

MY VIEW OF MOVIES

Akira Kurosawa

I have never had the chance to lecture in as fine a place as this. I don't know how well I will speak, but I will do my best. What I would like to talk about first of all is about how I think about movies. If I may repeat what I said yesterday at the Kyoto Prize Presentation Ceremony, I believe that movies are like large, open spaces where people from all over the world gather to make friends and talk with each other. People who watch movies experience together via the screen various lives from around the world. They laugh, weep, suffer, get angry and experience life together. I think that making friends with people around the world is like this. To strengthen our relationships, people who make movies in Japan need to talk honestly and straightforwardly about what Japan is, what Japanese people think and what kind of heart they have. If they do that, Japanese will be able to make good friends with people around the world and make stronger ties with them. These ties may be in the far future, but they will be useful to people's happiness and will contribute to world peace. I make movies with this feeling.

Related to this, I am now making friends with children around the world. This started when one day I received letters asking for my autograph from four or five children from another country. Of course, I sent them my autograph. Because they were children, I suppose they talked about this with their friends. So after that, I received many more requests. After I answered those letters, the requests increased, and it became difficult to autograph every time I received them. Now, I draw pictures of Santa Claus, make cards and send them to the children, even though the requests are well over a thousand every year. Before Christmas I become very busy with the cards and have trouble finishing them all. It may sound easy to autograph cards, but signing 1,500 to 2,000 cards really is very hard work. Even so, it is a pleasure for me, and I get along with children around the world in this way.

Next, let me talk about my way of making movies. To make movies, a scenario is necessary. I make plans, write the scenario, direct and edit. I do everything for each of my works, although I do, of course, ask people's help. Talking about writing scenarios, to tell you the truth, I find it impossible to write on normal manuscript paper.

Somehow, I cannot put letters in the ruled-off squares of the manuscript sheets. Usually I just use blank paper. I can write on blank paper freely. For example, for a scene in which people fight, I write “Bakayaro!” (You idiot!) on half a sheet. This is how I write scenarios. My motto is to write naturally, and that is how I write. If I want to write a certain scene, I don’t decide things in detail beforehand. I begin to write from the first scene. Then, I write naturally like the flow of a river winding along and turning in various places. I may decide to write a certain way today, but the characters are somehow like real people, each insisting on his own opinion. So the story does not progress as I plan; it turns, as I said, like the flow of a river. Such mysterious story development is natural and is very interesting to audiences. This is how I write, but this is not all to making a movie, of course. After the scenario is completed, I have to choose actors and actresses and create sets. I have to look for various locations to film at, and I have to decide costumes. All of this is complicated work. I am speaking before women today, but I would like to say that cameras take pictures of everything; so everything must be prepared in detail—even the loincloths for the infantrymen. Work piles up, and there are really mountains of jobs that have to be done.

After all this work, we practice very hard with the scenario. I tell actors and actresses to “listen to each others’ words well.” For example, if there are two people speaking, one actor listens to the other, and then his words come out naturally. It is troublesome if he doesn’t listen to the other person. If they don’t listen to each other, they tend to only memorize what they are to say and speak when their cues come. This is unnatural, so we try to improve on this by repeated rehearsals until their movements become natural.

Then we begin filming. In my case, I make actors and actresses rehearse repeatedly. My unique way of filming is using several cameras. One scene is usually about one cut. I make the cameras move freely. I ask Camera A to aim at one spot and Camera B to aim at another; so they move freely with the movement of the actors. The good point of this method is that actors are not conscious of the cameras. If there is only one camera, the actors tend to act toward that camera. On the contrary, they should become the real characters and play the roles. If they are conscious of the camera, they develop the bad habit of acting toward that camera. To solve this problem, I use more than one camera—at most, eight—so the actors cannot pay attention to the cameras. I take close-ups from the farthest camera using a telephoto lens, and by doing that, the

actors do not know which is the close-up camera and begin to act using their entire bodies. If the close-up camera comes close to the actors, they tend to act only with their faces, and this is not satisfactory. If I take close-ups from a far distance, they act using their entire bodies, which looks quite natural. These are rather specialized matters, so they might be difficult to understand. However, this is how I take films.

After this, the final step is performed—editing. I splice together good parts and necessary parts from the films of the several cameras. Most directors perform this job after all filming is finished. In my case, however, I develop film while filming is in progress and watch them with my staff in what I call a rush preview. Since we use several cameras, the staff does not know which parts to choose for a certain scene; so I edit them soon after the rush preview is finished. When we go on location, I make an editing room in an inn. I edit there and show it to the staff and the actors and actresses. I think this is a good way because the staff and the actors and actresses can then understand well what they are doing. Later, I put all sorts of sounds and music on the edited version. Then it is completed.

Next, I'd like to talk a little about audiences. I often say that I film movies from my heart, not from here. (Points to head.) So I hope you watch with your heart. When I read what critics write recently, I notice that they give complicated, logical arguments in difficult words. Since I am not a very intelligent person, I don't understand these critics. I hope everyone will just watch movies rather with an open mind, not logically. They should watch with their feelings, not with their minds.

Japanese audiences do not show their feelings outwardly. Many Japanese sit very still and watch quietly. Audiences have different attitudes in other countries. When I go to the United States, for instance, I notice that people go to theaters to enjoy themselves. They all stand up and applaud when their favorite parts are shown, and they laugh as if they will fall down from their seats. They enjoy themselves a lot. So I can watch my movies in the U. S. or other countries much more enjoyably than I can in Japan.

I heard from Mr. Hisashi Inoue that in Australia audiences stand up to cover the window of the projection room if they really enjoy a scene from the movie. This means that they want to watch that part again. According to him, this kind of thing happens very often, and to me this seems pleasant. If the audience blends with the movie and watches with their hearts, this could happen, I suppose. Japanese audiences

are all quiet. I am wandering from the subject now, but when I show the rush preview to the staff in a projection room, everyone is quiet. At that time, they watch the parts they are responsible for very carefully and can't laugh or cry. So they watch very quietly, and I do not see the effects of my production. If I put unrelated people among them, they cry when they watch a sad scene and laugh at funny scenes; so I can know how the movie affected them. I hope that Japanese will watch movies in a more relaxed way like people overseas do.

I owe my success to my seniors, who I would like to talk about now—for example, Mr. Kenji Mizoguchi, Mr. Yasujiro Ozu, Mr. Mikio Naruse and Mr. Sadao Yamanaka. There were others as well who helped train me, making it possible for me to be here today. These people raised Japanese movies to an international level. Unfortunately for the Japanese movie society, these talented movie directors all died early in life, at times when they could have been doing their best work. I suppose that this has a relationship to the dullness of Japanese movies today. These directors' distinguished works were never admired in Japan, and yet they were respected around the world. Their movies are shown in, for example, Mizoguchi Festivals or Ozu Festivals in other countries, but there are few examples of this happening in Japan. My own opinion is that I would like to see them receive prizes similar to the Kyoto Prizes. Whenever I am given a prize, I remember these people clearly. And when I watch their movies, I feel sad, thinking that I want to see Mr. Mizoguchi or Mr. Ozu or Mr. Naruse. We should not forget their splendid work, and I have been telling the association of directors in the U. S. that instead of giving prizes to and holding movie festivals for new movies, we should be holding classic movie festivals and giving prizes to directors who have already died.

Now I would like to change the subject and talk about my teacher. I was studying drawing. I studied oil painting very hard, but I was unable to earn a living. I had already reached 25 years of age and decided I should find a job; so I wrote my resume. One day, when reading a newspaper, I found a classified ad written by a PCL (Photochemical Laboratory). They had begun to film movies and were looking for an assistant director. In the ad a question was written. "Give an example of a fundamental defect in Japanese movies and explain the solution." I thought that if there was a fundamental defect, it could not be corrected; so partly for fun, I wrote, "If there is a fundamental defect, there is no way to correct it." And I sent it off. They apparently

thought I was strange and asked me to come over to take a test. The person who chaired the examination at the time was Mr. Kajiro Yamamoto, who became my teacher. In the interview, we found that we had many points of common interest and talked for a long time. Finally, because of his recommendation, I passed the examination and entered movie society.

When I visited the studio, I felt very strange seeing the actors wearing grease makeup, and I didn't feel like going in. Later, I told my father, "I wonder if I can continue doing this work." He said, "Anything is good experience, so how about trying it for a week or a month or as long as you like?" So I went in.

The first film was boring, and I hated it. I said that I was going to quit, but my co-workers, other assistant directors, gave me some good advice. "Movie directors are not all like him. There are finer directors, so you should endure." Next, I became assistant director to Mr. Yamamoto, the man who hired me into this society. After that, I only assisted him. Among the assistant directors, there were four ranks: chief, second, third and fourth. I became chief much more quickly than I expected, and Mr. Yamamoto made me do everything. Once, after I went to deliver the schedule, I came back to the set and found the staff fooling around. I told them they shouldn't do that. "Mr. Yamamoto went home," they said. "He told us to ask you to film instead of him, and then he left." In that way, I was entrusted with the whole thing. He made me do quite a lot of important work, and I, of course, took care of the B Group film team. He made me do dubbing, film in his place and do everything that he did. I was so busy and had a lot of trouble. I began to think that it might be too much for me, but his wife came to me one day and said, "Yamamoto is very glad. He said, Kurosawa is able to write scenarios, he can edit, and if I make him film instead of me, he does perfect work. He has really come along." At that time, I suddenly realized the truth of the matter and appreciated Mr. Yamamoto greatly. I still remember it now very clearly and how I was brought up in those days.

I filmed a movie called, "Hakuchi" (The Idiot), which was originally a story by Dostoevsky. I filmed it after "Rashomon", and it was a very complicated story. I was soundly beaten by all critics, and all my appointments for making films were rejected by various companies. Finally, I went to Tamagawa Daiei and was told that they had cancelled the contract between us. My reaction was to think that I would be ignored for a few years and nothing else. At the time, I was living beside the Tama River, and I

remember carrying my fishing rod and going to the river to fish. When I swung the rod like this, it caught on something and the line broke. I didn't have any extra line with me, and I felt that when I had bad luck, I couldn't have good luck with anything at all. I was depressed and went back home. When I got to the door, my wife greeted me. "Congratulations!" I was offended by this. But she went on: "The Grand Prix!" At that time, Japanese did not know about the Grand Prix. I had not introduced "Rashomon" in Japan; a woman named Ms. Stramigiori, who was working for an Italian movie company, thought that the movie was good and introduced it in Italy. As I said, no one knew my movie nor the Grand Prix in Japan; but suddenly there was a great uproar. Newspaper reporters thronged to me, and various companies asked me to make movies. After this, I was never ignored and worked very easily from then on. Because of this, "Rashomon" is a very memorable work for me, and Italy an existence, a kind of benefactor for me. People in Italy love me a lot, and when I visit, they always welcome me. For example, when my movie festival was held in Sorrento, pictures of me were hung on telephone poles, and when I walked through town, all the shop owners came out and said, "Nippon Banzai!" or "Maestro something." I owe a lot to Italy and the Venice International Film Festival for my success.

I also owe much to not only Japanese movie directors but also to directors in other countries for my growth. To begin with, Mr. John Ford, who I greatly respected. After I filmed "Kumonosujo" (Throne of Blood), I went to the national theater to be honored by British royalty. There was some time before the ceremony, so I was asked to be seated until it began. I was sitting in a seat by the aisle, and someone stood up and said to me, "Excuse me." I looked and saw that he was Mr. John Ford, who I greatly admired. I wanted to stand up straight at attention. When I was introduced, he said, "I watched your filming when I went to Japan." Then I remembered that some American commissioned officers had come when I was taking the movie, "Tora no Oo Fumu Otokotachi" (The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail), and he was among them. He said he had left a message for me, giving me his regards, and he asked if I had gotten it. I hadn't. I had such a relationship with Mr. John Ford, and he looked after me a great deal. If I visited him when he took a film, he called me "Akira" in a loud voice, let me sit in his chair near the cameras, and explained many things. His eyes were already bad, and he was forbidden to drink alcohol, but he screamed, "I want a drink!" in a loud voice when we met. An interesting thing at that time was that he was working very hard

to correct an actor. It seemed difficult, but finally the actor was able to do as he was asked, and Mr. Ford said, "Wonderful! Very good!" to the actor. As he did so, he turned around and winked at me. He was a very interesting person. I saw an open set at that time. He taught me how if a corner of a wall was made in the open set and filming was done very close to it, the city inside would be seen in various ways. Since he was very good at using horses, I asked him to teach me about it, and he explained that I should film at a slightly slower speed. Taking film at a slower speed means that the action becomes faster when it is shown again at normal speed; so the horses run fast. Also, to emphasize the speed, he said, dust should rise from their feet. Both of these methods are effective in showing speed, he said. These are both common techniques, but what is really John Ford about them is that when he talked about them, he spoke as if they were secrets.

When I went to Paris, I heard that Mr. Jean Renoir visited me, so I went to see him quickly. When we met, he said, "It is an honor to meet you." I didn't know what to say as a great master who I respected greatly had told me so. That night in Paris, we went to a little restaurant run only by an old woman. The French food there was excellent. When I left, both Mr. Ford and Mr. Renoir stood and saw me off until my car went out of sight. What nice people they were, I thought. They were warm-hearted, generous and had the power to embrace other people. When I got old, I thought, I wanted to become old like them. When I met Mr. Fellini, Mr. Antonioni, Mr. William Wyler, what I felt was these great directors' big characters. They too were warm-hearted and able to embrace others. If I talk about my friendship with foreign directors, I could talk forever. I am good friends with Mr. Coppola, Mr. Lucas, Mr. Spielberg, Mr. Lumet, Mr. Scorsese and Mr. John Huston. One day, I received a letter from a fan in the U. S. who said that when he watched TV, Mr. Huston praised my movie "Kagemusha" and that the program was full of talk about the movie. He wrote that I should write a letter of thanks to Mr. Huston. I didn't have a chance to meet Mr. Huston, however, until finally when I attended the Academy Awards. We had a rehearsal in the theater, and when I went in, I heard a loud voice calling, "Kurosawa!" I turned around to see a person inhaling oxygen and sitting in a wheelchair on the stage. It was Director Huston. Even though he was so weak at the time, he was the one who handed me the American Directors Award. I had met him for the first time then, but he treated me as if we had been friends for a long time. Even though he was so sick, he

created a movie called, "The Dead," which was one of his greatest works. This is what I think of when my body feels weak: I remember Mr. Huston and think that I should work harder. Another director, Russian director Mr. Tarkovskii, also died at a young age. I felt as if he were a younger brother as we had made good friends with each other. It really is regrettable that he died so young. When I was filming "Dersu Uzara" (Derusu Uzala) in the Soviet Union, we ate a meal together at "Domkino," a movie house. He was a person who could not drink much alcohol, but he did, and he got drunk and sang the theme song from "Shichinin no Samurai" (Seven Samurais) in a loud voice. I remember we sang together. I had a cassette tape of this singing somewhere, but I can't find it and am still looking for it. Now I respect and have made friends with Greek director Theo Angelopoulos and Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov. One director I much respected was Mr. Satyajit Ray of India, who is now deceased. When I went to an Indian Film Festival with my wife, she saw him taking his role as chairman of the judges and said, "I have never seen such a respectable person before." He was surely a fine person. He had very bright eyes and was tall so that I had to look up to him. It really is too bad that he died. I received a letter from Director Scorsese once which said, "Satyajit Ray's health is very bad now, and I would like to give him an Academy Award. Please cooperate with me." We worked together on various ways to give him an award and finally decided to give him an Honorary Award of the Academy Awards. He was unable to come to receive it. At the awards ceremony, we showed a picture that we took of him in the hospital. It is very unfortunate that he died.

I sometimes feel that God is kind because when I feel down after having lost friends who were great directors, I am then able to meet new faces. Kiarostami of Iran, for instance, who is now famous worldwide. Also, Hou Xiaoxian of Taiwan. For me, it is very good study to meet world famous directors and to keep company with them. Other Japanese directors, however, do not try to keep company with such people. I think they should go out and meet many kinds of people, but it is regrettable that this does not happen. I talk with many people about many things. To my way of thinking, learning by watching movies and meeting the creators of the movies are completely different. It is important to learn from the people directly. I wrote about this in my scenario, "Maadadayo." When learning something, it is more important to learn the humanity of the teacher than to learn the subject from a teacher. It is a big problem, I believe, that Japanese schools do not recognize this. In old times, there were many good

teachers. Mr. Hyakken Uchida was greatly admired and is the theme of “Maadadayo.” As I said, I think it is important that pupils learn from the humanity of the teacher. People who are related to movies, including those who have already become directors, should meet fine directors from around the world and should think about what they can learn from them.

From my experience, I feel that the present condition of the movie is not good. There are few people supporting the art monetarily ; so collecting funds to create movies takes much work. The scenario, “Ran,” was made before “Kagemusha.” Since it was originally a story by Shakespeare, movie companies may have thought it a bit difficult in content for many audiences. I was thinking about creating an interesting story about a feudal war, so I then made “Kagemusha.” To tell you the truth, I travelled all over the world to find people who would put up the money for “Ran.” I went to the U. K. first, since the story had originally been a work of Shakespeare, but no matter how the people there worked for us, we failed to raise any funds. Then I went to New York and tried very hard, but it was impossible there as well. I went to Hollywood and met various producers, but again it was impossible. After I came back to Japan, Mr. Toscan, the vicepresident of a company named Goumont in France gave me a call and said, “I heard you are having financial problems. Can I help you?”He soon came to Japan and said that his company would like to buy this movie and pay most of the production costs. He asked me, “If I sign here now, will it help you?” I answered that it would be helpful, and he said, “Then, I’ll sign.”Even though I took the signature to the bank, however, I could not get money from any bank in Japan. There is a movie bank in France, but in Japan, no one trusts movie directors. So I told him that I couldn’t get money with the signature in Japan. He then told me he would introduce a producer who would offer money to me if I take the signature with me. After various efforts, he finally went to the Minister of Culture. He asked the Minister of Culture to please offer money to Mr. Kurosawa. The Minister told him, “But this is completely a Japanese movie. It is impossible to offer him money in France.”Mr. Toscan asked, unreasonably, “Then, how about giving Mr. Kurosawa the best medal in France and make a reason to support him?”So in the end, the French government paid all the production costs for “Ran,” and that is how the movie was completed. Also, for filming the movie, “Yume”(Dreams), Mr. Spielberg made efforts, and a movie company in the U. S. offered the money. When I filmed “Kagemusha,” we lacked a little money, but Mr. Coppola and Mr. Lucas worked

hard for me and, thanks to them, 20th Century Fox put up the rest of the money. So, as I said, Japanese directors are having troubles with finances right now, but they could get money if they had strong wills to go around the world to look for it. None of them do this, however. Around the world, people who are related to movies get together with others who are related to movies. Foreign people do this; Japanese do not. I think that young Japanese directors should make friends with foreign directors. In the age of Mr. Mizoguchi, Mr. Ozu and Mr. Naruse, audiences watched their movies in theaters and really appreciated the movies. Recently, however, there are only strange movies, so the appreciation is not as strong as it was many years ago, and it will be difficult to raise it to that standard. In this respect, I am worried about the future of Japanese movies.

But now I will have to stop talking, even though there are more things I would like to say, because my time is up. In Japan, there is a saying that goes like this: It gets dark, and the way seems far still. Now, I am 84 years old, and I don't know until what age I can keep working hard, but I will continue more and more. However, my present state of mind is, "It gets dark, and the way seems far still."

Thank you very much.