Columbia Engineering Builds Bridge to the World of Work

By Caroline Ladhani

The event was a huge success with students who lined up outside.

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The Record

The opening shots of great films transcend a film’s period, genre or national origin says Annette Insdorf, director of under- graduate film studies and a professor in the film graduate division of the School of the Arts. Speaking at this year’s University Lecture in October, Insdorf said that a film’s first few sequences reveal how the cinematic language will tell a story. In her talk, based on Bernstein Bertolucci’s The Conformist, Volker Schlondorf’s The Tin Drum and Akira Kurosawa’s Rashomon, she identified the Unbearable Lightness of Being (1993) as an example of the process of transforming a literary work to film. “When reading a novel, one imagines the characters’ mind in flashes which represent a journey from ‘fascism to freedom.’

In The Tin Drum, based on the book of the same name by Gunther Grass, Schlondorf reworks the novel, whose man characters—Oscar decades to stop growing—a reference that relates Naum to infantilism. The Tin Drum, Insdorf noted, is an epic story that provides ‘psychological insight and symbolic richness that defies any single interpretation.’ Unlike the novel, the film’s opening sequence is about a man looking through a peephole of a door as silent music plays in the background. Oscar’s childlike voice suggests a demonic presence at a whole, the movie ‘raises more questions than it can answer about World War II and its aftermaths,’ said Insdorf.

In The Unbearable Lightness of Being, based on the novel by Czech writer Milan Kundera, the plot revolves around a hero who evolves from a political hero to a political hero. The novel opens with the main character speculating about the myth of eternal return. But the film begins by ‘celebrating the visual,’ Insdorf explained, replacing the montage, the director offers a ‘cine- matic analysis of sexuality and politics,’ seen through the character’s mind in flashes which represent a journey from ‘fascism to freedom.’

In the opening sequence, Bertolucci’s The Conformist, which was based on the novel by the Italian writer Alberto Moravia, is an example of the process of transforming a literary work to film. “When reading a novel, one imagines the characters’ mind in flashes which represent a journey from ‘fascism to freedom.’

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