

ENG-210 01

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Theme Analysis

Films are one of the most common forms of media and is commonly used as form of entertainment. As many casual film audiences may only follow trends and latest releases, they may not be aware of older or lessor known films or their place in cinematic history. If given the opportunity, film viewers may be able be able to learn valuable information about the evolution of cinematography, how the media and our use of it has changed and yet how some common elements of storytelling seem to transcend any medium as they evoke our thoughts and emotions.

Our world is based on current social-economic and historical realities that have played into all parts of storytelling. Before the current stream of technology, stories were told orally. Often the same stories were told over and over again until they were perfected word for word, later stories could be written and preserved (sometimes,) over time. Just as the majority of the early written works were eroded and lost to time as nothing more than worthless scratches having not earned the effort of preservation, so to have the early film works been lost. In the early era of any technology the populace may not see such efforts as any more than expositions, demonstrations, or mere proof of concept tests. Early works in any medium claim all of the limitations and very little of the viewership of modern audiences, as judged by todays standard that may appear to be poorly done, extreme low budget, or even caricatures.

One film that may come to mind is the *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, an early film in German Expressionism- a style that prioritizes the essences of storytelling over the early limitations of the media, and in doing such has alienated, perhaps a vast majority of current

movie aficionados. However, care should also be taken when evaluating older films as to not imply too much as with the limited sample base there may be some effects of a survivor bias.

In several scenes of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, many might say “there is a lot going on”. Towards the end of the movie our main character appears inside of insane asylum apparently as it’s leader which leads the audience to assume the doctor has perhaps been using his patients as sideshow tricks. However in later scenes the character himself is placed into a straight-jacket and secured to bed in a small room (Adkinson.)

As early films lacked the benefit of an audio reel, it was impossible to “tell” a story. Not to mention some of the other early limitations of film: low frame rates, low resolution, grainy film, and lack of color. Combined, these limitations may cause older films to be perceived as “bad”, however I believe that no films are bad- just more or less interesting (and all can be learned from.) Also, in this case we have the effects of a war starved population becoming seen through their work.

Unknown to modern audiences, the circumstance then at hand were very limiting, and one should truly try to recreate the film within their own mind, so that they can see it in the same vivid detail as the director imagined in. Though an example of early technology, it’s creator was human, just as we are today. How does a person tell a story in silence?

Once the barriers to absorption are broken, and it’s fans will surely attest, the movie tells a detailed (and if not all but elusive,) story of shock and surprise. A story of fear and panic as several ‘townsfolk’, for lack of a better word, are murdered. At the same time a local doctor is parading a sleeping beast. Unsure of who or what to trust, the authorities are called to investigate, and the story proceeds down a standard path of life. However, “real life” stories seldom attack an audience in any age and in early Germany, this director had a story with a twist. (Adkinson.) In this way, the reality of the film is Adkinson and the thoughts he invoked.

As many viewers, even upon a fine reading of this document, are not likely to venture into a silent film (and also not likely be able glean it’s story without further study or discussion with contemporaneous viewers,) to see full elements of story telling on display in even such an

early specimen, perhaps a better example would be a more 'modern' film, such as *A Hard Day's Night*, featuring the Beatles. Although, by modern a reader should know the film is still over fifty years old, however, it does have sound. Lots of sound.

What started with pianos and pipe organs evolved into reels to be played with a film. With the advancements audio technology, such as stereo sound, Dolby, etc. the media began to attract newer and younger audiences- not only for the impressive demonstration of the technology, rather for the "stars" appearing in it- no longer characters now, as they were playing themselves (or were they.)

A very different story is told in this film. If a person were to watch this movie in silence and distill the film down to a written story, a person might not be impressed with the remaining work- it might not be enough to fill a one thousand word paper. Cinematographically, the display of technology and innovation were amazing and the film is worth of it's place in history for that. However, the truest story perhaps being told in the film, another evolution of the worlds social-economic reality: self-promotion. The Beatles sold records, tickets, and movies too. In this way, this film tells another very familiar human story and it did so in spectacular fashion by combining the worlds, arguably, most famous people ever, and some of the newest techniques that were available at the time. For this reason, the film as endured: not for the story it told, but for who and how the story were being told.

As a person exposes themselves to a new media a common temptation may be to look for new stories that we haven't yet seen, however with careful examination we might find these directors were telling very similar human stories that have likely been told over all the ages. Twisting stories of confusion, suspense, and intrigue to captivate and entertain an emaciated people with the barest budget possible. Contrasted with coy tongue-in-cheek stories filled with (perhaps,) false humility while laughing themselves all the way to the bank. Technologies and techniques will change, however, the stories will stay human (for now.)

Works Cited

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