

Doll Film, Shadow Cinema

When a word “puppetry” is uttered in regards to cinema, our immediate reaction is that of disagreement, for obvious fact that actors are not dolls. Yes, actors are not dolls. Put it this way, a doll is a film and a film is a doll. And when I speak cinema in terms of puppetry, I am referring to a particular kind of puppetry known as *shadow puppetry*. Like shadow puppetry, cinema has a doll (film) and it is struck by the light. What we see at the end is the shadow of the doll projected onto a screen. *That play of shadows is called cinema*¹.

I have mentioned that in order to achieve the cinematic vision, sometimes it is natural for directors to treat the actors like dolls. Yes, but actors are not dolls, they are just treated like dolls. But since a doll is a film and a film is a doll, actors are treated like a film – that each image is precious/that each action is precious. Other way of saying is as such:

No matter how good the performance of an actor is, he/she needs to understand that cinema and theatre are completely different forms of art and must transform his/her self into the images of the vision (“transformation of self into another” is a secondary matter in cinema). An actor is as equal as the tree behind him/her, as equal as the wind that is causing the branches of that tree to dance. And as the natural phenomena change spontaneously, so does the actors’ state of mind and subsequent behaviors. If the images of vision are what make the film, the doll, seeing the doll is the achievement of vision. What kind of state of mind the doll is in and how it behaves is up to the actors’ creativity, but the director must first see the doll. If an actor cannot transform into the images of vision, then his/her performance simply does not get incorporated into the play of shadows regardless of his/her presence and performance. When such unfortunate thing happens is when the viewers say, “that actor can really *act!*”

Treating the actors like dolls is to incorporate their performance creativity into the doll, the film. Cinema, after all, is not about being in the moment – it’s about the relics of moments. And when it is projected onto a screen, those relics come together as an artifact of life itself.

Once a great director Krzysztof Kieślowski had to have a second take while filming a staircase scene for his masterpiece *Blue* (1993). After the second take was done and good, Juliette Binoche, who played the lead role, asked what went wrong in the first take. Kieślowski pondered for a while and replied, “because you breathe differently.”

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2015/12/26
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¹ Unfortunately with digital projection, which has eliminated the use of celluloid film, we no longer see the play of shadows at movie theatres. Instead, what we see now are slideshows consisting of high resolution pictures.