FILM 2332 — Understanding Film, Essay 1 — The Movies

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For most born in the past half century, film has been a constant presence in the home. Widespread access to technology and public broadcasting has allowed the movies to become an intimate part of the experience of growing up. While in each generation, the method of viewing media has changed, the shift has been the most dramatic for those growing up after the introduction of smartphones and laptops. Those growing up after the mid-2000s were able to consume film at any time or place for a large portion of their early lives. The increased access to portable technology allowed film to be viewed more casually and frequently, which in turn influenced how the messages impacted the audience. Namely, for me, having constant access to the movies while growing up allowed me to appreciate a diverse set of films. Having ready access to media through the internet without rental fees or the inconvenience of physical media as was the case for prior generations allowed me to develop a preferred type of narration in each point of my childhood in the movies which I watched.

The way I have consumed film has changed quite a bit over my lifetime, which have lead to changes in my means of interaction with movies and my community. In my early childhood, CDs, television, and theaters were the "typical" ways to watch movies. While the internet existed, it was sparsely populated and difficult to use without knowledge and further studying. I would often sit down on Friday nights and watch a movie with my family. As a result, before I had access to near-infinite television on-demand with my phone, watching a movie meant gathering with my family to watch and enjoy. The film itself, while interesting, was not necessarily the focus of the experience of watching a movie. They were simply a means for me to spend time with my family.

After receiving my phone, I suddenly gained access to a near unlimited stream of information on-demand. Rather than being limited to movies in the context of watching with others, I was able to enjoy movies at any time. Instead of watching movies solely in a community context, I turned to watching movies mostly in isolation. The change in mode allowed me to explore other genres of film and older or more comical movies such as (*Blazing Saddles*) (1974) and explore television such as (*The Twilight Zone*) (1961), which my parents did not enjoy. It helped me develop more of an appreciation of film at large.

The added freedom of watching movies made movies less about community, and more about the messaging within films. It gave me an opportunity to learn from media rather than to enjoy the plots on a surface level. As a child, the strong resolutions within the stories which movies told were a comfort. While exaggerated and unrealistic, they were usually uncomplicated, and gave a straightforward model of virtue to follow. For example, in animated Disney films such as (*Up*) (2013), the main character was rewarded, for letting go and being brave, even in opposition to elders and those in positions of authority. In many films, the difficulties which characters on the screen faced seemed to dwarf my own challenges. Characters who acted according to obvious virtues were often rewarded. The strong resolution of these films made me feel as if acting in accordance with my principles would result in similarly strong conclusions.

As I grew older however, these movies appealed to me less. As my life became more complicated, and as my academic and extracurricular responsibilities increased, my taste in movies changed as well. While the stories which the movies told were clear, the actions of the characters felt increasingly removed from my life, and felt no need to apply the lessons which I learned from movies to my own life. Having clear lessons became stale and uninteresting to watch. The messaging which films gave me became less clear, and helped me appreciate further nuance. Indeed, I became less interested with the resolution from stories and more interested in the interactions between individuals and how they contributed to the overall plot. I began to enjoy romantic comedies, such as (*You've Got Mail*) (1998) which used the character's personalities to highlight the unlikelihood of the scenario. Like the prior movies, they were unrealistic and often predictable, but I began to enjoy the interactions between individuals more. I even began to watch more sitcoms such as ("Seinfeld") (1989), the "show about nothing", which throughout used character's dialogues and the subtleties of everyday life to depict the overall picture of living in New York. Following dialogue became the better part of

film appreciation, and I became interested in how the interactions between characters contributed to the plot.

Most recently, I have begun to watch movies as a community event again. My limited time as a result of school work and other extracurricular commitments has made me curate the films which I most want to watch. It has forced me to choose a set of movies across genres. Most recently, I have tried to focus on the narration of films and how the characters are developed across the film. The characterization of the film has become the most important, and so movies like (*My Dinner with Andre*) (1981) and (*Twelve Angry Men*) (1957) focusing entirely on making the characters storied despite limited limited time on the screen have become most interesting to me. Even movies such as the (*The Peanuts Movie*) (2015) movies which, while having a plot but focusing on the interactions between characters have become more commonplace in my film viewings.

As I grew older, my relationship with "the movies" grew and changed over time. As I grew up, the interactions between individuals became more and more important to me. Ultimately, I always appreciated the strong resolutions afforded by mainstream films, as they gave me comfort as the viewer. Over time, the different films which I have enjoyed has reflected on the setting in which I have watched and my own life circumstances. This change was facilitated by my constant exposure to media, and having ready access to smartphones and the internet.

Bibliography

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