

Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* Experience

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In 2002, Gaspar Noé released his film *Irreversible* which immediately caused extreme controversy within France. The film features odd artistic choices as well as a climactic scene involving the graphic depiction of a woman being raped. France is notorious for its lenient judicial laws surrounding rape and its horrifically high rates. In 2019, France ranked first in the number of rapes of both men and women in all of Europe with 2,886 and 20,694, respectively (Published by Statista Research Department & 22, 2022). It is clear that France has had a problematic history with the crime of rape and has historically suffered from its prominence, therefore, Noé's intention behind his film becomes evident. This paper will utilize rhetorical analysis to discover the effects the film has on its audience and the methods Noé uses to achieve said effects. Through a non-linear structure, graphic violence, and a relentless soundtrack, Noé creates an immersive experience that leaves the viewer feeling disoriented and emotionally drained as the victims themselves.

Noé presents his audience with a story that begins at the end, with the brutal rape of Alex in a Parisian underpass. From there, the film in reverse chronological order, showing the events leading up to the attack and the aftermath of it. This structure is a rhetorical device that serves to amplify the film's themes. By starting at the end, Noé immediately immerses the viewer in the horror and brutality of the attack, forcing them to confront the consequences of the characters' actions before they even know what those actions were. As the film progresses, we are given glimpses of the events that led to the rape, but these glimpses are fragmented and disjointed, and we are left to piece together the story ourselves. This non-linear structure creates a sense of

disorientation and confusion that mirrors the emotional state of the characters. Marcus and Pierre are consumed by anger and a desire for revenge, and their actions are driven by a sense of disconnection from reality. Noé's use of a disjointed narrative serves to confuse the past and present, fantasy and reality, and ultimately between right and wrong. The film is full of violence and such scenes consume a majority of its first half.

The violence in "Irreversible" is graphic and unrelenting, with one particular scene - a nine-minute single take of Marcus bludgeoning a man to death - standing out as particularly disturbing. Noé's use of long takes and a handheld camera serves to intensify the visceral impact of the violence. It forces us, the audience, to confront these visceral feelings while experiencing such a primal act. This approach is a powerful rhetorical tool that forces the audience to consider the real-world consequences of violence. Noé encourages the physical and emotional impact that violence takes on the characters, and as a result, the violence in "Irreversible" is not glamorized or fetishized. Instead, it is portrayed as a destructive force that leaves its victims shattered and broken. Emotions that the audience experiences as well.

The film's relentless soundtrack is another rhetorical device that serves to heighten the emotional impact of the story. The music is a constant presence, even during moments of silence, and it is designed to create a sense of unease and tension. The pounding bass and disorienting soundscape serve to mirror the emotional turmoil of the characters, and as the film progresses, the music becomes more intense, culminating in a cacophony of noise that is almost unbearable. The use of sound in "Irreversible" is a powerful rhetorical tool that serves to immerse the audience in the emotional landscape of the film. The music creates a sense of unease and tension

that builds throughout the film, in its finale, the audience is already emotionally drained and disoriented.

Ultimately, Gaspar Noé's "Irreversible" is a powerful and challenging film that uses a variety of rhetorical devices to create an immersive and emotionally impactful experience. Through its non-linear structure, graphic violence, and relentless soundtrack, the film forces the audience to confront the consequences of violence and futility. Through the audience's transformative experience, the awareness and change that motivated Noe to make such a film could perhaps have been achieved. Sadly, statistics still demonstrate France's struggle with crime, but that does not undermine the effect and experience this film creates for its audience. Although it is an unbearable watch, its potential for impact and driving change against rape in France encourages its viewing and if seen en masse its effect can possibly achieve Noe's desired goal.

Bibliography

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