**The Color of Clutter**

Matt Flynn

Lynne Ramsay’s Ratcatcher takes place in the Glasgow Scotland in 1973. The location is a community housing project that is old, crowded and dirty. The housing is, in the American, the projects.  The film is a realistic depiction of these people and in particular a young boy named James (played by William Eadie). He is the center of the movie and most of the action revolves around him, his family and his friends, both male and female. The film is styled along the social realism aesthetic. This style represents human life in a stark un-glamorous manner. One aspect of this style is the location’s color. The muted color of Ratcatcher reflects the dour mood and lives of the film’s characters. The visual and emotional tone of the movie is contrasted when James takes a bus trip to a new housing development. He moves from the dank dirty streets of the Glasgow streets to the clean wide open space of a rural housing development. The change in color during James’s bus ride to their new housing conveys a temporary change in space and mood that foreshadows the communities moving to a better place.

The bus ride is a smooth transition from the dirty housing project to the clean and spacious country. The *mise en scene* changes during the trip. The Glasgow site is stone, gray and very dirty. The bus itself is driven by a well- dressed clean cut driver. The atmosphere of the top of the bus is sparse and devoid of any other human beings. The view is pleasant. James, for this first time in the movie, can look down at the streets from which he originated. He can look down as the piles of garbage, the dirty sidewalks and building. He can look down at this scene and simultaneously move away. This change in scenery represents a change in mind set for James himself and perhaps his surrounding community.

The bus arrives at its terminus. James doesn’t realize that he’s at the end of the line. The bus driver tells him to leave; the ride is over. He is forced to leave the bus and start walking. He walks across a field that is spatially and visually removed from Glasgow. It is flat, light and has no buildings. He walks through the grass to the site of a housing project under development. The housing construction is disorderly, but in a productive way. The construction site is portrayed as organic and disordered. However, it is not like the disorder of his current neighborhood. The houses are clean. Their yards are cluttered with lumber, pipes and other pieces of construction material. The yards scene creates a space that represents the creation of a fresh, new community.

The fresh clean clutter exists both externally and internally. The interior spaces are also under construction and somewhat messy. They are shown as bare walls and floors. The bathroom interior is raw. There is nothing on the floor and the walls are baron. The fixtures, the toilet and bath tub are new and have never been used. They are light, white, fresh and clean. He plays in the tub and tries to turn on the water. He is clearly ready to move in. He then moves on to explore the rest of the house.

James walks from the upstairs interior to the house’s kitchen which is also under construction. As he walks into the kitchen, the camera frames a window. It is an empty window that consists of only a sill and no glass. Through it, he can see the fields that surround the house. The view is of a field of brown grass about one foot in height. The view of the field is centered in the middle of the screen. This shot provides and nice contrast between an interior under construction and a flat, bucolic scene. James sits in the window sill and look outward from the kitchen’s interior.

At this moment, all the visual elements of the scene are held together. There is a shot from the interior of the kitchen to the grassy field in the exterior. The window’s frame is a frame within a frame. The audience sees the scene framed twice. The kitchen and the field are framed by the camera and the field is framed a 2nd time by the window sill. It’s as though there are 2 perceptions of the field. James sits on the right side of the window sill with his feet dangling over the edge looking out. When all these elements are brought together, the film conveys James’s viewpoints and feelings. He sits in a fresh interior looking at a fresh exterior. The feeling of a mild levity almost drips of the screen.

James then jumps off the window sill into the exterior of the house. He runs to the field and then runs through the field. It is a playful and light moment in a generally a dark and somber movie. He runs jumps, flips and experiences a child like playfulness with no inhibition. The lightly colored visual space of the flat field portrays a character having a good time with little worry about. Through these scenes, the audience sees a momentary and mild transformation in his character. He goes from a grim low class Glasgow public housing occupant to a normal human being having a good time.

Taken literally, the bus trip represents little; it is a short jaunt to the country to explore a new house. Some broader cinematic themes come to mind. There are a multitude of contrasted elements displayed during these scenes. Color, clutter and framing provide opposites that lead to a personal transitional moment in the movie. Arguably, there are other possibilities. James, his family and neighbors are moving from a dirty place to a clean place with the help of a community, government subsidized housing and a government subsidized bus driver. There is a specter of paternalism and dependence. This community is largely dependent on the government for a place to live. Going even further, the trip may represent James’s death. The bus ride and driver acts as vehicular purgatory that ends when the bus driver tells him the trip is over; it is time to get off the bus. The movie ends ambiguously, so these non-literal interpretations also get mired in ambiguity. Isn’t that the point?

Anyway, that is enough of that. James seems to be mildly uplifted by his short trip. He gets to leave his day to day activities and companions and experience a small piece of another world. The bus ride, the building site are a short but enjoyable jaunt through an idyllic pastoral setting. The mood of the film changes through these scenes, and the mood of James changes as well. Contrasting color expresses a change in mood of the lead character. The change in scenery that accompanies the color change reinforces this narrative for this character and for the audience. Overall, the trip to the country is a refreshing intrusion in what is an otherwise dour, sour and depressing taste of the reality of living in a Glasgow housing project in the mid 1970’s.

Movie link

The whole movie was on Youtube, but not it's gone

The scenes discussed are from 1:38 to 1:44

Here's clip of the kitchen scene

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RG5amE6TRwc>

**Ratcatcher: The color of drowning**

The Color of Clutter

The color of emotion

The color of semi sweat and sour

Displaying Hope through motion and color change

Degenerative cluster vs. constructive clutter…

Who is going to manage the clutter/good vs. bad chaos…..

Internal elements:

a-Color change between scenes

b-Clutter changes between scenes

c-Kitchen Framing between scenes

**NOTES and PIECES**

For this film please screen one of the following: *Ratcatcher* (1999) directed by Lynne Ramsay or *Umberto D* (1952) directed by Vittorio DeSica.  In this discussion you will be required to analyze both both acting and sound.

*Ratcatcher* and *Umberto D* both come out of a realist filmmaking tradition.  *Umberto D* is a classic [Italian Neorealist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_neorealism) film.  Italian Neorealism began in the aftermath of WWII, it focused on conditions of the poor and working class.  Neorealist films use the war-torn city as their set, stories are simple and minimal, focusing on the challenges of everyday life.  Ratcatcher comes out of a [social realist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_realism) filmmaking tradition, an important historically to cinema in the U.K.   Like Italian Neo-realism, social realist films are often set in on location, focus on the everyday problems of the poor and working class.

*Ratcatcher* and *Umberto D* share the core elements of realist filmmaking tradition.  Their protagonists are to a degree opposites, an elderly retired government worker who can no longer live on his meager pension, and a young boy struggling to grow up in the slums of Glasgow, Scotland during a sanitation workers strike in 1973.  As is true with many realist films, both of the lead roles are played by non-actors. ([Carlo Battisti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Battisti) - Umberto D and William Eadie - James).  Both films are loosely plotted and have open-endings.

I am working on better uploads of both films but for now you can check out these links on You Tube:

Umberto D

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnvj0horjGc>

Ratcatcher

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l42jveMRpnY>

1.) In preparation/practice for your final exam essay please formulate a thesis statement around the film you watched for this week and one of the formal film topics:

cinematography, mise en scene,

The staging, is Urban, concrete dirty, gray, cold, 1970’s Glasgow Scotland,

Interiors vs. exteriors

**Da Shu’ Up;**

A visual metaphor for dark to light….

Which represents?

How is visual language being used here? How does staging and composition tell a story.

Assume the story premise and use visual language to prove the story…

3 scenes a transition from rotten film of government /labor induced filth, moving away from his family

While at the same time being with his family…..

**Scene A**

Moving from the filthy Glasgow council housing streets to the clean suburbs

Moving on a clean bus looking at the dirty streets

He walks to the top of passes a circular mirror while climbing a circular stairway

The top of a clean bus

A 2 story bus

A clean 2 story bus moving from city to suburban setting with nice music

The flat, wheat color grass in visible from the top of the bus

He is alone in the clean bus, describe and infer from the setting

The bus end, the bus drive tell him it the end of the road…..,

**What to infer from this scene…..**

Within these scene. A child acting as a child and maybe becoming less a child and move of an adult.

**Scene B**

He walks out of the bus

Balmore Road is the sign on the bus…

The housing project is under construction

It littered with construction debris, yet it’s clean, as only a new house can be.

There are pipe to play with and to play and around. There are some board to crawl on and around

MY recollection is thus; construction sites often smell good, they often smell like fresh wood, when the frames have first been put up and they have yet to be covered with drywall and insulation.

The new housing is clean, light and bright. The toilet appliance are new, so new covered with plastic,

Yes he pees in the toilet that’s not hooked up.

**What to infer from this scene…..**

**Moving to a new space, metaphor for growing up, growing away form is family, in a very small way. He get’s a new clean tube a new clean soul**

**SCENE C**

He walks down a shot stairwell down a stairwell, to a new kitchen, with a

Rectangular window wit now glass, he jump on the window sill He jumps through and runs outside

To a flat landscape with short brown grass, must be filmed in summer.

The scene is flesh clean an bright.,

He then kicks the can down the road.

**What to infer from this scene…..**

He’s still p laying around like a kid, but he’s moved through form cleanly designed space and now he returned slowly walking back to his row house in Glasgow

The end

James is played by ……

**Scenes:**

Mouse scene: 11:30

Bus ride: Goes to the new houses, 38:30

Inside his own house

Playing in the tub with his female friend.

2nd trip to new house(it’s now close) 120:50

38:30 off bus to field

41:00 field framed by kitchen scene,

51:00 Mouse to the moon

57:30 bathtube Ophelia scene + canal almost drowning scene.

Sound, editing.

Make sure that your thesis has depth.  It cannot be something like "The use of diegetic sound in *Umberto D* makes this film a classic".

Type of actors

2.) There are four key types of actors mentioned on page 272 of your text:  
a.) Personality actors : actors who take their personae from role to role  
b.) actors who deliberately play against our expectations of their personae.  
c.) Chameleon actors: actors who seem to be different in every role.  
d.) actors (often non-professionals) or people who have achieved success in another field who are cast to bring verisimilitude to a part.

Evaluation of acting ability and style….

As we already discussed, the lead actor in your film is a non-professional ([Carlo Battisti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Battisti) - Umberto D and William Eadie - James).  Evaluate their performance using the criteria listed on page 310 of your text (be sure to review this list before writing).  They include:

Actor and acting criteria in Ratchater

-appropriateness

-Inherent thoughtfulness or emotionality

Credible inner life and inner life portrayed?

-Expressive coherence

Aesthetic consistency- character is maintained throughout the time of the story in a variety of setting and situations. How is this different than expressive coherence??

Emotional stasis=social stasis?

Are the qualities above maintained throughout the film?

-Wholeness and unity

The lead actor is a young boy, William Eadie. The character he is playing, James, is also a young Scottish boy. So he is definitely an appropriate choice for this role. A 25 year old man or a 60 year old woman playing this part would have been completely inappropriate and even ridiculous.

In many scenes James looks sour and somewhat confused about his community and family situation. This actor projects these qualities to the camera and thus to the audience. He is a young boy living his life in the council houses of Glasgow in 1973 and his persona is believable. Given the trauma that James has to endure he comes across as unemotional and stoic. He fights back against the many injustices that he has to endure. But, he’s never becomes overtly or strongly emotional about his situation. There are many times where he could have broken down and cried.

For example, when the kid he’s playing with drowns, when he sees how upset his mother becomes and when he is playing with the neighborhood floozy in the bathtub. These were moments of emotional clarity. This actor and thus his character display a limited emotional range. He’s stays blank faced throughout much of the film. A more emotional responsive character would probably have a broader range of response. The blankness makes James the focal point of the story. Through his stoicism, a sense of objectively about the cityscape portrayed in the movie is being built. His emotion response is somewhat un-realistic in an overtly realistically styled film.

These stoic qualities are maintained throughout the film. There is not much change in the boy’s character as the film progresses. This consistency could represent the stasis of the community as a whole. He becomes the embodiment of sourness and stasis in this low rent district part of the city. There are times when he smiles and seems in tune with his family, but in most of the scenes he is moping around his neighborhood.

There are a series of scenes that contrast this communities present and what may be in the future. The greatest contrast in backdrop is between the old row houses and a housing development being constructed. James, his family and the rest of the community are slated to move to the new housing. His persona remains constant between these two locations. His body language, demonstrated by the way he walks, shows only a subtle shift between these dramatically different locales. Their current local is old, constructed of dirty bricks, filled with trash bags and has many dead rats scattered about. The new housing project is a bus ride away from this decrepit street scene. It is new, clean bright and spacious. The inner space and outer spaces are clean, brightly lit and spacious. In the transition between the dirty old neighborhood and the fresh housing development, James’ persona is even, steady and believable.

24 min

James runs away when he sees the mother of the boy who drowned. He seems someone guilty at this time. He walks away has to be called back by his mother. He seems somewhat aware that and may have regrets that he was involved with the drowning death of?? Quinn.

Mouse scene 28:00

My recollections from this film.

The kid drowning in the opening scene

James’ trip on the bus to what he expects to be his new home, new hope,

Sex in the tube with his neighbor

His drunk father