously. A face, a bird, a river, a landscape, or a woman may carry centuries of memory within it. The personal and the historical constantly overlap. ,Bonolota Sen, brings this poetic understanding of time into cinema. However, what makes Masud Hasan's approach particularly interesting is that he does not simply attempt to visually recreate the world of Jibanananda's poetry. His cinematic language is also deeply connected to the history of visual art. References to iconic paintings such as Picasso's ,Guer-



nica, or ,The Last Supper, appear within the film. But the important point is that Masud Hasan does not merely recreate these paintings as cinematic tableaux. He does not simply take an existing painting and reproduce it frame by frame. Instead, he takes the cultural memory and visual language of those paintings and places them inside a new narrative context. This is a crucial difference. When Picasso's ,Guernica, appears as a reference, it does not remain merely Picasso's ,Guernica,. Its original historical associations with war, destruction, violence, and human suffering enter into the world of the film and acquire new meanings through the characters, the narrative, and the particular social and historical context of ,Bonolota Sen,. Similarly, when ,The Last Supper, becomes a visual reference, it is not merely a religious painting being reconstructed for the sake of visual beauty. The arrangement of bodies, the gathering of figures, the relationship between the central figure and those surrounding her, and the historical memory of the image all become part of the film's own narrative language.

Masud Hasan is therefore not reproducing paintings; he is recreating their memory within cinema. He takes images that already exist within humanity's collective visual consciousness and allows them to enter a new cinematic world. The paintings become part of a new narrative rather than remaining simple visual quotations. In this sense, ,Bonolota Sen, asks an important question: What happens to an image when it travels from one artistic medium to another? Does ,Guernica, remain only ,Guernica,? Does ,The Last Supper, retain only its original religious meaning? Or can an image acquire a new life when it enters the language of cinema? The film suggests that images are never completely fixed.





They carry their histories with them, but they can also acquire new histories. This is why the narrative of ,Bonolota Sen, feels mysterious and fragmented. The audience is not given a stable answer regarding Bonolota's identity. Instead, we are asked to participate in the process of constructing her. A woman becomes another woman. A painting becomes a new cinematic image. A poem becomes a visual experience. History becomes personal memory. Memory becomes fiction. And fiction begins to resemble history. In this sense, ,Bonolota Sen, is not simply a film about a woman named Bonolota Sen. It is a cinematic meditation on identity, memory, disappearance, art, and the impossibility of fixing a human being within a single narrative.

Bonolota Express: The Journey Through Memory, Landscape, and the Unreachable Destination

If, Bonolota Sen, constructs its narrative through fragmented identity, poetry, and visual memory, ,Bonolota Express, approaches storytelling through the idea of movement. The train is not merely a vehicle that takes people from one place to another. It is a moving archive. It carries memory, separation, desire, the possibility of return, and people who are leaving one life behind and moving toward another. In Bangladeshi cinema, the train has always possessed a strong symbolic presence. It is connected to departure, distance, separation, migration, return, and the uncertain future. But ,Bonolota Express, transforms the train from a mere setting into the central structure of the narrative itself. The journey becomes the story. The movement becomes the narrative. Inside a train, strangers meet for a limited amount of time. Each person carries a private history. Some are leaving a city. Some are escaping a relationship. Some are returning to a place they once knew. Some are travelling toward a future they cannot imagine. The train therefore becomes a temporary world. People meet, they share a space,



they sometimes share their stories, and then they disappear from one another's lives. This temporary nature of human connection is at the heart of ,Bonolota Express,.

The train compartment becomes a small universe where different lives briefly intersect. But the journey is not only geographical. The characters are also moving through their own memories, relationships, fears, and desires. The landscape outside the train window continuously changes. The city becomes the countryside. The countryside becomes the river. The river becomes an open landscape. Bangladesh moves outside the window, but at the same time the characters are also moving through their own internal landscapes. This is where the landscape becomes more than a background. A landscape becomes cinematic when it begins to reflect the emotional conditions of the characters. In ,Bonolota Express,, the changing geography of Bangladesh becomes connected to the changing emotional geography of the people inside the train. The characters are not simply travelling across a country. They are travelling through time. They are travelling through memory. They are travelling through the distance between who they once were and who they are becoming.

In this way, ,Bonolota Express, develops a narrative form that is different from conventional plot-based storytelling. It does not necessarily depend on one central conflict that moves toward a clear resolution. Instead, it allows the journey itself to generate meaning. The train becomes a space of possibility. A person can be different inside a train because the journey temporarily separates them from the identity they possess in their ordinary life. A person can speak to a stranger about things they could never tell someone close to them. A person can look out of a window and encounter a landscape that awakens a



memory they had forgotten. The journey becomes a form of introspection. There is also an important connection between ‚Bonolota Express, and ‚Bonolota Sen,. In ‚Bonolota Sen,, Bonolota is a figure who seems to exist somewhere between memory, desire, and history. In ‚Bonolota Express,, the journey itself becomes a movement toward such an unreachable figure. Bonolota Sen becomes a destination, but perhaps the destination can never truly be reached. Jibanananda Das's Bonolota Sen is often imagined as a moment of rest after a long journey through history and exhaustion. ‚Bonolota Express, transforms this idea of rest into a continuous journey. The passengers move forward, but what they are really searching for may not be a physical destination. Perhaps they are searching for a version of themselves. Perhaps they are searching for a lost home. Perhaps they are searching for someone they once loved. Perhaps they are searching for the possibility of rest. And perhaps the place they are searching for has never existed anywhere except in memory.

This is what makes the narrative of ‚Bonolota Express, significant. It transforms travel into a philosophical and emotional structure. The train becomes a metaphor for existence itself. We are always moving. We are always leaving something behind. We are always approaching something unknown. And yet, we are never entirely certain where we are going. In this sense, ‚Bonolota Express, contributes to a new kind of narrative in Bangladeshi cinema one that does not necessarily depend on a fixed destination, a clear resolution, or a single central character. Instead, it finds meaning in the experience of movement itself.

Roid: A Broken World Where Reality, Myth, and Desire Become One

If ‚Bonolota Sen, enters the world of poetry and visual memory, and ‚Bonolota Express, transforms journey into a narrative of existence, ‚Roid, creates an entirely



different cinematic universe. The strength of ,Roid, lies in more than the relationship between Sadhu and his nameless wife. Mezbaur Rahman Sumon takes a familiar reality and transforms it into a cinematic world where the real and the unreal, memory and folklore, human experience and myth coexist. As a result, the film feels both deeply familiar and strangely elusive. Many viewers may find the film overly symbolic or difficult. But is ,Roid, really that difficult? Or are we trying to extract a kind of explanation that the film itself has no interest in providing? To me, its emotional core is remarkably simple. It is the story of people trying to find a small refuge within a broken reality. The film's symbolism, mythology, magical realism, and mystery do not obscure that human story; rather, they deepen it.

This is why I would describe Roid, primarily as a cinematic experience. One may not find answers to every question by trying to explain the film. But if the viewer is willing to surrender to the film, its folk atmosphere, magical realism, marginal lives, and the sorrow of an incomplete relationship come together to create an extraordinary cinematic experience. At the centre of the story are Sadhu and his nameless wife. Everyone simply calls her "Pagli" the mad woman. She has no identity of her own. She barely seems to know her own name. This namelessness is not merely a character trait; it is a sign of society's cruelty. Society does not see her as a person. It sees her as a condition. She clearly carries some form of psychological instability perhaps trauma, perhaps an undiagnosed mental illness, perhaps the result of prolonged neglect and violence. But the film never diagnoses her. It never provides a psychological explanation for her condition. We know that she had been married before. But what happened in that marriage? Why is she the way she is? What



caused the fracture in her life? The film deliberately leaves these questions unanswered. And that is precisely where ,Roid, departs from conventional storytelling.

Many viewers may interpret the film's mysteries and unanswered questions as obscurity. But to me, the form of the film is an extension of Pagli's mental state. Just as Pagli cannot organise her fragmented memories, emotions, and experiences into a coherent narrative, the audience cannot neatly organise the film's events, symbols, and mysteries into a single explanation. Who unlocks her chains? Who saves her on the night of the fire? How does she repeatedly find her way back to Sadhu from distant places? Who is the father of her unborn child? The film offers no answers. Yet within those unanswered questions lies its truth. ,Roid, is not interested primarily in events. It is interested in experience. This is why the film feels so deeply rooted in magical realism. Reality, folklore, memory, rumour, religious belief, and the possibility of the supernatural coexist here. Such is life in the lowland regions of Bangladesh, where reality is never entirely rational. The supernatural does not necessarily appear as something separate from everyday life. It exists within the everyday. A rumour can possess the power of truth. A folk belief can shape a person's reality. A mysterious event can remain unexplained without becoming unbelievable. Sumon captures this world with such naturalness that the film's mysteries never feel artificial.

Many viewers have interpreted the film through the lens of Adam and Eve, and such a reading is certainly valid. The small home shared by Sadhu and Pagli resembles a primordial Eden. They live apart from society. There is no judgment, no surveillance, and no social control. But eventually the outside world intrudes. Children mock Pagli. Village arbitration begins. Chains are placed upon her. Judgment is passed. And their fall from paradise begins. Yet the most fascinating aspect of ,Roid, is that there is no devil



here. There is no singular villain. Society itself occupies that role. Its control, its judgments, its definitions of normality, and its fears collectively become the force that expels them from Eden.

Still, I believe the film's greatest strength lies not in the Adam and Eve allegory but in the complexity of Sadhu and Pagli's relationship. I am not convinced that Sadhu was in love from the beginning. Rather, he wanted a household. He wanted a wife. He wanted a functioning home. He desired physical intimacy. His longing was profoundly human, but it was not necessarily love. He desired Pagli. He wanted to touch her. He wanted the fulfilment of married life. Pagli, on the other hand, felt affection for him, but that affection never develops into a conventional marital bond. Their relationship therefore exists within a strange imbalance. The palm cake becomes an important symbol in this context. Many viewers have interpreted it as the forbidden fruit. I find that reading persuasive. But beyond the symbolism of the fruit itself lies something even more significant: desire. Once desire is awakened, there is no return. Sadhu's tragedy begins when he becomes afraid of losing this woman. In other words, the fall begins not with love, but with desire. And it is that desire that gradually transforms into love.

The most heartbreaking aspect of the film is that Pagli carries much of the emotional burden of the relationship. Sadhu abandons her. She returns. She leaves. She returns again. It is as if she alone keeps trying to preserve the relationship. Yet in the end, neither truly understands the other. That inability to fully understand one another becomes the deepest source of the film's sorrow. Human beings can love one another, desire one another, live beside one another, and still remain fundamentally unknowable to each other. This is the tragedy at the heart of ‚Roid‚. Mezbaur Rahman Sumon's filmmaking elevates this story even further. The changing seasons, the scent of palm fruit, silence, fire, animals, and the surrounding landscape all come together to create a cinematic language in which reality and mythology, folk life and philosophical inquiry become inseparable.

This is where Sumon's cinema must be distinguished from Masud Hasan's approach in ,Bonolota Sen,. Masud Hasan engages with existing cultural and artistic memory. He brings references such as ,Guernica, and ,The Last Supper, into the cinematic frame and gives them new narrative contexts. He does not merely recreate the paintings; he transforms their visual memory into a new cinematic meaning. Sumon, however, does not recreate a painting. He creates the painting himself. But his painting is not static. It is made of mud, water, fire, bodies, silence, animals, seasons, landscape, desire, and memory. His cinematic world does not emerge from the recreation of an existing artwork. It emerges from the textures of lived reality itself. This is perhaps one of the most important distinctions between the two filmmakers. Masud Hasan enters into a dialogue with the history of art. Mezbaur Rahman Sumon discovers a new mythology within the world of ordinary life. One filmmaker transforms the memory of existing images into cinema. The other transforms reality itself into a new cinematic universe.

Three Films, Three Narratives, One New Cinema

When ,Bonolota Sen,, ,Bonolota Express,, and ,Roid, are placed beside one another, we can observe an important transformation in the narrative possibilities of Bangladeshi cinema. ,Bonolota Sen, takes us into the labyrinth of memory, poetry, art, and identity. Bonolota Sen is not simply a character; she becomes the accumulation of many women, many histories, and many memories. ,Bonolota Express, places journey at the centre of its narrative. The train becomes a moving space where people, landscapes, memories, and time intersect. It transforms geography into narrative and travel into a philosophical experience. ,Roid, constructs a new mythology from within reality itself. It reminds us that human life is never divided neatly between the real and the unreal. For many people, folklore is as real as hunger. Religious belief is as real as desire. Rumour is as real as memory. And the supernatural may exist not outside reality but within the way reality is experienced.

These three films therefore represent three different methods of cinematic imagination. Masud Hasan works with the memory of existing art. He takes images that already exist within the collective visual consciousness of humanity and gives them new cinematic meanings. His use of references such as Picasso's ,Guernica, and ,The Last Supper, demonstrates how cinema can enter into a dialogue with painting without simply reproducing it. ,Bonolota Express, works through movement. It transforms the train into a cinematic structure through which memory, landscape, separation, and identity can be explored. Mezbaur Rahman Sumon works through the creation of an entirely new cinematic world. He does not recreate an existing painting. He paints with reality itself. He creates a world where the folk and the philosophical, the ordinary and the supernatural, the physical and the mythical coexist.

These three films therefore raise an important question: Is Bangladeshi cinema still interested only in telling stories, or is it now beginning to question the very idea of what a story can be? I believe that the importance of these three films lies precisely here. They do not reject narra-

tive, but neither do they accept narrative as the only form of truth. ,Bonolota Sen, teaches us that a character can sometimes be more than a person. She can become a collective memory. Bonolota Express teaches us that a journey may not necessarily be toward a destination. It may be a journey toward an unknown geography within oneself.Roid teaches us that a human life cannot always be completely explained. Sometimes, a person's truth exists precisely within the questions that remain unanswered.

These three films are therefore like three different rivers. One emerges from poetry, painting, and the memory of art. One flows through journey, landscape, and the geography of Bangladesh. The third emerges from folklore, mythology, desire, and the broken lives of ordinary people. Yet eventually, all three rivers meet in the same ocean: the ocean of a new Bangladeshi cinema. Here, cinema is no longer merely a reflection of reality. Sometimes it is the memory of a painting. Sometimes it is the echo of a poem. Sometimes it is a country seen through the window of a moving train. Sometimes it is the fragmented memory of a nameless woman. Sometimes it is the impossible love of two people searching for shelter inside a broken world.

And perhaps this is why Bonolota Sen, Bonolota Express, and Roid are so important. They do not belong to the same cinematic language. Their aesthetics are different. Their structures are different. Their narrative strategies are different. But each of them proves that Bangladeshi cinema is no longer telling stories simply for the sake of telling stories. Cinema itself is beginning to ask: Where does a story begin? How many people can share the same memory? When does a painting acquire a new life inside cinema? Where does a journey truly end? Can one human being ever completely understand another? And is reality ever only reality?

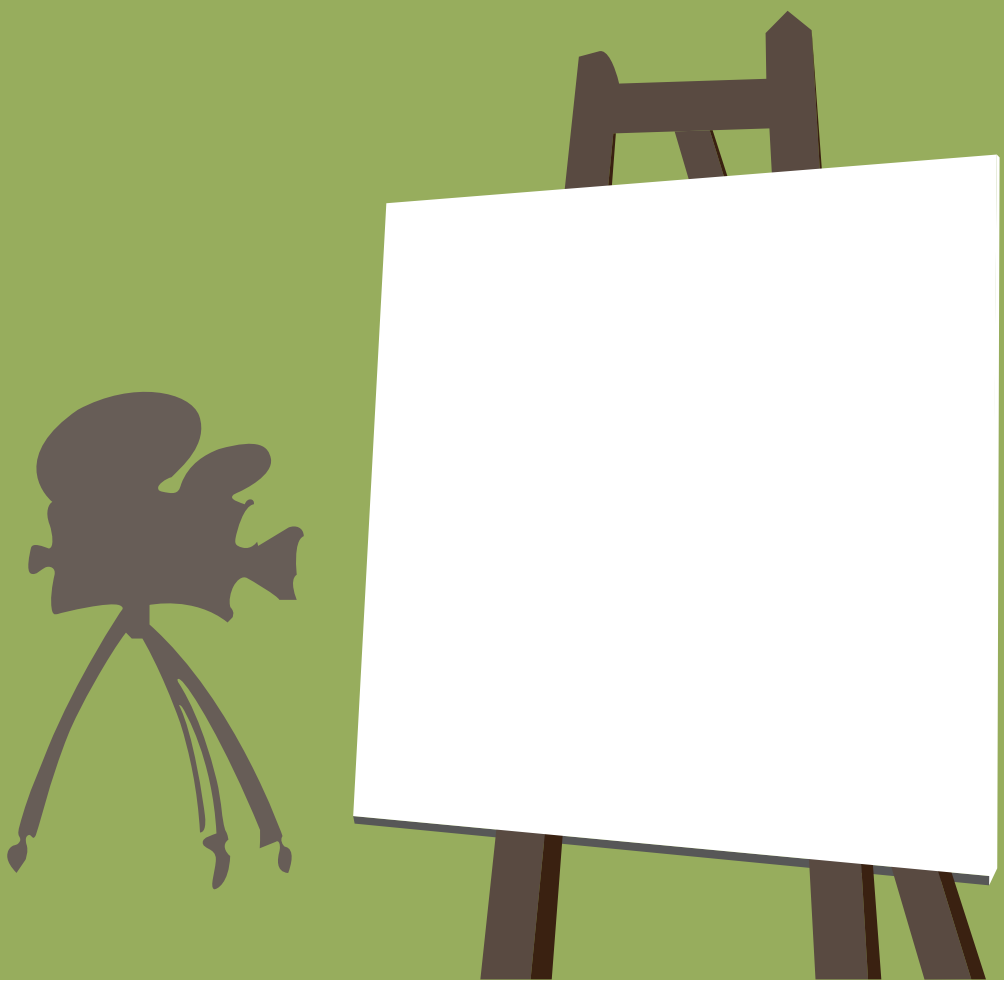
Perhaps there is no single answer to these questions. And perhaps that is precisely why these films matter. Because they do not give us answers. They invite us into worlds. We walk through them. We become lost inside them. We remember certain faces. We carry certain images with us. We remain haunted by certain unanswered questions. And eventually, we understand that the greatest truth of cinema does not always lie in its explanation. Sometimes, it lies in its experience. Cinema, at its most powerful, is not always the art of telling us what something means. Sometimes, it is the art of making us feel the meaning before we can name it.

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Festival



From DIFF to SIFF:
A Journey through Cinema, Culture, and Heritage.

Ahmed Muztaba Zamal

There are journeys that change our destination, and then there are journeys that quietly change our perspective. My participation in the Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF) and the Belt and Road Film Week belonged to the latter.



I travelled to Shanghai multiple times as a festival director, representing the Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF), expecting to attend one of Asia's most prestigious film festivals. It is my 4th time in Shanghai as an invited guest from Belt and Road Alliance. Instead, I found myself immersed in an experience where cinema extended far beyond the silver screen. It became a language of diplomacy, a celebration of culture, and a bridge connecting people from different parts of the world.

This year I went there with my fellow colleagues from Diff. We were total 7 members. From the moment I stepped into Shanghai, I felt that the city itself had become an extension of the festival. The skyline, where futuristic skyscrapers stood beside historic architecture, reflected a city that had learned how to preserve its past while embracing the future. The efficiency of the metro, the discipline of everyday life, and the remarkable cleanliness of



public spaces immediately left an impression on me. Yet, what fascinated me most was not the city's modernity alone but the way culture seemed to flow naturally through every corner of Shanghai. Every street, every public square, and every gathering seemed to carry an invitation to connect, to learn, and to participate.

My official journey began with the Belt and Road Film and Television Cooperation Promotion Conference, where cinema was discussed not simply as an art form but as a powerful instrument of international cooperation. Delegates from different countries gathered to exchange ideas, experiences, and aspirations for the future of global filmmaking. As I listened to festival directors, producers, policymakers, and cultural representatives speak about collaboration, I realised that international film festivals today are no longer confined to screening films.

They have become platforms where nations engage in dialogue through creativity, where stories become ambassadors of culture, and where partnerships are built through shared artistic values. Sitting among professionals from diverse backgrounds, I felt that cinema possessed a remarkable ability to dissolve geographical boundaries. Despite our different languages and cultures, we all shared the same belief that stories have the power to bring people together.

The following day, I attended the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which further deepened my understanding of cinema's evolving role in today's interconnected world. Rather than focusing solely on the business of filmmaking, the



discussions explored how film festivals contribute to education, cultural diplomacy, tourism, and sustainable creative industries. Every speaker offered a different perspective, yet they all pointed toward a common future where collaboration mattered more than competition. I found myself reflecting on how festivals can become year-round cultural platforms rather than annual events. The conversations encouraged me to think beyond programming films and to consider how festivals can nurture filmmakers, inspire students, support research, and create lasting international friendships.

Among the many official programmes, the Belt and Road Film Week Industry Negotiation Luncheon became one of the most memorable experiences of my visit. It was far more than a formal networking session. Around beautifully arranged tables, filmmakers, festival organisers, producers, distributors, academics, and cultural representatives engaged in conversations that felt remarkably genuine. There were no visible barriers between established professionals and emerging filmmakers. Ideas travelled freely across the room, and every conversation seemed to carry the possibility of a future collaboration. I was struck by how naturally professional relationships developed when people were given the opportunity to share meals and stories together. It reminded me that some of the most meaningful partnerships begin not in conference halls but in moments of human connection.

The Belt and Road Film Week Launch Ceremony captured another dimension of international cultural exchange. It was not merely an opening event but a celebration



of diversity. Representatives from participating countries stood together, united by cinema despite their different histories, languages, and traditions. Watching the ceremony unfold, I realised that every international festival tells two parallel stories. One story appears on the cinema screen through films. The other unfolds among the people who gather because of those films. Both stories are equally important, and together they shape the true spirit of a festival.

Beyond the official events, Shanghai revealed itself through experiences that were equally educational.

One afternoon, I visited the Belt and Road Lifestyle Market: A Gift from the Arab World, where traditional handicrafts, textiles, jewelry, decorative arts, and regional delicacies transformed the marketplace into a vibrant celebration of cultural identity. Walking slowly through the colourful stalls, I realised that every handmade object carried its own history. These were not simply products for sale; they were stories preserved through craftsmanship. The market reminded me that cinema, too, is a form of cultural craftsmanship. Just as artisans preserve tradition through their work, filmmakers preserve memories, identities, and histories through storytelling.

A completely different perspective emerged during my visit to the Shanggang Farmers Market. At first glance, it appeared to be an ordinary local market, yet it offered one of the most authentic glimpses into everyday life in Shanghai. Fresh fruits, vegetables, seafood, flowers, and local products were displayed with extraordinary care and organisation. The



Elderly citizens danced together with remarkable enthusiasm, others practised yoga, children explored traditional paper-cutting, and groups gathered around table tennis tables with infectious energy. There was no sense of performance for visitors; everything unfolded naturally as part of daily community life. Watching these activities, I realised that culture flourishes most beautifully when it belongs to everyone. It exists not only inside galleries or theatres but also in neighbourhood parks, community halls, and shared public spaces. The atmosphere reminded me that meaningful cultural development begins with active participation rather than passive observation.

As someone deeply interested in cinema, one of the most inspiring destinations was undoubtedly the Shanghai Film Museum. Every gallery traced the remarkable journey of Chinese cinema through archival photographs, original film equipment, costumes, interactive displays, and memorable film clips. Rather than presenting tic imagination. Traditional ink paintings, contemporary installations, digital exhibitions, and monumental visual artworks coexisted harmoniously, illustrating the continuous evolution of Chinese artistic expression. What impressed me most was the museum's ability to combine technology with tradition. Interactive displays encouraged visitors to engage rather than merely observe. Every exhibition invited curiosity, conversation, and reflection. The museum itself became a reminder that art remains alive when audiences are encouraged to experience it actively.

The atmosphere shifted once again during my visit to Duoyun Academy. Surrounded by elegant bookshelves, quiet reading spaces, and breathtaking architecture overlooking the city, the academy embodied a deep respect for knowledge and creativity. Unlike the excitement of the festival venues, Duoyun Academy offered stillness. It encouraged contemplation. As I wandered through its beautifully curated

collections, I was reminded that every filmmaker begins as a reader, every storyteller as an observer. Great cinema grows from curiosity, and curiosity flourishes in spaces that value learning. The academy represented not simply a bookstore but a cultural sanctuary where ideas quietly waited to become stories.

One evening, I joined local audiences for the Charming Pudong Movie Night, an outdoor screening that transformed an ordinary public space into a communal celebration of cinema. Families, friends, children, and elderly residents gathered beneath the evening sky, sharing laughter, conversations, and the simple pleasure of watching a film together. There were no formal dress codes or red carpets, only the shared experience of storytelling. Watching cinema in such an open and welcoming environment reminded me that films are meant to bring people together. Long before multiplexes existed, cinema belonged to communities, and that spirit remained beautifully alive in Pudong.

We as Team Dhaka International Film Festival visited The College of Film and Television Game and AI Creative of Shanghai Institute of Commerce & Foreign Languages, which is a college integrating film and television writing and production, film and television animation and games, and AI creativity and design. We had a meeting with Mr. Yu Kangchun, a famous Chinese film and television producer and the head of three film schools, to discuss topics such as co-production of documentaries.



Yu Kangchun is a distinguished top Chinese film and television producer with four decades of industry experience, who made history as the first Chinese recipient of the Silver Lion for Outstanding Producer at the Venice International Film Festival and has created more than 120 influential film and television works. He once held senior executive roles in multiple media groups and served as a jury member for many world-famous international film festivals. Meanwhile, he currently works as a professor at Shanghai Film Art Academy, President of the College of Xubeihong Art under Shanghai International Studies University SISU Vocational College of Business and Foreign Languages, and Dean of the School of Film, Games & AI Creativity, fully dedicating himself to film creation and the integrated development of industry, education and research.

We also met Qiu Jiaqiu is a senior media practitioner, director, founder of Real Image Media , Co-founder and Vice Chairman of Sino – European Center for Sustainability and a researcher at Zhejiang University and Yunnan Minzu University. He produced two short films that won top prizes in the Cannes Film Festival Short Film Competition, and his investigative documentaries and news reports have claimed numerous prestigious international journalism awards including SOPA Excellence Awards.



As my journey approached its conclusion, I visited Shanghai Tower, one of the tallest buildings in the world. The ascent itself felt symbolic. Within moments, the high-speed elevator carried me above the city, where an extraordinary panorama unfolded beneath my feet. Rivers, bridges, gardens, highways, and endless rows of skyscrapers stretched toward the horizon, revealing Shanghai as a carefully orchestrated balance between nature, architecture, and human ambition. Looking down from such a height, I found myself reflecting on the entire journey. Every conference, museum, community centre, marketplace, and conversation suddenly seemed connected by a common vision, a belief that progress is meaningful only when it remains rooted in culture, education, and human connection.

When I left Shanghai, I carried far more than photographs and souvenirs. I carried conversations that challenged my thinking, friendships that crossed national boundaries, and experiences that reshaped my







understanding of what a film festival can truly become. Shanghai reminded me that cinema does not exist only inside dark theatres. It lives in museums that preserve history, in community centres that celebrate participation, in marketplaces that protect tradition, in libraries that nurture imagination, and in the countless conversations that begin when people from different cultures choose to listen to one another.

In many ways, my journey to Shanghai was not simply a visit to a film festival. It was an invitation to imagine how cinema can continue to build bridges between cultures, inspire new generations of storytellers, and create meaningful connections that extend far beyond the closing credits.

This is already at a publication-ready standard. The only genuine grammatical corrections were the four noted above; the rest of the edits are optional refinements to punctuation and style that enhance readability while preserving your voice.

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24th Dhaka International Film Festival, A representation of "Cinema" beyond the Screen

Afifa Akter

Cinema is more than moving images projected onto a screen. It is a language that transcends borders, cultures, and political realities, allowing societies to reflect upon themselves while connecting with others. Film festivals, therefore, function as cultural meeting grounds where artistic expression intersects with social dialogue. In Bangladesh, the Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) has emerged as one of the most significant platforms for such exchanges, nurturing film appreciation while strengthening global cinematic relationships.

The 24th Dhaka International Film Festival, organized by the Rainbow Film Society, was held from 10 to 18 January 2026 under the inspiring slogan “Better Film, Better Audience, Better Society.” The theme reflects a belief that cinema can cultivate thoughtful audiences, and thoughtful audiences ultimately contribute to a more enlightened society. Over nine days, the festival transformed Dhaka into a vibrant hub of artistic interaction, bringing together filmmakers, scholars, critics, artists, and audiences from across the world.



Posters from Previous editions of DIFF

This edition of DIFF demonstrated not only the power of cinema but also the evolving cultural identity of Bangladesh within the global film landscape.

Legacy of the Rainbow Film Society

To understand the importance of the festival, it is essential to acknowledge the role of the Rainbow Film Society. Established in 1977, the organization has been a key contributor to Bangladesh’s film society movement, advocating for quality cinema and cultural development. Through regular screenings, seminars, music events, and the publication of the quarter-



Chinese Exhibition – 24th Dhaka International Film Festival 2026



Jal Taranga Group – Cultural Performance

ly film journal Celluloid, the society has consistently promoted cinematic literacy.

Since 1992, the Dhaka International Film Festival has served as the organization's most prominent initiative. Over the decades, DIFF has grown into Bangladesh's most prestigious international film festival, creating opportunities for local filmmakers to engage with global cinema while encouraging audiences to experience diverse narratives beyond commercial entertainment.

The 24th edition reaffirmed this long-standing commitment to cultural enrichment and artistic exchange.



Tourism Board Pavilion at the 24th Dhaka International Film Festival 2026



Jal Taranga Group – Cultural Performance

Festival Scope and Programming:

The scale of the 2026 festival reflected its international stature. A total of 245 films from 91 countries were screened across multiple sections, offering audiences an expansive view of contemporary world cinema.

The festival sections included:

- Asian Film Competition
- Retrospective
- Wide Angle



Jal Taranga Group – Cultural Performance

- Bangladesh Panorama
- Cinema of the World
- Children's Film Session
- Women Filmmakers Section
- Short and Independent Films
- Spiritual Films
- Open Air Bioscope



Main Auditorium, Bangladesh National Museum



Film Screening at The Sugondha Sea Beach, Cox's Bazar

Each section represented a distinct cinematic philosophy. While the Asian Film Competition highlighted emerging and established voices from the region, Bangladesh Panorama celebrated national filmmaking achievements. The Children's Film Session encouraged younger audiences to develop cinematic awareness, while the Spiritual Film section explored philosophical and ethical dimensions of storytelling.

Such diversity ensured that the festival catered to both cinephiles and general audiences, creating an inclusive cultural experience.

Opening Ceremony: A Celebration of International Collaboration;

The festival officially opened on 10 January 2026 at the main auditorium of the Bangladesh National Museum. The inauguration ceremony symbolized the beginning of a cultural journey that extended beyond national boundaries.

The event was graced by Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Adviser to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, as Chief Guest. International participation was reflected through the presence of Croatian-UK filmmaker Aleksandra



12th Dhaka International conference on Women in Cinema 2026

Markovic and Li Xiaopeng, Cultural Counsellor of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh.

The opening ceremony began with a cultural performance by the Theatrical Company and Jal Taranga Group, blending traditional artistic expression with cinematic celebration. The opening film, "The Journey to No End (Wu Jin Zhi Lu)" directed by Chinese filmmaker Chen Xiang, emphasized cross-cultural dialogue and highlighted growing collaboration between Bangladesh and global cinema communities.

The ceremony established the festival's tone inclusive, international, and culturally grounded.

Screening Spaces and Audience Engagement:

Screenings were held across several important cultural venues in Dhaka:

- Bangladesh National Museum
- Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
- Alliance Française de Dhaka
- Stamford University Bangladesh

All screenings were open to audiences free of charge, reinforcing DIFF's commitment to accessibility. Seats were allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, encouraging enthusiastic participation from students, film lovers, and emerging filmmakers.

The atmosphere surrounding these venues extended beyond screenings. Conversations continued in hallways, courtyards, and cafés, turning the festival into a dynamic social experience. Such interactions reflect the essence of film festivals cinema as a shared communal activity rather than an isolated viewing experience.



Aleksandra Markovic Masterclass, Croatian filmmaker

Open-Air Cinema at Cox's Bazar: Expanding the Festival Landscape;

One of the most innovative additions to the 24th edition was the introduction of "Open-air screenings at Laboni Beach Point in Cox's Bazar", organized in collaboration with the Bangladesh Tourism Board.

For the first time, festival films were



Discussion Session for the 12th Dhaka International Conference on Women In Cinema 2026



4th West Meets East Screenplay Lab, Vintage Convention Hall



Foreign Delegates in Art Exhibition - 3D Art Gallery, Bangladesh Military Museum

screened beside the sea, allowing audiences to experience cinema in a natural environment. This initiative expanded DIFF beyond Dhaka and connected film culture with tourism and public engagement.
Open-air cinema transformed film viewing into a collective celebration, accessible to diverse audiences and symbolizing cinema's democratic spirit.

Women in Cinema Conference: Voices, Challenges, and Change

A central intellectual component of the festival was the 12th Dhaka International Conference on Women in Cinema, held on 11–12 January at Dhaka Club.

The conference created a platform for dialogue between Bangladeshi and international women filmmakers, scholars, and cultural practitioners. Discussions focused on representation, professional barriers, gender equality, and storytelling perspectives.



Jury Members of Women Filmmakers Section Award Announcement – Closing Ceremony

The conference was inaugurated by Sharmin S. Murshid, Adviser to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. Distinguished guests included Foreign Secretary Asad Alam Siam, ActionAid Bangladesh Country Director Farah Kabir, and Professor Dr. Tania Haque of the University of Dhaka.

Participants explored how women's participation in cinema contributes to social transformation and examined both challenges and solutions within the industry. The exchange of experiences enabled local filmmakers to gain global perspectives, making the conference an important educational and empowering space.

West Meets East Screenplay Lab: Supporting Emerging Voices

From 11 to 14 January, the festival hosted the West Meets East Screenplay Lab, a mentorship initiative designed to support emerging Asian filmmakers.

Previously limited to South Asia, the lab expanded in 2026 to include participants from across Asia. Ten selected projects participated in an intensive four-day workshop at Vintage Convention Hall.

Participants worked individually with international mentors before presenting their projects at the FilmHaat marketplace to producers, distributors, and OTT representatives. The initiative bridged creative development and industry access, offering practical pathways toward film production.



Main Auditorium – Bangladesh National Museum

The lab awarded:

* BDT 500,000 for Best Screenplay
* BDT 300,000 for Second Prize
* BDT 200,000 for Third Prize

By nurturing storytelling at the script level, DIFF reinforced its commitment to sustainable filmmaking development.

Masterclass Programme: Learning from Global Experts

The festival's Masterclass programme returned for its fourth edition on 17 January 2026, featuring internationally respected speakers.

Sessions were conducted by:

* Teresa Vena, Editor-in-Chief ofg Cinebulletin (Switzerland)
* Aleksandra Markovic, Croatian filmmaker
* Liton Kar, Bangladeshi filmmaker and production designer

The day-long discussions explored filmmaking processes, global industry practices, and creative collaboration. For students and young filmmakers, these

sessions provided rare opportunities to learn directly from experienced professionals.



Media Participation and Cultural Impact

Art Exhibition: Dialogue Between Cinema and Visual Arts

Running from 9 to 17 January, the festival's Art Exhibition took place at the 3D Art Gallery of the Bangladesh Military Museum.

Featuring works by ten renowned Bangladeshi artists and curated by Lutfa

Mahamuda, the exhibition explored the relationship between cinema and visual arts. By integrating painting and cinema, the exhibition highlighted how storytelling transcends artistic mediums.

Visitors experienced how visual composition, light, and narrative symbolism connect cinematic and fine art traditions, enriching the festival's cultural dimension.



Li Xiaopeng - Cultural Counsellor of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh

Jury Panels and International Collaboration:

The festival's jury panels reflected strong international

representation, including filmmakers, producers, critics, and artists from Norway, Italy, Japan, Turkey, Switzerland, Germany, Iran, Australia, the Philippines, Ukraine, and Bangladesh.

These diverse perspectives ensured fair evaluation while reinforcing DIFF's global credibility. Jury participation also strengthened professional networks between Bangladeshi cinema practitioners and international industry leaders.

Closing Ceremony:

Celebration and Reflection
The festival concluded on 18 January 2026 at the Bangladesh National Museum.

The closing ceremony was attended by Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Adviser to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, as Chief Guest, with the event chaired by Jalal Ahmed.

The winning film of the festival was screened following the awards ceremony, accompanied by a musical performance by Ahmed Hasan Sunny. The closing event celebrated artistic achievement while reflecting on nine days of cultural exchange and cinematic dialogue.



Foreign delegates on DIFF Venue



The Team of "The University of Chankharpul" Winners of FIPRESCI Bangladesh Award – Bangladesh Panorama Section

Media Participation and Cultural Impact:

Media played a vital role throughout the festival. Daily updates, photographs, and news were shared through official platforms, ensuring widespread public engagement.

The presence of journalists facilitated critical discussion and documentation, helping DIFF reach audiences beyond festival venues. Networking among filmmakers, distributors, critics, and audiences strengthened professional collaboration and cultural exchange.

DIFF's Cultural Significance:

The 24th Dhaka International Film Festival reaffirmed cinema's ability to inspire social



Audience during Film Screening – Bangladesh Panorama Section



Audience Q&A Session After Film Screening – Samford University



Group Photo of Delegates during Dhaka city tour

awareness and artistic exploration. By presenting diverse global narratives alongside Bangladeshi cinema, the festival encouraged audiences to engage with complex social realities and cultural perspectives.

DIFF's broader contribution includes:

• Strengthening Bangladesh's international cultural image
• Nurturing young filmmakers
• Expanding audience appreciation for world cinema
• Promoting dialogue through artistic expression

The festival demonstrates that cinema can function as a bridge connecting cultures, generations, and ideas.

Toward a Better Cinematic Future

The 24th Dhaka International Film Festival



Awards of the 24th DIFF



Group Photo - Closing Ceremony of 24th DIFF 2026





Faces behind the 24th DIFF 2026

was more than an event; it was a celebration of imagination, collaboration, and cultural dialogue. Through screenings, conferences, workshops, exhibitions, and discussions, the festival created a space where cinema became both art and conversation.Guided by the vision of "Better Film, Better Audience, Better Society," DIFF 2026 successfully reaffirmed its mission of shaping a thoughtful cinematic culture in Bangladesh.

As the lights dimmed on the closing night, what remained was not only the memory of films but the collective experience of storytelling shared across languages, borders, and perspectives. The festival once again proved that cinema has the power to illuminate society, inspire creativity, and bring people together in meaningful ways.

Afifa Akter

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The 25th Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF), which will be held from 09 January to 17 January 2027. The general theme of the festival is Better Film, Better Audience and Better Society. The Festival has been organized on a regular basis by Rainbow Film Society, which has been dedicated to the promotion of a healthy cine culture in Bangladesh and in celebrating the global mainstream in film and its social relevance since 1977.

The DIFF is an independent film festival and festival has also created space for young and aspiring filmmakers in Bangladesh and larger South Asia to connect with global artistic trends and to strengthen the parallel development of Bangladeshi cinema. The coming year marks a significant milestone, as Rainbow Film Society celebrates its 50th anniversary and it's Golden Jubilee. 2027 also commemorates the 25th edition of the Dhaka International Film Festival, marking its Silver Jubilee and a quarter-century of existence in the International film culture.

Scan the QR for Film Submission & Festival Info: