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film 1070

20/10/October

Historical events and Culture in film

I will be addressing the question How does American Cinema connect us to our own "American Experience?". film connects us to our culture by manipulating our emotions through our self perspective. essentially it is we identify with films on a deep mental level with what we view and film uses that to connect us to our culture. i hope to achieve this through the use of external sources some on film, culture and the human brain. and it is my goal to show the more scientific process connecting culture through film.

the brain is a very powerful organ to the human body. many argue that it is where the sense of self lies, and to many people this may sound very silly since it is very difficult to quantify exactly where consciousness is or what it is really. so lets start at the beginning of the so to speak of the brain functions. brains take in informations, they gather information from our many other organs and translate into our own personal perspective of the world around us. Our brains process thoughts and release chemicals to produce what we feel as emotions and use that to determine our perspective of the world.

So if you are robbed or attacked you may begin to view the world as a dangerous place, and that is your brain learning by taking in informations and committing the

important information to memory to build a neurological map that makes up your personality. This is advantageous to survival. having a personality based on experience is a survival technique heavily utilized by humans to ensure adaptability. So when you get scared at a scary movie or excited during an action scene really you are experiencing a survival reaction.

It is with this reaction that filmmakers are really manipulating. In essence directors are conductors of chemical and neurological responses. and all to get you to manipulate you the directions they want you to go emotionally speaking. because when you have someone's emotions it can be almost said you almost have them physically. you manipulate their chemical responses, making them act and behave in a different way. The brain releases these chemicals again as a survival technique to alert us to danger and release dopamine when we find food.

Using these techniques we build a perspective of what is happening around us and what environment we are in, what dangers are present and a multitude more conditions to build the perspective. so when our emotions change so does our perspective. when film shows a woman being attacked, to our brains all they see is the woman being attacked and even if you know it is just a movie we still have similar responses chemically which translate over into emotional responses.

So if you want an audience to be afraid of lions, then you show people being killed by lions. The brain sees that and remembers the emotions you experienced while watching a lion killing a person. So now our perspective of lions has changed forever,

we now know that lions are dangerous. Your very first reaction to seeing a lion will most likely mirror my own that is to simply run.

but then lets say you were shown a movie of a man running from a lion but suddenly he and his family got angry and chased the lion away. Your brain will remember that as well. it will remember that the man together with his family chased the lion away and they do not have to fear lions as much anymore. that is the beginning of culture forming among a group of individuals. Culture is the shared perspective across a group of individuals. being a part of a culture gives our brains chemical responses as well as group are advantageous for survival.

all the brain has to go on is just sensory input and the chemicals present of the time the sensory input. so it becomes a lot easier to see how film is really just a modern form of manipulation of our primal instincts. altho applied to a more modern setting they are none the less primal and most of the time without reason. Manipulation of film applied to a social setting can be a very good thing. It can portray emotions without actually requiring the subject to be placed in the situation. This can be used to bring issues to light that need to be addressed to more and more people, And not just giving them examples but transferring emotions so the audience to identify with the characters.

By showing certain shots and angles film can also manipulate the brain into thinking for just a second that it is currently placed into that situation. For example the peeping tom angle is used very commonly in film. the peeping tom shows usually a women in an activity that they normally would not liked to be normally view in, and it is all shot through the eyes of the person. so first in the scene they show the character are

person doing the watching actually watching and the setting. Next they show the subjective view of the character. By doing this, your brain sees the character next it sees the scene.

The scene that is being viewed is generally one which gives the audience emotions. As the audience feels the emotions they begin to identify with the character because they are for a split second that same person in that same event. This can be used to make the audience feel exposed all the way to powerful. Think of revenge of the nerds, when the nerds place cameras in the girls changing rooms the characters begin to feel more empowered and the audience as well begins to see the nerds as a more powerful character, and that scene is really the tipping point for the story as they begin to become more and more confident, and as the audience you begin to see them as more confident. By showing these nerds viewing naked women without their knowledge, they traditionally to american culture are “becoming a man” and it pushes the belief that women are objects for men’s desires only, And that all men acting sleazy and generally just shitty, is a normal and accepted thing as well as a load of bollocks that women should feel flattered by men going to great lengths just to invade their privacy and view them naked.

Scenes like this are being used all the time to get audiences to accept certain ideals of the apparent dominant culture, and unfortunately thanks to they the way our brains work, they work with resounded success. As advanced as our brains are they really are just primitive reasoning organs and thus response to cases like this as such.

Which of course makes what we are shown and experience just that much more important in determining our own fears.

cultural fears are always expressed in horror films for example, there are certain academic writers (Hughes) who believe George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* was about the frustration of African Americans not being viewed as equals or even really people. Even today there are some who believe that the current zombie culture is rooted in the fear of our dwindling resources, and if you look back at around 2012 which was considered the apex of the new age undead trend, at around that time scientists from around the world began to stress the importance of conserving resources on a much grander scale than anytime before and around that time Americans in particular began to worry about zombies.

Zombies and the survival drama in particular, revolve around the idea that the who ever survives the initial shock of the stressor must then fight quite literally for survival and resources. Resources is the word I want to stress because my particular school of thought on the matter is that the real stress society was enacting was actually about the limited resources we were facing and next to no real worry about the literal rising of the dead. So really society had a shared fear, and that fear was expressed through the popular media of the time, which is still film.

It can almost be said that the entire zombie trend was a sub-culture of the American culture. People began to discuss zombie plans openly and frequently. Zombies began to appear on every major network and hit shows were created in the wake of the zombie craze. I believe that, although brief it was strong enough to make a

lasting impression on the american culture and film was a major if not the single driving factor in the wide acceptance of the new culture of the current attitude toward our finite resources. Film was not the first medium to work with the zombie craze but it was the one that was absorbed by the most people.

Film has a direct link to our senses and therefore our emotions, in a way that no other media so far can match. As audiences all over america watch main characters battle hordes of the undead and struggle with their own family's possibly turning into one, they instantly relate to their own life and at the very least subconsciously begin to doubt if the amount of resources we are enough. And thus another facet of our culture is born, one bred from conservation and thanks to film no matter what your personal opinion is, it a on going discussion into what to when we run out, whether or not you want to discuss it you will be exposed to both sides of the discussion. And when we have officially decided what to do about it, be it nothing, or extreme action, thanks to zombies in film, will have changed our culture in some way forever.

another great example of american cinema that connects us to our culture is the great star wars legacy. It is a movie series that has defined generation after generation, directed by george lucas who was apart of a new generation of directors that spent most of their lives studying film and even graduated from a film school, so he was versed in the various styles of filmmaking. The greatest movie he directed was arguably star wars. star wars is classic in all respects but it does reflect the dominant hegemony at the time, which during 1969 was white anglo saxon, protestant.

To summarize the story of the movie really briefly, the main character Luke Skywalker, discovers a princess across the galaxy has been captured by the empire, and he sets out with a holy man that is apart of a ancient religion called jedi. during the journey he converts to jedi and begins to train in their ancient fighting tradition with a light saber. He sneaks aboard the space station she was being held at and rescues her. On the way out his mentor who has been training him, is killed. The story continues to as he of course destroys the main military base with the help of the force and severely cripples the empire.

The story supports the dominant hegemony with the main character, Luke skywalker. Luke is white and male. He runs off and saves a princess. Just that part of the story reinforces the ideal at the time that men were superior to women, and that they need a man to come and save them. It is the classic damsel in distress story. The princesses name is leia Organa, she is the daughter of a prominent galactic senator and the leader of the resistance to the empire. So obviously she was a very strong woman, and if she is capable of leading a entire rebellion i would think she would not need to be saved. The story continually pushes that she needs to be saved and consistently introduces male characters to save her, although if you do add it all up she is a strong women and should not need to be saved as consistently as the movie shows.

Another character that shows up in the movie is lando calrissian. Lando run a mining operation that the main characters run to hide from the empire who was hot on their trail. The actor who plays Lando is an african american, and Lando's character in the film sells out his friends to the empire and up front those two things do not seems to

be related, but when you dissect the time it came from which is 1968, many different minorities were still trying to fight for complete social justice even tho many laws had been abolished, it still was not well accepted completely socially.

if we begin to really break down some popular zombie movies, even from other countries like Great Britain. as you are probably know Great Britian was center stage in the infamous black plague which killed hundreds of thousands of people in europe quick literally one of the most remembered human disasters in recorded history, and because of the differences if our cultures, zombie culture takes on a different flavor if you will then the american counter part. In fact the rebirth of zombie movies arguably happened in Great Britian. they first appeared in american cinema in the early 1960's .

In an essay written by Jacob Hughes which discuss monsters appearing in popular culture and how they can be used as a good learning technique for students, he discusses briefly discusses the idea that early zombie movies had a civil rights theme to them. According to the article night of the living dead by george romero featured a African American Leading character that through out the whole film was continually mistaken for a zombie and was the only rational thinking character throughout the whole movie. so according to the essay those two themes of the movie demonstrated frustration to the current social status of African Americans of the time.

Into the 80's the zombie movie started to lose popularity as sci-fi began to take more of a center stage role in cinema and began to communicate with audiences with a shared fear and simultaneous love affair of technology. As social movements began to negotiate with the dominant hegemony and the rapid growth in medical technology

began the frustration was pushed aside of center stage to sci-fi films. zombie films for the most part became dormant from mass popular culture, although it was obviously still around and movie were still made featuring them, our culture as a whole was not as interested as before.

Zombie movie since then became B-rate horror film with cheap jump thrills or made by independent studios that did not reach the same audience. Fast forward to 2009 with a show called “the Walking Dead” featured on AMC. AMC’s new hit show was a different take to zombies in american television. As zombie movies of the past generally were only jump scares “the Walking Dead” was focused on the dramatic aspect of survival and not just on being scared. If you look at current events of the time, the housing market just crashed, many american companies were filing for bankruptcy and closing down or asking the federal government to bail them out, and global warming was becoming a real concern. “The Walking Dead” took off during this time period.

The show spoke to america's fears of the future. As the world began to run out of resources and we ran out of time to change or help it, Americans began to worry. Since the show was about survival in a dead and twisted world, americans could not help but become addicted to the show as the social fear of a depleting world rose. In this example cinema was used to communicate and dramatize a growing social fear to the mass audiences, one that our culture related too. Film can also communicate fears to other people. In the case of “The Walking Dead” it can be used to show the dangers of running out of resources, even tho zombies would never happen, the growing concern of global warming and its effect on our crops is an ongoing debate and this show

demonstrated what would happen when resources become harder to get ahold of, and regardless of what side of the debate you are on the show's commentary resources turns it into a public conversation.

In England the zombie movies take a different background tone to the American counterparts, mainly in the emphasis in the disease aspect of the story, whereas American stories deal with the drama of survival British zombie films deal with how easily and quickly it can spread under the radar until it is too late to react too. A common theme throughout the films are that the infected humans possess superhuman abilities where conversely in American films the infected humans are slower and dumber they just possess a dangerous will and outnumber the survivors.

The argument I take up is that this is because of the Black Plague. As it is common knowledge that the Black Plague ravaged through Europe, and because of the sheer amount of deaths that occurred, it became subconsciously engrained in the culture of British. So films and stories begin to see a common theme and that is sicknesses. Of course plague-themed stories are not unheard of in American culture but they are nowhere near as common as our British allies, and that is directly linked to the simple fact that "the Black Death" did not take place in America and even though a great deal of Americans have ancestors from the time period it just simply is not as ingrained in our culture.

So in conclusion, when major events take place it lingers in our culture and films are a way of readdressing the major events that played a major role in shaping our culture. All of the stories and films are just our culture digesting, in a way, what

happened. By constantly reminding us of the major events they keep the ideals going, and the ideals continue to define the culture, and happens across the world because of films amazing ability to directly relate portray emotions and ideals to such a broad audience that it can be said almost controls cultures today.

Works Cited

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