Japanese movie analysis movie review sample

Environment, Nature

Japanese horror films through the years had made astounding contribution to the movie industry and to the horror genre in particular. One of the notable directors of great Japanese horror flicks is Kurosawa Kiyoshi who is often compared to Andrei Tarkovsky and Stanley Kubrick in terms of directing style and influence. Most of his films are focused on ho a general society affects an individual and how the society also reacts to adverse irrational and disintegrated social mechanisms. Japanese horror movies are not typical to the usual western made fright movies. As observed from many western horrors movies, they incorporate all elements of technical movie making and its major components. Sound effects, paired with splatter, blood and violence and intense acting makes up the entire film. But J-horror is different in many ways. The way the plot and the movies elements put together, makes up more realistic scenery and fancy sound designs are not much employed. Usually the sound of creepy silence works effectively in Japanese horror scenes. Slow movements and the mysteriousness of the characters are most of the time more effective in terms of creating scary environment rather than jumpy surprises in the background. These characteristics of typical Japanese made horror flicks are well demonstrated in Kiyoshi Kurosawa films. In this essay, nine of Kurosawa's films will be analyzed and will be discussed according to movie elements such as cinematography, sound, editing and all aspects that comprise film making.

The first on my list is the movie " Serpent's Path" sounds slithery but this movie is about revenge on a murder of a child. It is an unprecedented move that Kurosawa created a remake of this movie just after the first one was finished filming. The real motivation for him in doing so is to explore the

possibilities of exploring a single subject in different ways rather than focusing much on creative poverty. The movie is a companion film of " Eyes of the Spider" although the plot and motif of the two movie pieces starts at the same premise; Kurosawa used the two movies to jump off from one context to another. By doing so Kurosawa has created a conjunction of the plot instead of dedicating the theme of revenge to the movie. The movie employed the idea of human mental process when a person is placed in the situation that they do not see everyday. The idea of madness lingers within the character because of the fact that his daughter was killed by a gang, so what he planned to do for a very long time is to seek revenge and the time made him like that, like paranoid about his daughter being dead because of the said gang. The was shot on an on-site location instead of filming it in a studio, which makes it more realistic as far as background set approach is concern.

The 85 minute movie starts of with two men who are also the main characters in the movie named Nijima played by Kurosawa's regular actor Sho Aikawa. The other one is Miyashita played by Teruyuki Kagawa. The connection between the two was clearly explained I the movie but Nijima a teacher who has an eight year old daughter while Miyashita is a former member of Yakuza. The most prominent part of the movie is at the beginning when the two men dragged a man out the trunk and chained him into the wall. The next events led to the flashback of what happened to the child and the captive's involvement in the crime. In this film, Kurosawa used an approach of similar to the characteristics of a cold observational eye. He worked perfectly with long shots and utilized the background of the scenes

to create depth by means of using the entire space. The way scenes were portrayed by the actors did not show much of emotion but rather precedes mental process. Sound design on the other hand is too much to be observed since it used diegetic sounds instead of fabricating unnatural sound effects. The lighting conditions on the film are more on the neutral side. Shadows were cast by almost natural light. It is neither dark nor high-key in nature but just as natural. Combinations of medium and focus shots also added the natural view perspective to the scenes creating images that appears to be happening right in front of the viewers. This approach is effective in engaging more personal experience to the audience for them to fully experience the movie depends on how the scenes appears as real as possible. The color of the film is ore of neutral this is because the director has to capture the natural environment also because his film is synonymous reality.

The second movie is entitled " Cure", also a masterpiece from Kurosawa Kiyoshi. The theme of the movie is more on crime and mystery, as the story evolves in the series of crimes the main character detective Takabe portrayed by Koji Yakusho and a former pop singer Tsuyoshi Ujiki who is playing the role of Takabe's psychologist assistant. The story is about a drifter who's very adept with hypnosis; he is the only common link the in the crimes since none of the suspects are related to each other. The only common denomination among them the victims is an " X" cut across their throat to the chest, but the mystery lies at the beginning when Takabe questions them of the motives in committing the crime is their statement that " it is the natural thing to do". I agree to the fact that statement on

some degree because it is undeniable that we all have hatred inside of our minds, so hared is not possible to feel when obscurity exists in the society.

On the technical side of the film, editing is quite poor on this movie as irrelevant scene were filling in the minute gaps. One of the best examples is the kitchen scenes with Takabe and his wife were not really in conversation but just appeared to be doing their own choirs. It makes no sense as well for putting in a scene with a too long single shot on the laundry room door plus a focus shot on the spin dryer, it's just not relevant to the plot. The film as shot entirely on site and studio locations were not considered since the aim of the movie is to impose a realistic environment based on the requirement of the story. The use of natural surroundings created a key element in the overall atmosphere in the movie even though the color and lighting is not so impressive. Using grey instead of black and white however delivered a perfect contrast to the film. There is a sense of cultural relevance in the movie. Hypnosis in general is considered as a paranormal psychological mystery defied and believed upon by different cultures and since it was employed in the core context of the movie, it clearly blended cultural elements in the film as well. In terms of cinematography, Kurosawa used a combination of different camera perspectives such as long shots, close up, focus, tracking and single shot frames. The " Cure" embodies a slow yet riveting diegetic sound structure not to bring shocking fear but to render soft goose bumps. Sound is not so much essential in the making of this movie, although sound effects are needed in order to emphasize a particular emotion in the scenes. In terms of film color, it has a very dull atmosphere, like I mentioned it used the grey blend of soft color rather than using black,

although black is often used to blend with fear, but to minimize it, only shades of grey was used.

Third movie on the list is " Charisma", the movies starts with an overworked, unfocused and rumpled officer by the name of Goro Yabuike played by actor Koji Yakusho. After being suspended from a hostage rescue mission gone wrong, Yabuike found himself on a road of a remote barren forest and carcinogenic plants he met the leader of the forest ranger named Kirayama. In the forest lies an oddly decorated tree called charisma, the unusual tree is being taken cared of by Nakasone who resides in an abandoned sanitarium. The tree is the focus of the story and how it is being protected by Nakasone, but things didn't go so well since there are individuals who are also interested in the tree because of its rarity. Biologist, Jinbo found out that the tree itself is the reason behind the unusual setting of the forest and the battle goes on to bring back the natural balance of the forest. In a nutshell the charisma tree is a symbol of ideology considering its properties as depicted in the film.

Kurosawa presented a different approach in this movie, it compelling in visual terms, balanced, multi-layered and insightful. Editing was appropriately by choosing the right scenes to patch together. The film was shot on site giving it an austere landscape and the thematic perspective presented in the movie is symbolized by the metaphoric environment that depicts the exploration of spiritual longing, conscience and personal disharmony. Medium lighting created a realistic environment using pale foggy and muted colors of decaying interiors and barren wilderness which in

return reflects psychological distress. The characters were framed using long and medium shots with combinations of tracking and focus shots and blended it to the environment settings.

In this movie Kurosawa raised issues contemporary to quality and values of life. Social order and individual rights created a dilemma that relates to natural order and how human intervenes to overcome threats of extinction. Sound design was cleverly employed in this film, the combination of diegetic and non-diegetic sound effects delivered an authentic outdoor experience to the audiences viewing perspectives. As usual with Japanese movies, it was not a typical jumpy sound effects but rather soft and chilling.

Fourth on the list is " Pulse", the original Japanese masterpiece that Hollywood selected for a commercially made remake. The character Taguchi played by Kenji Mizuhashi wasn't able to return to the office after working on a software project in his home. Michi played by Kumiko Aso was worried about Taguchi and decided to visit him at his home to see about his health condition and also to get the project disc. The two had a polite conversation, but after Taguchi went to the back room in his apartment after fetching a lengthy piece of rope he then committed suicide. After the event Michi has been experiencing odd thread of events like, flickering lights and disruptions on TV set's reception. Michi also had a call from someone with distorted voice pleading for help. Since then Michi and her colleagues are experiencing spine chilling events involving unusual behaviors after getting into a weird website with Taguchi staring into a live webcast.

Pulse is a haunting, compelling and insightful portrayal of loneliness, disconnection and technology's impersonal nature. From the lone vessel drifting in a turbulent vast ocean to the scenes of terror, Kurosawa was able to establish unnaturalness and foreboding sense of pervasiveness. Medium shots were predominantly used in the film, employing diffused lighting tone and dark interiors casting more shadows in the shots after shifting delayed focus. The distorted focus on the transparent plastic curtain adds a frightening atmosphere in the film and the green hued image of a web ghost can sure to scare the crap out of every audience.

Kurosawa has captured the paradoxical relation between the affordable conveniences of the modern technology the estrangement that came from inertia of compulsive need in retaining anonymity. The sound design used in the film is more of non-diegetic arrangements paired with shocking and surprising scenes will definitely make the audience to jump out of their seats in fright. Kurosawa also used the social allegory of human interaction in the film which reflects on the character's behavior as a result of self-induced feeling of being alienated in the contemporaries of urban living. Another important point in the film is that the modern society had engaged their life with computers so Kurosawa wanted to use it as a symbol of coming death through the computer monitor. Sound design is relatively important and was used cleverly in this film since, the scenes needed to be highlighted with a sound equipment in order to capture the fell. Diegetic and mix of non diegetic sound did the trick in the movie. In terms of color, green very prominent especially that the ghost in the movie ha to appear on the computer screen and the only way to emphasize that is to capture the green

tones of the computer screen and blend it the soft tone environment outside of the monitor.

The fifth movie is entitled " Bright Future" starring Joe Odagiri as Yuji Nimura and Tadanobu Asano as Mamoru Arita. The movie is about the young Yuji and his friend Mamoru who is working at Mr. Fujiwara's factory, they were offered with salary bonus and work stability by making them regular employees in the factory. Yuji is a directionless young man who spends his spare time in the arcade and his equally non-ambitious friend shares the same characteristic. Yuji is a typical young man who only wants to make a steady living, but the pleasant night sleep was ceased by recurring visions of emptiness. Fujiwara's genuine concern for their future was reluctantly accepted by the two young lads because of their impassivity and lack of responsibility. The only thing that Mamoru keeps as his prized possession is the salt water poisonous jelly fish which symbolizes social interest and responsibility. True enough because some young people have many conflicts with their relationship in the society being not satisfied with their life. The enigmatic correlation of the characters and the paradox of happiness is a great conflicting elements that we can find in the movie.

Poetic, apathy, hauntingly enigmatic and disconnection resembles defines the overall characteristic of the movie. The film was made in a dream like approach using realistic and temporal ambiguity through the use of verite-styled camera movements. The entire movie was shot using digital video by means of alternating point of view shots. The surreal encounters and narrative ellipses created a visual of young protagonist adrift in

disassociation from reality. Editing should have been utilized more in this film, a lot of filler scenes can be seen especially in the friend's quarters. Lighting elements of the movies employed natural lights captured by digital lens. Long shots and medium shots are mostly being used to frame scenes shot on site. The use of natural urban environment made an impression reality. The audiences are not drawn to the fantasies of the plot, but rather had them put into the character's line of perception. Diegetic and a few non-diegetic sounds can be heard on a toned down volume in the background, but the most of the noise in the backdrop were taken from a real-life environment. The film was based on real lie tendencies, but the core context of the story evolves in the representation of the jellyfish as a symbol of personal struggle. The use of digital video, allowed the movie to capture the nature sound of the backdrop, using diegetic sound made this movie more realistic in many ways and the color tones are also based on realistic approach, the trick is to use natural lighting in the scenes to capture the color tones that audience can normally see on regular view.

Our number six movie on the list is " Séance" a psychic thriller movie about Junco, a housewife with an unnatural ability to see the soul of the dead after a tragedy. Her husband Sato is working as a sound effects artist for a television studio. Sato supports his wife's ability and devised a plan to use it for his advantage. When a young girl abducted by a child molester escaped, the girl hid inside Sato's equipment trunk while recording sounds of nature in the forest. Instead of reporting the authorities after finding out on the girl in his trunk, Junko kept the girl hoping that her psychic ability would be used to

lead the police to the dead little girl. This action is fueled by his ambition to make herself the most renowned psychic in Japan.

The movie in general looks like it was made for television as a top rated supernatural special. The problem with the movie is that it has the mood and atmosphere of a J-horror flick but failed to deliver the power to scare. It ended to be flat and disappointingly dull. Maybe for a nod it is noted to Sato's job. In terms of sound effects the unsetting background of ambient noise, it set the tone for spooky feel story but when the ghost appears it comes out the same with all other Japanese movies of the same genre in the early parts of 2000s. It may have been that Junco and Sato settle into an evil fare but it didn't made justice to the story's full potential. The lack of sufficiency in the movie made it boring and dull although the objective is to scare the audience at some point it failed on that.

The movie also required quite a hefty amount of suspension of disbelief as far as the audience is concern. At one point it would look as impossible that Sato has an empty box by any chance that it met a coincidence with the escaping little girl and ended up not using it to put his equipment back. This is just one of the many plot holes that the movie has in general. It was a movie with a strong horror and supernatural core, it just that it wasn't explored too much that the movie only delivered so much. Although on the positive note, the movie used an onsite setting which is good for a realistic feel and it used neutral lighting along with a few scenes with limited lighting to highlight shadows which inflicts a scary feel. The objective is to scare people, so the use of nondiegetic sound and gloomy mood and dull coloring

left the audience to linger with their minds to inflict fear.

Next stop is the movie " Doppelganger", the film centers Koji Yakusho who played as a medical technology researcher who is being haunted by a spirit who takes the exact same form of another person, in this case it's the main character's image that doppelganger is imitating. In a typical director's eye the movie could have evolved in a slasher fun-fare but Kurosawa is a typical Japanese director who utilizes an approach typical to a J-horror standards. According to legends, anyone who sees a doppelganger of themselves will eventually die. But in the movie Hayashi tend to ignore what's happening and deny the existence of his double. In his early attempts to gradually accept to manipulate the double for his own personal benefit but in his attempts to finally suppress his double that when the trouble begins. The allegory of people's conflict to their inner self is a constant pull and contradictions of desire and responsibility. There is a horrific element in the film but instead of using it to bring out a shrieking reaction; I was generally oversimplified eliminating the full potential for a mind blowing scary film. What we can think about personally when watching this movie is how personality plays a role for us to think that we are a division of two individuals. Revealing inner self that people usually scared of showing to others will eventually surface and in Hayasaki's case, his doppelganger is a representation of of his real life.

The movie was shot using digital video, on one hand the film's visuals showed how it lacks the technological advantages. The overall atmosphere is not strikingly lit and the resolution aspect ratio is below the standard. The movie also employed composite camera action of pan and scan especially

when needed to frame both the doppelganger and Hayashi. The digital format also allowed Kurosawa to experiment on the multiple use of running visual window, this is a technique also used in Kurosawa's film Bright Future. The long and medium shots were a great advantage also in framing the scene with Hayashi and his double. This is also a technique which creates the scary atmosphere; especially on one of the scenes when he sees his double face to face and Hayashi couldn't stand to look and closed his eyes. Sound design is not pretty much impressive, there were no special intervention made by the sound effects nor did it make a striking contribution to the overall scare delivery. Editing was done appropriately; it seems that all scenes are made perfect for the plot. Color is monotonous as it was consistent from starting scene to the end. There were no special scene highlighted with special symbolic color, it is natural lighting with a few implications of shadows which shows on some scenes.

Our next movie is entitled " Retribution", the story is about the detective Yoshioka played by Kurosawa's favorite Koji Yakusho. There is no question why Kurosawa favors Yakusho for he starred in most of the director's movies just like Tim Burton favors Johnny Depp, this is because the actors fits the character requirements. In the film a movie was killed by drowning in a puddle of salt water, but when the culprit was apprehended he only confessed to the first crime. Ironically, there were murders done in the same fashion as the first one and what Yoshioka is puzzled about is why it is happening and why the culprit only admits to one murder. The rational is that the first victim is wrecking havoc to other potential victims for the reason of revenge. It is scary in all sense just like what Japanese horror is all

made of. Apocalyptic scenario, guilt and loneliness makes up the motives is heavily using for this film. Te woman in red dress somehow died of suffocation, and the color of her dress is also a symbol of social suffering because of repression and regulation that exist in the modern society. It is not just the color of the ghost but an epitome of suffering and death.

At the first part o the movie Kurosawa used an introduction that made the film looked like a detective thriller case. But as the movie progress, the audience will be doused into terror of what lies behind the murders. But despite of that the flaws in the film are still too obvious to be ignored. Attraction is lacking in the film the pacing is annoyingly slow and the crawl of events would have to be set on the second part of the film. It means the first one is just simply plain and boring to an average audience, not unless one engages himself to explore the context of the first one. Evidently, editing was done poorly on this film, given that the first half is filled with filler scenes and does not really transcends into the main core of the story. This also relates to how the plot was made for the film, it is just not flawless. Sound design on the other hand made a good contribution especially when the scary part comes on the screen. The screeching low and creepy sound blended well with the scenes and this is a good example of using non-diegetic sound for scary movies. Scenes were shot on site and with a few exceptions of indoor shots that looks like fabricated from a studio settings. Long, medium and overhead shots worked perfectly for the film as well. Color was greatly employed, especially the color red. To emphasize the ghost character and the core context within that color made a contrast to the

gloomy and dull colored background, but as soon as the red dress appears, it suddenly becomes a prominent element in the scene.

Last on the list is " Tokyo Sonata", after two years since his last film, Kurosawa made a comeback with the film that totally broke loose of his conventional style, the story of the movie is no typically filled with ghosts, murders and monsters. It is about a salary man who kept on coming back to his family after loosing his job. Yet this is one as one of the most terrifying masterpiece of Kurosawa. It is terrifying because the story and what the audience is engaged in the picture is hiss real self and what the society holds for such reality. It can be about your friend, neighbor, or anyone across the street. The surreal reality depicted in the movie is intense that the scary feeling is not triggered by distorted images of spirits and evil nor blood splat and psychopaths but a clear non imaginative picture of who we are as an individual. The madness that people contribute to the world was depicted in this film and the world without mercy is proven to be more frightening that any ghostly apparitions.

Numata played by Teruyuki Kagawa in Serpent's Path found he unemployed and that made him lose his self-worth, authority and role in his family and the very foundations of his existence came crashing down. He lost his authority over as simple as demanding for a bottle of beer with his dinner, all of that was gone and he is left alone to wonder about his true interest and potentials as a human being. Every scene in the film send of waves of emotion and simple mundane of complex incidence. The shots taken on dinner scenes, walk in the park, job interview, all are powered to distress the

context of a world gone astray. Long shots, medium and tracking techniques were employed with utmost intelligence which is a mark of a true master of films. Sound design is not really something to be concerned about as the story does not require creepy connotations in delivering scare. The realistic embodiment of the core context was amplified by the natural acting shot on the natural backgrounds. Reality is the basis of this film's density of horrific proportions; the way the scenes and the plot emerged in the film became the frightening elements to behold in the movie. As much as horror films scare the audience, this film does the same in a very unique way.