Angles commentary (which he feels creates a “pseudo-visuality.”). Well, it’s always a compromise. Criterion has provided well-illustrated video essays as special features on other DVD packages (note the superb blend of image and information in James Quandt’s supplementary essay for the “Three Films of Teshigahara” series). On the other hand, there is no way to provide such images in the commentary that accompanies the actual film. Perhaps they could have done more; perhaps they could have done less. Hopefully the viewer can take the suggestions mentioned by Professor Angles and others in their commentaries and look for (easily accessible) books on traditional Japanese art.

The main on-screen menu page of the DVD shows an image of the landscape setting of the final scene and invites the viewer to enter into a quiet, even contemplative, state through the haunting strains of one of the main musical motifs which mixes traditional Japanese instruments with Western orchestration. While some might find that music difficult to hear at length, it reflects the elegance and Buddhist underpinnings of Sansho dayu. Criterion deserves praise for their austere and multi-layered approach to one of the world’s great films.

Endnotes
1. There was even a short-lived 1954 stage production adapted by Terrence Malick and directed by the great Polish director Andrzej Wajda.
5. For more information on Kagawa Kyoko’s career, see my article on “Kagawa Kyoko: A Life in the Cinema,” Asian Cinema. 15:1 (Spring/Summer 2004): 116-142.
7. It would have been helpful to include a short biosketch of Professors Angles and Le Fanu in the back pages of the booklet.

The Willow Tree (Beed-e majnoon, 2005), directed and written by Majid Majidi, Iran, 2007, 96 min., color

After a sudden, unexplained fall, a blind university professor Youssef (Parviz Parashatui) travels to France to consult with specialists. An extremely successful corneal transplant restores what had seemed unimaginable. The irony is that Youssef—as a blind man—is more dignified than the man he becomes when his sight is restored. Before his operation, Youssef was a blind person in the model of the Audrey Hepburn character in Wait Until Dark—resourceful and unassumingly graceful. After his operation, he is closer to Buñuel’s blind men—irritable, undependable, mean-spirited.

I would like to first highlight two remarkable sequences in Majidi’s film that investigate the wonder of sight: Following the surgery, Youssef runs down the hall of the French hospital, giggling in delight, until he catches a glimpse of his red, injured eyes in a reflection in a night window. The camera and musical score help us feel his joy at his first sight of his hand, and even of an ant crawling along the sill.

Another memorable scene is the one that takes place when Youssef returns to Tehran following his successful operation. Well-wishers (family, students, friends) have strewn the entrance area of the airport with red roses, but—from the distance—an uncertain Youssef cannot at first recognize loved ones: his aged mother (whose face he does eventually identify) and his wife (he hesitates—is she the lovely young woman carrying a camera?).

After this point, the film loses some of the clarity it had maintained in the pre-surgery and immediate post-surgery sequences. When Youssef realizes that his devoted wife Roya (Roya Tamourian) is actually a middle-aged bespectacled woman, he finds himself unable to accept her and engages in increasingly self-destructive acts which end up alienating his friends and family. Near the end of the film, this formerly patient man even throws himself (literally) into a gutter.

Rather than such operatic surges of emotion, the small moments in The Willow Tree are often more resonant. One such moment is a light conversation between the sighted Youssef and his little daughter Mariam (Melika Eslafi) when she helps her father learn the names of colors. How true! A person blind since early childhood would have trouble differentiating colors like purple from black. Another is a short sequence that might almost be an homage to Bresson. The newly sighted Youssef sees a young pickpocket at work in a crowded bus. What should he do? In these wordless moments, the director reminds us that sight involves different ethical dimensions than those available to the blind.

In early scenes in the film, we are reminded how hearing, feeling, and taste take over what the eyes cannot convey. At this point, Youssef is in the tradi-
tion of a blind storyteller, like Homer, or a painting like Picasso’s *The Blind Man’s Meal*, with its poignant portrayal, in shades of deep blue, of how a blind man uses the sense of touch to orient himself during his meal.1

In the cinema, blindness is a familiar trope but few films tackle the difficult topic of the recovery of sight. Of course, Chaplin’s *City Lights* comes to mind. Seemingly miraculous cures of blindness can be presented in other ways as well, For example, in Paradjanov’s *Ashik Kerib*, the minstrel’s grieving mother’s blindness is cured when dust from the hoof of the saint’s white horse is placed in her eyes. Her blindness (which began when her son went into exile) could be explained away as a form of hysteria, but neither sacred dust nor surgery is a sure indication of a successful transition to the sighted world. In an equally evocative scene in *Ashik Kerib*, the minstrel is called to perform at a Wedding of the Blind where the bride, groom, and guests (all blind) offer the minstrel handfuls of pomegranates and follow him briefly along his journey.

The minstrel is only one of a variety of roles the cinema has provided for the blind, including blind puppeteers (*Life on a String*), blind warriors (*Zatoichi, House of the Flying Daggers* [though here the blindness is a ruse]), the gradual loss of sight (*Dancer in the Dark*), a blind military man (*Profumo di donna/Scent of a Woman*), and blind children (*Silence*). Before making *The Willow Tree*, Majidi had already directed a sensitive portrayal of a blind child in *The Colour of Paradise* (*Rang-e Khoda*, 1999), and in his 1997 film *Children of Heaven* (*Bacheha-ye asemar*), Majidi painted a subtle portrait of childhood’s vulnerabilities and resilience.

Blindness can enter a person’s life through so many doors—birth, war wounds, accidents, degeneration with age, disease (to name a few). We tend to take any of our physical or mental abilities for granted when they are functioning properly. It takes an empathetic leap to imagine what it might be like to maneuver the world as a completely blind person. For an image of blindness and the restoration of sight to be deeply meaningful, it must catch us by surprise, beyond the cliché. Those of us with vision problems, or who have at least visited one of those new trendy “restaurants in the dark,” have a sense of what blindness might entail: yet it is only an approximation. Filmmakers who attempt to show us the world of the blind do well to keep this in mind. Although *The Willow Tree* falls into melodramatic excess at moments, it also offers us extremely perceptive insights into the challenges of sudden life changes and second chances.

Endnotes
1. *The Blind Man’s Meal* (1903, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Linda C. Ehrlich

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Lyle Pearson

*Amu* (a name, Hindi-English, 2005. 102min, directed by Shonali Bose).

Adopted as a young child, and raised in the United States, UCLA graduate Kaju (Konkana Sensharma) returns to Delhi, amused by life there and then shocked to learn of a 1984 genocide that she vaguely recalls from age three. While the rest of her adoptive family parties, singing “O Gonga Tumi” (Ol’ Man River in Hindi, the river now being the Ganga, and the film’s score attributed to Bhupen Hazarika), Kaju searches for and then confronts the killer who may be her father. She is deflected from her search by her adoptive mother (Brinda Karat, a political activist and retired actress) who, as the rain pours over the windscreen of their Ambassador automobile, finally tells Kaju the truth of her own childhood as *Amu*.

It would be inconsiderate to reveal the specific upheaval to which Ms. Bose refers, but any student of recent Indian history will almost certainly anticipate it. This is a film for students who would like to learn about what Salman Rushdie refers to as India’s sporadic blood sacrifices.

Despite a few confusing flashbacks and red herrings, *Amu* achieves much humor and Hitchcock-like suspense. Many films directed in India by expatriates are touristy, their style remaining aloof from the environment that their subject demands. The photography here, by Lourdes Abrose, an Indian like Shonali living in LA, gradually deepens this “foreign” alienation into an accusation of political malfeasance. *The New York Times* (5/25/07) states that Bose is too inexperienced a director to include successfully all the issues that interest her. Yet the differences she notes are often amusing: slum children dance to filmic music until the power fails, but when we enter an upper-class home, we hear Mozart, and there are no power outages.

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