FILM 2332 — Understanding Film, Discussion 10

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Question

Persona's (Bergman, 1966) discussion of sex is very open compared to anything produced in the United States in the years immediately prior to 1966. In the United States, there were clear (albeit hateful) rules governing the type of film which could be released. Similar standards are in place in India, even today. Were other regulations on film in place in Europe (excluding the World Wars), and if so, how did they affect film? What differences did this create between European and American cinema?

Commentary

From the beginning, *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967) pushes the boundaries of the Production Code. Although it helped undo the Code on the basis of violence, it also weakens the Production code in the way of sex. In the first scene, we see Bonnie topless, and throughout the film we see closeness between men and women. Even the premise of the film violates the code's insistence of "the sanctity of marriage in the home". Because both couples were portrayed as being immoral and died at the end, the code did not have any issues with their relationship. Still, the film did not try to cast their union as bad, only their murder and theft. This "escape clause" to the code is evident to the movie, and ultimately renders the code itself meaningless. Joseph Goebbels, like the Soviet government did later, understood the power of film. *Paris, Texas* (Menard, 2003) describes how he considered them "weapons…of mass psychology". His intent in filming was to glorify the german government, but to do so, replicated American film. This is an example of the irony of cultural exchange. The same techniques and stories which display patriotism and promote one country can easily be flipped to promote another. Thus replicating the works of other countries, even those which are in direct opposition is a highly effective method for propaganda. This also reiterates that many of the techniques for telling the similar stories with film are repeated, thus forming genres.