

Journal sample from a past class.

This journal earned a score of 9.5 out of 10 points.

Journal by X.W Film 122B

Journal Topics for The Secret In Their Eyes

The Secret in Their Eyes (2009) was produced by Juan José Campanella, Gerardo Herrero, and Mariela Besuievski as a Argentine-Spanish coproduction. The film was directed by Juan José Campanella and the cinematographer was Félix Monti. The Secret in Their Eyes won the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film in 2010.

Questions:

1. How would you describe the visual style of the film in terms of lenses utilized, camera placement and movement, and editing?
2. How would you describe the role of Espósito's friend Pablo Sandoval. How does his character and style of acting contribute to the narrative?
3. Which scenes or sequences had the greatest impact on you in terms of effectiveness, emotional impact or style?
4. Who is your favorite character in the film and why?
5. The film raises questions of what is truth, what is fantasy, and finally what is justice? What conclusions about these issues if any did you take from the film?

The Secret in Their Eyes (2009)

Campanella uses camera movements to his advantage to create suspense in this thriller. One of the most notable shots at the beginning of the film happens during Esposito's analysis of the victim's past photos. The camera zooms in at the blurry and out of date photograph of a suspicious man, focusing especially on his eyes. The eerie parallelism between the murderer's eyes and Esposito's longing gaze at Irene in a photo reminisced after 25 years sends shivers

down our spines. The film achieved to successfully stir up these emotions precisely with the previous highlighting of the murderer's eyes and the later seemingly nonchalant skim past Irene and Esposito's photos.

Another area where camera styles especially came into play is at the soccer stadium where Esposito and Pablo discovers and chases after the suspect. Campanella plays with us for a second by identifying the wrong suspect at first and then immediately sets up the real murderer's face blurred in front of our eyes. While the camera's focus is on the barely viewable Esposito and Pablo, the audience eventually recognizes the same face and eyes from Morale's photos enjoying the ball game at the lower right corner of the screen. The wobbliness, dutch tilt, and close up shots used during the physical chase help the audience engage in the squishiness and intensity of the crowd and surrounding environment.

A particular scene that I found especially impressive in the chase is the narrow angle attributed to the killer running down the flights of stairs where more than 2/3 of the screen reflects the outer structure of the stair case. As we watch the killer becoming minuscule as he runs down the stairs, we cannot help but laugh a little as he frantically turns around and runs towards the camera due to the cops blocking him from the bottom of the stairs. Campanella seems to like using smart camera movements to hint things at the audience, highlight certain details, and amplify anxiety and tension throughout the film. When Irene, Esposito, and the killer reunite in the elevator, Campanella shows us the murderer turning around to face Irene and Esposito as he leaves the elevator through the elevator mirror. This small but significant camera detail heightens the audience's feeling of terror, forcing us to experience Irene and Esposito's angry and fear.

Similarly, at the end, Campanella places huge emphasis on eyes as he artfully blocks the camera, closes up onto the face, and blurs the surrounding. During the conversation between Morales and Esposito at the end, Campanella also purposefully covers Morale's mouth while he is speaking to force the audience to stare deep into the expression and emotions of Morale's eyes. This camera style insinuates that one must look into the eyes to find the truth, as what come out of the mouth may very much be lies—which is exactly the case in this particular scene.

The role of Esposito's friend Pablo Sandoval is that he serves as comic relief through the film by constantly getting Esposito into trouble by not acting cautiously and being a reckless alcoholic. However, a significant aspect is the inability for Esposito to solve the Morales case without Pablo and his peculiar methods. He has bigger guts than Esposito and it is his boldness and conclusion that a man can never change his passions that brought them closer to the killer. He works as clerk not even a lawyer but plays wild cards. Director spares us the exact scene of how he looked as he is being shot to death but the scene is also Esposito's imagination of a less gruesome and bloody memory.

The scene which had great impact on me is the ending where Esposito discovers Morale's true punishment for the killer. Despite Esposito's efforts to pursue justice in the legal system throughout the entire film, in the end, it was a method not matching the society's law of justice that put the criminal behind bars. My favorite character is Morale due to the emotional turmoil that he has gone through in the search for an appropriate sentence for the murderer of his wife. While most of the audience would theoretically agree upon Morale's claim that a lonely life sentence would be a more deserving punishment, in practice the plan comes out as rather cruel and alarmingly, even slightly sadistic. Morale's struggle between convincing himself and Esposito to forget the past and executing his own system of justice marks him as a character especially interesting to me.

The film communicates mixed feelings in the realm of justice. The failure to achieve legal justice during Esposito's pursuit of the Morales case is concluded with a plot twist that is equally questionable in terms of justice. Coincidentally, or even ironically, Morale's actions outline a changing attitude in the face of morals, which inherently points towards justice. When Esposito asks the suspect which train he took, knowing that Morales has waited a year by the train station to catch the killer, the suspect's response was "I don't take the train, I take the bus". This statement, which sums up a seemingly insignificant habit of his, is a dramatic blow to Morale's tedious and obviously fruitless effort for the past year. While Morales, the man waiting for the train, may symbolize justice itself, ironically the moral and just society that he has hoped for is not on the train he awaits. Instead, the fallen and corrupt government and state of society is symbolically backwards in its parallel to the bus.

By the end, Morales reject societal justice and takes matters into his own hands by executing his own form of justice. In reality, his ultimate punishment for the murderer is mentally cruel and torturous. In the discussion of human justice, the boundary between what is truly right and wrong is a heavily contentious and debatable subject. Campanella also muddles the present and past with the extra element of fantasy to discuss memories and human nature. Esposito's imagination of certain events in the past and his inclination to believe the best memories, such as speculating that Pablo purposefully flipped over the pictures to protect him, also seems to imprison him in a state of constant recollection and speculation. Morale's advice for him to forget everything turns out to be evidently hypocritical in that he was the most unlikely person to let go. This sequence of events and streams of thought concludes with the value of positive fantasy, where Esposito used it as a coping mechanism and where in contrast, Morales still lived a life of emotional struggle and agony whilst facing the reality.