

7. Film and Video

Synopsis

This module provides an introduction to the moving image, audio-visuals, film and video. It also introduces film appreciation through a few films .

Lectures

- 7.1 The Moving Image
- 7.2 The Auteur School of Thought
- 7.3 The Rasa Theory
- 7.4 Film Appreciation

7.1 The Moving Image



Fig. 7.1.01

The moving image in cinema, comes alive in the ambience of a dark cinema theatre and the flickering screen that receives the projection. This kind of entertainment and storytelling has enchanted audiences for over a hundred years.



Fig. 7.1.02

Cinema Paradiso is a film about a boy who grows up in projection rooms and eventually goes on to become a projectionist, till the fateful day when the cinema for which he works, gets burnt. There are many who still live by what is called the First Day, First Show, First Row culture as they await new releases.



Fig. 7.1.03

Film cameras were bulky but the resolution of film was unmatched. Recent advances in high definition video can now give picture qualities that are very close to that of film.

Film and Video

The words film, video and cinema are often used inter-changeably to refer to the moving image that also carries sound and music (though film and video are two different technologies and the word cinema also suggests the movie hall that shows films). The power of the moving image is further enhanced by its capacity to carry sound and music that has been synchronized with the action that unfolds visually.

Film is actually a strip of plastic coated with photosensitive emulsion sold as rolls of 'raw stock'. After suitable exposure with a film-camera it needs to be developed before it can be projected onto a screen. Video is recorded electronically on tape or directly onto a digital storage device. Since both are used to capture motion, they have come to be used as synonyms. The high resolution possible through coated emulsions gave images recorded on film a rich quality. With the advancement of video technology, the image quality on video has greatly improved. Video has obvious advantages of instant replays and simpler editing processes. It is relatively inexpensive and uses equipment that is less bulky. Many professional film-makers have taken to video, though few still prefer to work on film. For our purposes here, we shall be restricting ourselves to video. However, for reasons of its long association with the moving image, we shall continue using the word film to refer to the moving image even if it has been created using video technology.



Fig. 7.1.04

Cell-phone capabilities of recording video and other personal video technologies may well have revolutionized how we relate to cinema on the big-screen, but telling an engaging story well, through the moving image, continues to be no easy task.



Fig. 7.1.05

The large numbers of satellites hovering above earth ensures that television has more channels than we possibly need. If there is a crisis in the world of privilege today, it is the crisis of plenty. Indigestion is the

first symptom of having had too much. If one seeks to create something relevant it is perhaps good to cultivate the sense of having nothing to say and then say it well.

We shall begin with a consideration of some still images, before speaking of images that move. The first of the two images below is a drawing; the second is a photograph. We shall look at both images and attempt to describe what we see.



Fig. 7.1.06

The first image (Fig. 7.1.06) looks like a train next to a platform. The depiction of the train is not 'realistic'. The engine appears to have a human head and people inside the coaches appear to have long arms that enable them to reach out and shake hands. The platform seems to have two different structures. One is shaped like a tiled hut; and the other looks like a football goalpost, but could represent a room. One of the persons on the platform holds an animal that could be a goat or a dog. Another person reaches out to the leg of a figure, hidden by the hut. At the right we can see a lame beggar. The train appears to be a steam-engine that gives out smoke that envelopes people in the platform. Thus far, we have attempted a more-or-less factual description of what we see in the image.

We may now ask a few questions that may lead us to the purpose behind making this image. Does the image have a focus? If it had to be given a title, would it be appropriate to call it "A Train Entering A Platform?" What if, you are told that the image is actually titled, "The beggar-woman and the dog"? How would this colour your perception of the image? We shall return to these questions after we have looked at the second image (Fig. 7.1.07).



Fig. 7.1.07

The subject of this image appears to be the flute-player in the middle. Framing the image such that the flautist appears at the centre, makes him the centre of attention and suggests that he is the focus. We see another person to the left and a crowd of people behind. Those who can identify the location based on visual cues in the building behind, will possibly identify that the place is a parking space next to the Jehangir Art Gallery, in Bombay. Why has the photographer chosen to make the flute player the focus? What does the image communicate?

Does it communicate something very trivial - such as “the flute is a nice musical instrument” or does it seek to convey something more ideational – such as “in the midst of a busy life there are few who can listen to the music of the flute.”

We shall now look at two sets of images (Figs 7.1.09a) and (Fig. 7.1.09b), Each of these sets has three images. The first and the third image in each set are the same image and only the image in the middle changes. You may think of these sets of images as snapshots from two different films.



Fig. 7.1.09a



Fig. 7.1.09b

Unlike in a still image where meanings have to be construed by whatever visual cues are provided in one image, meaning from a set of moving images (in film and video) is created by mentally 'stitching' together these images.

What is the meaning created when we try to 'stitch' together Fig. 7.1.09a? What is the meaning created when we try to 'stitch' together Fig. 7.1.09b? It is likely that the meaning that is created by looking at the first set will be along the lines of life for ordinary people in a metropolis; for the second set, the meaning is likely to be such that there is an element of some love story of two ordinary people in a city. A skilful film-makers creates associations and meanings by editing together images and sequences that allow the viewer to connect them and complete the story.

A Very Brief History of World Cinema

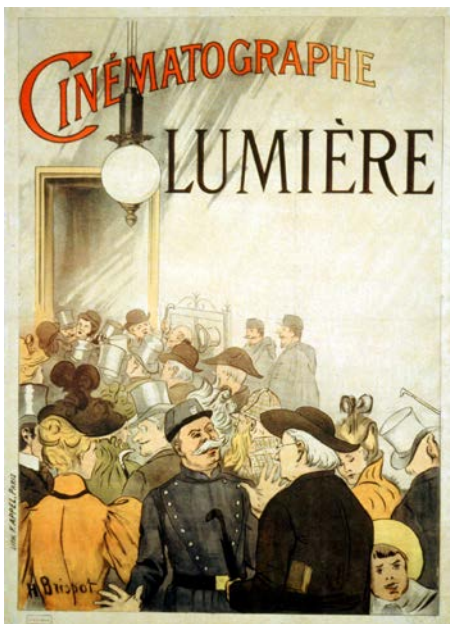


Fig. 7.1.10

The Lumière brothers were amongst the first to create documentaries.

It is over hundred years since cinema was invented and the proliferation of television, home video and internet have greatly extended the media that can display the moving image. High definition screens, digital projectors and digital cinematography and editing tools have simplified access to the moving image.

Human interests and interactions have however remained largely the same. Just as the Lumière brothers sent cameramen all over the world to make very short documentaries, cinematographers of nature and news channels stride the crowded and obscure corners on planet earth. The initial magic of seeing a film of a train arrive at a station might have worn off, but musicians who accompanied the screening of films in the silent film era make an occasional appearance in video art installations that seek to push the cinematic grammar beyond the conventional.

If once upon a time, film-makers like Truffaut, Goddard and Fellini ushered in the new wave and the avant garde, experimental film-makers today, seek to usher in new sensibilities that depart from the ubiquitous presence of mainstream cinema. The sources of inspiration for new-age film-makers are many - from Chaplin, Kurosawa, Eisenstein, Bergman, Hitchcock, DeSica, Herzog, Fassbinder, Wenders, Allen, Tarkovsky, Ray, Ghatak to the post-modern scenarios conjured up Wong Kar Wai, Tarantino, Kiarostami, Kitano and Kashyap.



Fig. 7.1.11

The films of Charlie Chaplin portrayed the difficulty of life in the years of the great depression in America. A still from the film 'The Kid'.

On one hand, gatherings such as the film festival at Cannes, showcase films with outstanding cinematic vision. On the other hand, resistance against the might of industrial-military complexes that creep in to the production of films, finds expression in smaller gatherings such as the BYOFF (Bring Your Own Film Festival) that does away with the hegemonies inherent in juries and censor boards. If the classical forms evolved slowly out of the more spontaneous traditions, the characteristic of our times are bewilderingly plural, absorbing the "very-edgy" with as much ease as the "well-trodden-and-finely-crafted" narrative.



Fig. 7.1.12

The films of Andrei Tarkovsky use long sequences to build a rhythm very different from films that use quick cutting techniques such as montage.

A Very Brief History of Indian Cinema



Fig. 7.1.13

Dadasaheb Phalke brought cinema to India, soon after it was invented in the West. He set up a film production company at Nasik and was a pioneer of film-making in India.

Dadasaheb Phalke was quick to see the power of films. Trained as a painter he developed a fascination for photography and later went to London to source equipment for making films. His first film on the life of the mythical king 'Raja Harischandra' won him many admirers. The Hindustan Film Company at Nasik was started in 1917 and became the first film studio in India. Between 1917 and 1932 made over 90 films.



Fig. 7.1.14

A scene from Raja Harischandra, the first film made by Dadasaheb Phalke, based on the mythological legend.

Commercial film companies started in Bombay which became a centre for film production. The acceptance of "Bollywood studies" in film-schools, suggests a legitimacy that is accorded to a cinema that slowly carves out its own place in the history of cinema. Several influences appear to have shaped the masala-film that has come to be the defining feature of much of the cinema made in India. These includes the epic narratives of Ramayana and Mahabharata and besides continuing the tradition of the family-drama that forms the under-current of the epics, the films often follow narrative structures found in them. Other influences come from the contact with Western modernity that includes both Hollywood and European cinema.



Fig. 7.1.15

Mainstream commercial cinema flourished in Bombay and came to be known as Bollywood, after the American cinema industry at Hollywood. Commercial film-making has taken root in many regional centres in India. Independent film-makers starting with Satyajit Ray, have also created a different kind of cinema that emerge from a more personal vision.

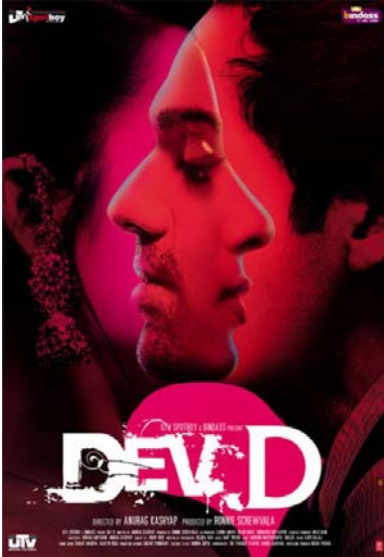


Fig. 7.1.16a and Fig. 7.1.16b

Young filmmakers have sought to push the boundaries by new approaches to cinematography, editing and storytelling, both in commercial and alternate cinema. "DevD" was a remake of the earlier classic 'Devdas' by Anurag Kashyap. Amit Dutta's 'Kra ma Sha' continues a tradition started by film-makers such as Mani Kaul.

As with other popular and high cultures, there exists a tension between mainstream commercial films and art / alternate cinema in India, with each camp assuming positions of a general distrust or of grudging admiration towards the other.