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RES 60203DESIGN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Title : What are the components used to design a movie that reflects on a social issue of the 21st century

Due Date : 18-06-2015

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Course : RES60203100941-M Design Research Methodology

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1.0 Introduction:

In paris 1895, the lumiere brother showed their first film, one of their subjects was a railway engine drawing slowly into a station, it was photographed in such a way that it looks as if it was moving towards the cinema screen, at that scene some of the audience ran out of the theatre because they believed the engine might come out of the screen and hit them. “Hollywood had and still has the power to cloud people's minds on one hand and open and excite them on the other hand”

(Hilliard, 2009, p.10)

This is just one of the few examples that shows us the real power that lies behind motion picture. The powerful impact and the anticipation that the movies bring to the audience are a great evidence that a film could have enough power to move the audience mentally and emotionally. Films has been an excellent way to teach about social issues, since the beginning of the 20th century. Thus in this literature review we will dive and look at what are social issue films, what makes them different from documentaries, and how to write/direct such films. We will also review two powerful social issues film and discuss some theories related to them. Lastly, this review will discuss the “Stardom power” which takes a deeper look on how big accomplished stars such as “Tom Hanks” contribute to the success and the popularity of a movie.

2.0 Social issue films:

Social issues movies are usually centered around people who take a stand , often against a great odd. These types of movies can essentially make a difference in someone’s life, and could change the world (Beker, 2012, p.1)

According to (Espejo, 2009, p.39) “The movie industry influences the perceptions of billions of people around the world. Movies are becoming more accessible to a wider audience through the advancement of technology and globalization, the top 200 movies in cinematic history have grossed excess of 70\$ billion US dollars in box office.”

There is a convincing evidence that the entertainment media influences behavior, a survey of American teenagers who engaged in risky behaviors such as drug abuse and alcohol abuse had revealed that they spent more time watching television than their peers. We can see that this survey implied the negative impacts of films on the youth. However in Hilliard (2009) opinion “Hollywood has shown two face in its production, sometimes changing the society for the better

and sometimes ignoring the content related to the real world, Hollywood has the opportunity to change the world we live in for the better, but has chosen to do so only rarely”.

Below is a filmography of few social issues films as presented by (Russel III, 2009)

Issue	Movie Title	Director	Year of Production
Abortion	A private matter	John Nicklin Silver	1992
	Lake of fire	Tony Kaye	2006
Addiction	Lucky girl	John Fawcett	2001
	Candy	Neil Armfield	2006
AIDS	Philadelphia	Jonathan Demme	1993
	An early frost	John Erman	1985
Animal rights	Earthlings	Shaun Monson	2005
	Fast food nations	Richard Linklater	2006
Child abuse	An American crime	Tommy O’Haver	2007
	Sleepers	Barry Levinson	1996
Drugs	Blow	Ted Demme	2001
	Traffic	Steven Soderbergh	2001
Racism	Glory	Edward Zwick	1989
	Mississippi burning	Alan Parker	1988

Women Right	Iron jawed angels	Katja von Garnier	2004
	Gracie	Davis Guggenheim	2007

In this literature review the researcher will look at reviews of :

- The Whistleblower (2010)
- 12 years a slave (2013)

2.1 Movies VS Documentaries

Many anecdotal evidences suggest that there are many social issues that are very well presented in documentaries, however there is a distinct difference between documentary films and feature films. Most documentaries tend to be more realistic because they go beyond entertainment alone covering real life issues without heavy emphasis on drama. However for young generations who look for the “entertainment” element they might find these documentaries to be boring and dull. “Entertainment combined with message is paramount entertainment doesn’t always have to be comedy, the beauty behind social issue films is that they are based on humanistic concerns therefore the involve the audience emotionally” (Beker, 2012, p12). Therefore in the researcher’s point of you, in order to ensure that the filmmaker reaches a wide range audiences, making a film based on the social issue might be a better idea than producing a documentary.

3.0 Writing a social issue film

In a study conducted by (Beker, 2012, p.12) she mentioned inspiration and character to be important element when writing a social issue film. Character being incredibly important because they “take the issues to the audience”, she believes that characters must be strong yet vulnerable. Inspiration being that the writer understands the nature of the issue to help the audience relate to issue because “audience can sense when writers are faking it”, therefore a writer must realize the “power that lies behind their words” then they must know how to “Plan the attack”, as in structuring the story in a way that will be adherent and related to the issue, without a good story structure the story will fail to communicate the issue itself, a writer should also ask themselves if the story is going to be based on a real life story, or is it purely from their own imagination that has been influenced by surrounding factors. Next the writer must do a brief research on the topic, but must not delay the story for research purposes, as a writer could

start with a minimal research and improve the research behind the story along the way. The final step is to get it made, now this could potentially be the hardest step as social issues screenplays tend to have a little edge because of their nature, but writers should take advantage of the edge and look at previously made social issue film, to understand the way they can promote their ideas.

The study also discussed about the *Propaganda* element in making films with such nature, as propaganda is usually associated with controversially themed films. Also according to the study, even though the propaganda in films is usually has a negative stigma, it can also be used for the good to subtly influence people to do the right thing. Therefore the writer of any social issue film must have a good understanding of why he or she write the story, as “the story is only a chiffon scarf over the rippling bosom of its message”. The reviews below will discuss further and take a look at how social issue films are structured and the meanings behind them.

4.0 Review of some social issue films

In order to have a better understanding of the filmmaking process the researcher has decided to take a look at what has already been made, the following reviews are reviewed by academic journals, they take a deeper look and have a bigger scope behind the message of what each film tried to convey, they have also made some changes in the world after they have been released and brought light and awareness to issues that people might have been oblivious towards.

4.1 The Whistleblower (2010)

The whistleblower as discussed by the International Journal Of Multidisciplinary Approach & Studies, 2014, p. 233-244)

The whistleblower is a movie about an American in Bosnia who discovers a network of underbelly U.S military personnel and un officers that are participating in the human trafficking of eastern European girls.

The film is based on the true story of Kathryn Bolkovac and was released in 2010. The film raised issues about human trafficking, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and children.



2010-IMDb

Figure 1. The WhistleBlower Movie Poster,

This journal has highlighted the eight disciplinary perspectives to interpret The Whistleblower. Among these perspectives are “feminist perspective, psychoanalytic perspective, literary criticism perspective, aesthetic perspective, sociological perspective, ethical perspective and Marxist perspective”.

For the sake of research , the researcher was interested to view three different interpretation perspectives of The Whistleblower

The Whistleblower through semiotic interpretation:

Semiotic explains how the meaning of the issue is discussed through the film, thus it focuses on the facial expressions, music and lighting used to express the characters in the movies. As discussed earlier, characters study is an important element in making such films, thus The Whistleblower has successfully made good use of semiotic, in scenes such as the expression of the beaten tortured victims, symbols such as bloodstains in the bar, and marks on the body of the tortured Muslim woman and finally the chains in the rooms, to show the audience the violations of human right that has been condemned in the arena, all these were hidden meaning that helps us connect with these victims on a whole different personal level.



Figure 2. The WhistleBlower torture scene, 2015- Youtube

Youtube



Figure 3. The WhistleBlower- Torture victim, 2015-

Figure 4. The WhistleBlower- Blood stains, 2015-
Youtube

The Whistleblower through feminist interpretation

This is another part of the film that highlights a bigger issue in society. The film portrays how women are sold for sex and for the satisfaction of men who will rape them and abuse them, yet the women are promised to be released but that promise is never fulfilled. This is inspired by real life event whereby in society many people blame the women, because they believe that women (especially poor, divorced or single) to be desperate and to look for sex consciously and unconsciously and thus getting raped and abused. The film states clearly that these woman are not going for prostitution to “Have fun” or to “look for sex”. They are threatened, abused, and finally blackmailed to doing so and thus forced to be a part of the human trafficking network. The film sends a very effective message because we can see these woman pleading for help, but often are helpless. They are all around us, yet we barely notice them. It makes us more aware of the dangers of society around us.

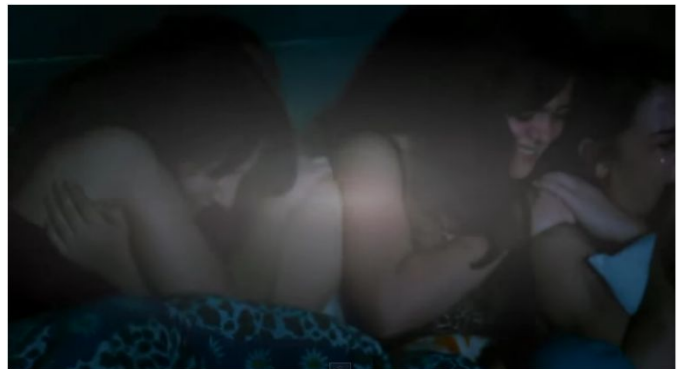
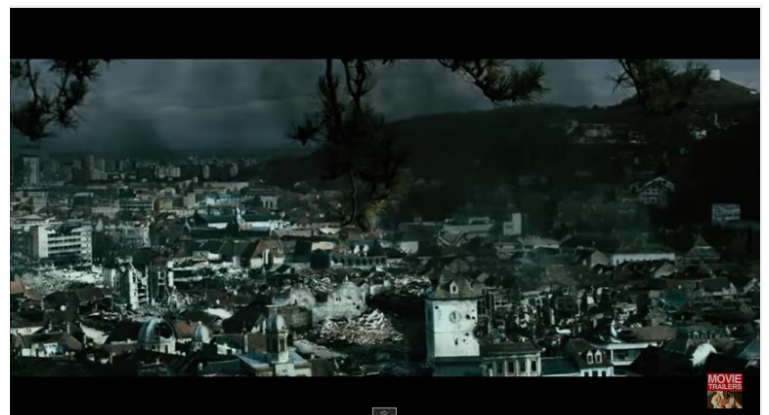


Figure 5. The Whistleblower tortured women, 2015-

Youtube

The Whistleblower through Aesthetic interpretation

Aesthetic interpretation often include the use of the technical side (sound effects, lightening, scene selection, locations, etc) and the performance side, the power of the actors and the actresses to bring the characters to life. In the whistleblower these two side were merged beautifully and used creativity to portray a rather realistic and



influential picture to the audience. The indoor and the outdoor location made a very good realistic visual appeal.(figure 6, 7, 7.5)

Youtube

Figure 6. The Whistleblower- Location, 2011-



Figure 7. The Whistleblower- Lighting and cinematography, 2011- Youtube



Figure 7.5. The Whistleblower- Character emotions,

Youtube

Following the screening of The whistleblower, The United Nations or as abbreviated as “UN” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon opened a panel discussion on human trafficking and sexual exploitation, where Ban Ki-moon stated “The bottom line is that we have made much progress since the dark period portrayed in this film. We also know that we still have much to do. This film reminds us how important one person’s voice can be. It underscores how important it is to speak out against abuse or injustice.” (UN, 2011)

The filmmaker and UN officials addressed the issues that were discussed in the movie. According to UN (2011) The discussion was attended by lieutenant General Babacar Gaye, a UN Military Adviser and many other high-level UN officials to gather their efforts to stop human trafficking and save human rights from being violated.

From this interruption we can see the power that lies behind “The whistleblower” and how it depict human trafficking as an issue, and explain it to the audience, that it drove the UN themselves to start a panel against this issue, and for Ban Ki-moon to declare absolutely no tolerance for sexual abuse. Ban Ki-moon finally stated that “Sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeeping personnel, anywhere, anytime, is heinous and unacceptable. It is a grave

breach of the trust bestowed in the United Nations – by those who look to the United Nations for protection and expect of the United Nations the highest possible standard of ethics.” (UN, 2011)

12 years a slave

As reviewed by Doherty (2014) in Journal of American History. Jun2014, Vol. 101 Issue 1, p357-360. 4p.

12 years a slave is directed by Steve McQueen and adapted of the 1853 “Twelve years a slave by Solomon Northup”.

This movie discuss issues of slavery, racism and betrayal. The film is about a free black man from upstate New York, who gets abducted and sold to slavery (IMDB, 2013).

The audience reacted to this movie differently, as the movie contains a lot of violence and inhumane actions committed towards the slaves (figure 9) “Often during the film, spectators gasped with shock and expressed horror at the film’s portrayal of that “peculiar institution” of slavery” doherty stated. Therefor it shows us the powerful impact McQueen drew in his film.

According to Doherty (2014) strong character study can be found when reviewing this film as McQueen managed to portray Solomon Northup without being scared to show the realistic aspects of brutality against slaves (figure 11). If one compares the melodrama to slave narration one can see a clear link, however there are many changes implied when making the film in order



Figure 8. 12 years a slave- Movie Poster, 2013-IMDb



of the flow and the continuity in the structure. All the scenes that were omitted from the book when making the film where

Chamberlain

replaced with a successful use of cinematography and sound this helped communicate Northup's experiences and show the horror of slavery.

Figure 9. 12 years a slave- slave being whipped, 2015-



Figure 10. 12 years a slave- whipping wounds, 2015- DUTTA



Figure 11. 12 years a slave- Cruelty , 2014- Bohr

The researcher believes that adaptations can be very successful if they are well portrayed as they add a realistic tone and feel to the film, and also cover aspects that a book might fail to cover such as sounds strong visuals. Although the human imagination can expand to imagine the horror of slavery (figure 11), when McQueen crafted the film. he made sure that these visuals will not be unforgettable, and strong enough to leave a powerful impact on the audience.

12 years a slave has won the academy award for best motion picture of 2013. (IMDb, 2013)

According to the journal article, The success of the movie could be contributed to the fact that McQueen managed to make use of the source story in a way that is adaptable to the screen, as he didn't mainly focus on the historical and biographical side of the story, rather he focused on the emotions and the suffering that Northup witnessed, using great filmmaking techniques to portray all these emotions.

5.0 Directing a social issue film

In this section the researcher will look at Roman Polanski directing skills to understand more about the directing aspect of social issue films. The vital aspects ought to be further elaborated in the following strategies.

5.1 The Micro/macro strategies

To make the audience identify with the main character the micro strategies must be character focused (Dancyger , 2006, p.225). The macro strategy victimizes the main character by using plot and antagonist, this strategy is used by Roman Polanski, in his work the audience always find themselves wondering if the “Character is able to continue to exist” as they are often abandoned and alone.

Polanski has made many successful film including “The pianist” refer to figure 12 (2002) and “Chinatown” (1974). Polanski has a unique obsession with loneliness which makes him capable into taking the audience in the lonely space and getting inside the victimization of the characters. “None of us like to be victimized and we hope that the main character can avoid victimization”.

When directing the camera Polanski ideas and emotions of loneliness is in the heart of his camera placement and shot selection. Dancyger states that “Camera placement tell us whether or not we, as the audience , should identify with the character”. Polanski uses wide camera angles to showcases the aloneness of his characters.

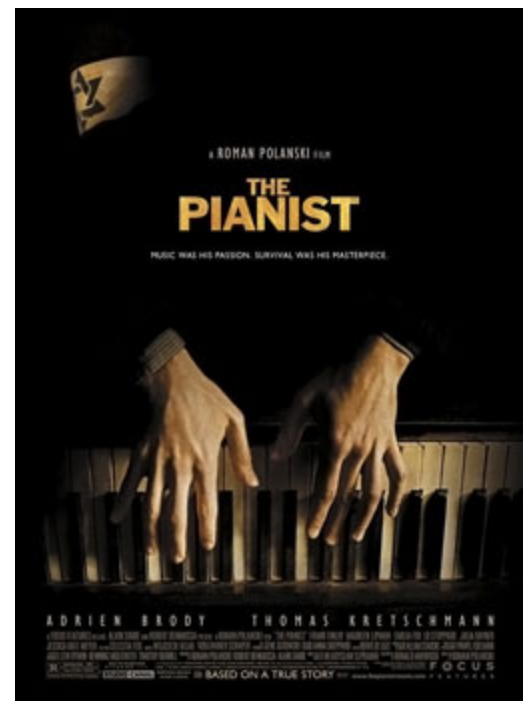


Figure 12. The Pianist- Movie Poster, 2002-IMDb

In most of Polanski films, he focus majorly on the dignity and the psyche of the characters he chooses to portray as they are often wounded, and vulnerable individuals who are victims of an unfortunate consequence.

Polanski style of filmmaking is very inspiring, it is very well made in a way that grips the audience and alert them to the message behind the movie.

From this study the researcher can conclude the importance of camera angles and cinematography. Sometimes context is not enough, therefore a good director like Polanski focuses greatly on the camera's placement to convey his idea, because "the audience feel privileged when the characters reveal themselves to them" .

Polanski focus on the audience shows the researcher how important it is to keep the audience engaged and leave them a puzzle to solve throughout the movie rather than feeding them the answer.

6.0 The power of stars

The researcher has observed an intriguing relationship between the main cast of the film and the amount of success and popularity of the film. The researcher was inspired to take a deeper look at this relationship to understand the power of fame/stardom.

It can be said that, the stars of a film could contribute massively to the success of the film, “Stars can save a studio because they sell films”. They are what often inspire us to change and somehow become our role model even though we know on the inside that they are merely humans speaking the words from the mastermind of a screenwriter. “The stars provide the studios with a tangible attraction, and image that can be advertised and marketed” according to (Belton, 2009, p.89).

Tom Hanks is an example of star power who has influenced generations of audience, as he was rated as of (2003) number 13 for premiere magazine's “100 most powerful people in movies”.

Hanks movies make a great amount of money as he has appeared in seven consecutive blockbusters and earned over \$100 dollar on each. (Belton, 2009)

However his biggest influence is not the amount of money he makes, but talent he portrays as an actor. One of Hanks most successful role was being the lead character in “Forrest Gump”, where his character “Forrest” bears major social problems of postwar America such as child abuse, antiwar movement and Vietnam, sex, drugs and AIDS. However his character manage to still stay innocent and achieve his goals no matter how much people looked down on him and disbelieved in him due to his disability. A character like this is very difficult to portray but Hanks managed to pull it off with his body, gestures and physical movement, to paint a genuine picture of the character and make Gump creditable. (Belton, 2009, p.93)

Until our modern day, people still remember “Forrest Gump”. Hanks portrayal was far too effective to be forgotten.

This goes to show the researcher the importance of “Good casting”, without a good cast in the movie, and the presence of chemistry that the audience feel with main character, the story might be less effective and inspirational to the audience, this is not to say that without a “famous” actor the movie will fail, it is rather focusing on the talent and ability of the actor, and the good eye of the casting directing to choose that actor.

7.0 Conclusion

Throughout this literature review the researcher has looked at different books and journals that discuss the various aspects of filmmaking, such as (Writing, directing and acting). The researcher has learnt that these are the most imperative pillars that structure the film itself.

Each book held different aspects and perspectives on moviemaking in the past and modern moviemaking techniques, but throughout reading all these different books the researcher has found one thing in common, all these films mentioned, whether criticized or praised have impacted the cinema and theatre in many different ways, but most importantly have left a big influence on the audience themselves.

This literature review was imperative for the researcher to widen her knowledge and learn from the master of filmmaking, It has inspired the researcher to continue developing her skills in filmmaking and potentially read more about it, because reading gave the researcher a very big scope on issues and techniques.

Lastly, the researcher is grateful to have been provided with resources that has helped her immensely through her literature review journey, and supplied her with solid knowledge that is backed up with strong evidence.

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Images

Figure 1

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Figure 2,3,4,5

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Figure 8

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Figure 9

I'm Probably Wrong. 2015. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://wrongasalways.blogspot.com/>. [Accessed 30 June 2015].

Figure 10

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Figure 11

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Figure 12

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