

City of god: the post-modernistic third cinema essay sample



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Introduction

There is an apparent misconception on how films or cinema function in society. It is a harsh reality to confront that films in recent years are often perceived as a mere entertainment tool. For every picture that appears in the big screen, only the glitter and glamour projected by the celebrities are given with extreme importance. The idea of watching a movie becomes a habit that is solely meant for relieving the stress and pressure brought upon by the workplace, emotional hang-ups or for the very reason of having alone. Despite of the fact that this may not readily project a big dilemma, this is an issue that should be confronted or addressed. Once and for all, this scenario subjects cinemas into derogatory and mediocre positions. There is more to film than what the majority understands it. Films are not just a mere showcase of the actors and actresses' talents and skills. Neither can it be regarded as a simple exposure or parade of stars. Moreover the importance of films cannot be described as a proud display of the latest and modern techniques of creating appealing and provocative special effects. Although it cannot be denied that the latter adds to the intrinsic value of the movie that is catered to the public. Films are never a demonstration of visual imageries and delivery of unforgettable and timeless lines. More than that, the processes involved in cinema creation is a noble act of depicting reality.

Films are precious work of arts that should be valued and given importance. Its artistic integrity and credibility are the same as those of paintings, music making and literature. Films are form of expressions wherein the deepest emotions and feelings are presented. Painters use canvass and paints, writers on the other hand, play with words and singers see music as their “

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expression tools." Film makers, in the meantime exploit the advantages of their cameras. If an artwork is a manifestation of ones creative expression, then it follows that these expressions are also representations of reality. It has been often argued by scholars and respected members of the academe that cinemas offers a glimpse of various societal conditions. It is through these medium that certain aspects of reality are readily articulated and formed.

Depicting reality in films has never been easy. This is most especially true nowadays wherein mass appeal is used as a criterion in examining the film's worth and value. The (intense) aim to gain profit has been the benchmark of the current film industry. This factor has somehow affected the means and ways in which movies show reality. However, the biggest challenge when it comes to reality portrayal is the manner wherein the whole crew combines the both the visual and musical elements to convey the emotions that they want the audience to feel or experience. On a closer examination it can be seen that the themes and concepts presented in films can be also seen on different television programs. Somehow, this aspect eliminates films' reason for existence. Yet there is something about cinema that separates it from ordinary television shows. Films are more focused and the experience that they offer allow the audience is not as ephemeral as the ones shown on the television.

Considering the fact that movies are reality depictions and portrayals, these make the medium as cultural artifacts. Reality cannot be separated from its cultural influences. The two are inseparable. Both are highly interdependent and interrelated to each other. Therefore, perhaps it is safe to say that films

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are reflections of different cultural realities. Films' cultural significance and relevance are even highlighted since it is something that requires performance or reenactment. Real life events are shown and somehow it acts as a reminder of the public's very own experiences. Like other works of art, film elicit a cathartic effect which enable it to connect to its most precious and loyal patrons. Oftentimes, viewers are prone to identifying themselves to the characters shown in movies. They see their lives presented and portrayed on the big screen. Therefore it would not come as a surprise if films have been also regarded as one of the most effective tools in educating the public.

Speaking of educating, through the years, it can be observed that many film makers decided to deviate from the canonical norms and standards that were established by Hollywood. There came to a point of film history wherein directors have taken a stand to stray away from the artificiality that was brought forth by formula films. For such a long period of time, Hollywood has been dominating the whole course of the film industry. It has long organized and set the criteria of how films should be made and delivered to the public. In addition to that, it cannot be denied that many Hollywood films have been so long dependent on the whims and impediments of their respective producers (Giannetti 379). This situation has somehow affected the director and the rest of the staff. Because of such circumstance, the mastery and total control of the cinema's form and content are blatantly compromised (Philip 12). The visions and ideals that serve as frameworks and foundations of film making no longer apply primarily because of conflicting interests (Philip 12).

But more than anything else, Hollywood has readily affected the entire ideological domain of film creation. So far, it has become an articulation of the western experience and those that are located within the periphery are often taken out of the picture. The periphery that is being tackled in here pertains to the social and to a certain extent political situations of many third world countries. Since Hollywood films have penetrated the global (market), the ability of third world films to garner a steady audience or viewer in their very own domain slowly depletes and disappears like the stars in the night. Or if there are instances wherein Hollywood has managed to incorporate themes and ideas from the third world, these are rather way too superficial. These instances paved the way for the birth of the third cinema movement. A movement which never fails to question the conventions of western cinema, to be more specific, Hollywood. The concepts and approaches that are being used in Third Cinema cannot be merely described as an avant-garde style. More than that, it also embodies a sense of post-modernity. But in order to gain a better understanding of Third Cinema and how it intersects with the concepts of post-modernism, the two shall be thoroughly discussed. A feature film is used as an example in order to attain a much better perspective about the movement and its post-modern nature.

Third Cinema in Focus

Lechni and Boli shared that the term “ Third Cinema” was first used or “ coined” by two renowned film makers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino (313). Basically, the guiding light of Third Cinema is to present

themes and images that questions and condone the existence of imperialism and colonialism (Lechni & Bolni 313).

The radical concepts that are embedded in Third Cinema are highly influenced by the triumph and victory of the Cuban Revolution (Xing 80). If one has to take a closer look, the Cuban Revolution saw the downfall of Batista. It was also the time wherein the Marxist ideology was initially incorporated into the government system, not only of Cuba but in the overall Latin America. Therefore, the Marxist ideology that is introduced into the minds of many best explains why Third Cinema stands in direct opposition with both colonialism and imperialism. In addition to that, it is important to note that the Latin America region is beset with extreme poverty.

Opportunities for a better life were scarce and the damages of war and injustice have readily kept Latin America into very uncompromising situations. One should not also disregard the fact that the region perfectly fits under the " Third World Category (Shohat & Stam 28)." This argument is also supported by Mike Wayne who elucidated that the bulk of Third Cinema came from third world nations or countries (1).

But then again, while it is true that majority of Third Cinema films came from the third world, Wayne argued that the movement per se transcends beyond the limitations of geographical borders (1). The truth of the matter is, it is not the geographical representations that define Third Cinema, rather it is more on the socialist perspectives or political orientations that govern its themes and meanings (Wayne 1). This also explains why Third Cinema cannot be readily considered as a film genre (" Third Cinema"). It is more of a space or a political platform wherein the voices of the oppressed and the struggles of

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many are articulated and presented (“Third Cinema”). Yet, more than a political tool. Third Cinema is also critical about films’ focus on providing entertainment alone.

There is a tripartite structure (Harindranath 104) which seems to guide the growth and development of films. This structure also provides some insight regarding Third Cinema’s dominant ideology. The tripartite structure is comprised of the so-called “first, second and third” cinema (Harindranath 104). Basically, this is one of the main arguments that Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino stated in their critical work entitled as *Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of A Cinema of Liberation the Third World* (Stam & Miller 272). According to the two First Cinema is mainly comprised of its dominant-industrial (Xing 80) notions. In this particular case, what happens is that the audience is seen as passive entities. Films are produced not because it is aimed to inculcate or impart something into the viewers’ consciousness. In this kind of set-up, films are seen as commodities that must be readily consumed. Films are mere products that have to be displayed and catered to a (potential) market. What happens in this situation is that it is still the bourgeoisie’s interests that are readily promoted. The value and importance of films are mainly geared towards profiteering and money-making. In addition to that, the scope of reality that is portrayed is based on the experiences of the ruling or dominant class. Therefore, First Cinema does not really reflect the most important issues and concerns that the public as a whole should address are taken out of the picture (Solanas & Gettino cited in Stam & Miller 272).

On the other hand, Second Cinema, based on Solanas and Gettino's arguments pertain to the status of cinema as a work of art (Solanas & Gettino cited in Stam & Miller 272). This is something that can be seen from a positive light since film as an art is given priority. The filmmaker is seen as an artist who has total control of the content and themes and treatment of the story. Take for example, the case of autism which purports that it is the directors that should take much of the credit for the film's creation. Because of their "stylistic treatment (Giannetti 378)," the director is no longer restricted from the commercialistic structures of film making. In addition to that, they are also no longer indebted to the producers' wants. Conflicts of interests are readily avoided. However, Solanas and Gettino's (cited in Stam & Miller 272) contend that this approach is rather too individualistic. Therefore, the notion of having an "alternative" is not really achieved. Second Cinema is individualistic since it is the artists' expression alone that is being offered into the public. The communal aspect of film is debunked.

According to Solanas and Gettino (cited in Stam & Miller 272), a real alternative can be only achieved under two distinct conditions. First cinema must create something that the dominant system cannot easily control or something that is foreign to its needs. Secondly, the film must outwardly expressed its intention to fight or go against the norms that the system established. For Solanas and Gettino (cited in Stam & Miller 273), the two conditions are met by Third Cinema. Third cinema for the two presents more cultural value and significance because it presents different facets of life that are otherwise taken for granted by the artist or totally neglected by formula-

driven films. Third Cinema has a sense of community which is bounded by a set of experiences and ideological stand that serve as catalyst of change.

Understanding Post-Modernism

The post-modern approach is beset with different degrees of controversies. This matter has been an all-time favorite topic of various kinds of debates and intellectual discussions. Since the post-modern approach has readily rejected the conventions of modernism, this kind of framework seem to lag behind in terms of creating a concrete and solid explanation of how post modernism really operates. Thus, it would not come as a surprise if such is deeply characterized by its vague, abstract and to a certain extent vague nature. The matter becomes even more complicated as both theorists and audience alike seem to be confused on how to apply post-modernism's concepts into various kind of art form, which of course include cinema.

Boggs maintained that postmodernism does not really succumb or adhere to the ideological notions of different schools of thought such as " liberalism, nationalism" and even socialism for that matter (xiii). Given this aspect at hand, it seems that the fundamental foundations of postmodernism cannot be readily distinguished. If a particular framework does not have a reliable basis, then such readily debunks its practical applications. Even Frederic Jameson who had successfully analyzed postmodernism's nature elucidated that defining the basic characteristic of the post modern approach is quite difficult and far by too complicated to contextualize (55). Perhaps the reason behind this is that in postmodernism's attempt top deviate from all the schools of thought that have been established before it, the approach is now

showered with complexities on how to differentiate itself from its predecessors and therefore offer new perspectives on how to better understand or comprehend reality. Therefore, in categorizing and examining films, it can be seen that each and every movie that is presented into the public has its very own flavor of the postmodern style and treatment.

But in order to better understand how postmodernism is applied in cinema, Ghosh presents some of the postmodern elements that are commonly utilized in films (" Post-Modernism and Cinema"). First of all, there is the so-called " presentation of the unrepresentable (" Post-Modernism and Cinema")." In short certain themes and events that are not readily reflected in reality are seen in postmodernist films. The so-called unrepresentable themes may range from taboo practices or an overt exaggeration of different kinds of events or scenarios (" Post-Modernism and Cinema"). Another element is the absence of the concepts of time. Post-modernism in film means not submitting to a particular time frame (" Post-Modernism and Cinema"). A particular scene may present different periods of history. Since there is no concept of time, it cannot be denied that nostalgia is very much felt (" Post-Modernism and Cinema"). Films with post-modernist ingredients tend to show events and incidents which allow the audience to reminisce (" Post-Modernism and Cinema"). But then again, whether the film is nostalgic or not, it is the audience who will eventually decide since time no longer applies in the post-modern approaches, therefore, the articulation of this scenario is rather implied than directly stated.

Another post-modern element that is shown films is the use of parody and pastiche (" Post-Modernism and Cinema"). Connor discussed that post-
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modernism cannot really create something that is “ unique and private (48). Artists that are highly influenced by this framework serve as “ bricoleurs” wherein they tend to reinvent or recreate the previous styles and treatments that came before them (Connor 48). Post modernism is also not devoid of voyeurism and the unconventional portrayal of a woman (“ Post-Modernism and Cinema”). The last but definitely not the least is the existence of this so-called “ post-modern hope (“ Post-Modernism and Cinema”).”

In this case it can be seen that Third Cinema and Post-Modernism can hardly meet on the same plane. Whereas the other has solid and concrete foundations, post-modernism is way too abstract. What happens then is that the rationality and logic of Third Cinema seems to see the post-modern elements as more of a bane than boon. However, if one has to take a closer look, the fusion of the two is still very possible. In order to illustrate this matter, the film City of God shall be used as primary example of how Third Cinema and Post-Modernism meet.

Deconstructing City of God

The opening scene of the film presents a highly depressed area in Brazil. The characters that are shown in the said movie are plagued by the heavy burden brought forth by extreme poverty. This kind of situation is quite unlikely for a domain that is considered as the sanctuary of the Supreme Being. The title itself connotes wealth and abundance. Once and for all, gods and goddesses are known from experiencing luxury and comfort. However, the opening scene presents the exact opposite. The place does not invite a healthy and conducive lifestyle. It is an area wherein only the strong survives

and those who are weak perish. Therefore, the manifestations of crime and violence are very much evident. The place is something that any individual would refuse to stay, much more of a god.

It can be observed that the film is flavored with satirical notions. However, more than that, there is also parody in this sense. The first few lines of the said film has actually encouraged many to come over in the so-called “ City of God” when they have no place to stay. The persona that speaks in the said movie tries to convince the audience that the area is no less than their only last option and resort. The persona also implies that the said city is the final saving refuge of those individuals who have no place to call home. Basically, the parody that is utilized at the onset of the film is indicative of the post-modern approach.

On the other hand, the said film also articulates the historical experiences of Brazil. Brazil was a former colony of Portugal (Fausto 76). The main problem with colonialism is that it tends to focus on the extraction of supplies and natural resources of the involved colony. It also develops a sense of dependency on the colonizers’ economic industries. While it is true that colonizers offer job opportunities to its colonies, the truth of the matter is, the latter do not really benefit from it. What the colonizers do is that they capitalize on cheap labor that is offered by the natives. The natural resources and materials that could have been otherwise used by the colonies for their own growth and development were benefited and readily taken advantage by their colonizers. Therefore, the so-called aim to civilize and encourage sovereignty and economic dependence were no less than rhetorical claims.

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Based from this, the political agendas and concepts of Third Cinema are highly reflected. There is the contextualization and articulation of Brazil's systemic problems and issues. There is the intention to show and express protest against a system that causes heavy burden to many Brazilians. In addition to that, it can remember that in the first lines of the movie, the persona also stated that the so-called city of god is way too different from the picturesque images of the widely acclaimed Rio de Janeiro. Given this situation at hand, the said films seems to purport that the Brazilian government are deaf to the pleas and cries of its very own citizens—that behind the renown tourist spot is an ugly face—that the reality of it is that many are still groping in the dark and the political system of the said nation does not seem to make any efforts in improving the situation.

Presenting the unrepresentable is also manifested in the said film is also evident. The movie showed a little kid being involved in a gangster group. As a matter of fact, the young boy even dreams of becoming a legitimate member of the gang. The way in which he holds the gun seems to show that he is already an experienced gangster. This kind of situation is basically unacceptable. It is something that cannot be easily shown in films due to censorship and moral restrictions. There is also the manifestation of voyeurism during the robbery of the motel.

There is no doubt that those elements are indeed post-modern. However, because of those scenes, it would not come as a surprise if the film may not be warmly welcomed by the whole public. Therefore, if these scenes are readily incorporated and utilize the commercial appeal of the said movie slowly depletes. This is therefore congruent with what Third Cinema readily <https://assignbuster.com/city-of-god-the-post-modernistic-third-cinema-essay-sample/>

promotes—to create films that are not geared towards commercial success but more on the intention to enlighten or indoctrinate its respective audiences or viewers. There is a direct criticism to the seemingly worse societal problem that remains unanswered and unattended. There is the deviation from what Espinosa expounded as films' “ narcissistic” tendency (cited in Stam & Miller 296).

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