

جامعة سيدي محمد بن عبد الله بفاس
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كلية الآداب و العلوم الإنسانية - ظهر المهرار
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Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines - Dhar El Mahraz

Introduction to Media (Online lectures)

Semester 4

Professor Hakim

These online notes are organized according to the following outline.

WEEK 1: Media Theories

WEEK 2: Media Theories (continued)

WEEK 3 : The Film as a Medium

WEEK 4 : The Film as a Medium: non body language features

WEEK 5: Importance of non verbal features in films

WEEK 6 : The main Genres of the Film

WEEK 7 : The film as business and functions of films

WEEK 1: Media Theories

There are many media theories, each tries to define what media is, what it does and how it does it.

Introduction:

An overview of media theories in general. However, the focus will be on the main ones.

Media Theories

The first of these theories is :

1. The Hypodermic needle theory:

The earliest theory about how mass media influences audiences.

It was developed in the 1920's and 1930's.

It is a linear communication theory: it means a one way influence, from media to audience.

This theory believes that audiences are passive consumers of messages: they do not have the ability to question what they read and view. They believe everything they watch and see.

This theory states that people are a mass/ a group; not distinct individuals. It says that we all respond/react to media messages in the same way.

Even though it has been found that this theory has limitations/ weaknesses, the idea that media can have a powerful influence continues to exist:

For example, parents worry that media can have a negative influence on their kids.

This theory argues that media can have a direct and powerful influence on the audiences.

WEEK 2: Media Theories (continued)

The second major theory we will discuss is:

2. The Reception Theory:

It has come as a reaction to the Hypodermic Needle Theory:

So, it opposes the main arguments of the Hypodermic Theory.

First, Reception Theory considers an audience, not as one group, to be made up of different individuals.

These individuals react in different ways, not as the Hypodermic Theory says.

In the Hypodermic Theory, meaning is given / determined by Media; in Reception Theory, meaning is given / determined by the individual / receiver.

For the Hypodermic Theory, there is one meaning.

For Reception Theory, there are many meanings (a multiplicity of meanings).

Reception Theory speaks of individuals who are different one from the other.

These individuals are different in terms of:

a/ Age: each age group reacts to media in a specific way.

It is a question of generations.

b/ education: This determines how media messages are viewed: intellectuals and the masses see media in different ways.

c/ Culture: This means the beliefs, values, norms, customs of a people. This influences the way we interpret media.

d/ gender: men and women see media in different ways.

e/ social class: the rich, the middle class, and the poor see media in a variety of ways.

f/ experience: This factor should be distinguished from age (the old and the young can have experience); and education (education comes from schools, whereas experience comes from life).

These factors show that we cannot speak of one audience, but of a variety of audiences.

These factors also show that we cannot speak of one meaning, or one reaction, to media; but of many interpretations/ points of view.

These factors also show that it is not media which determines how a message is seen, but it is the receiver who does this.

Reception theory also shows that all interpretations coming from different individuals are valid, acceptable.

So, Reception Theory has changed/shifted the importance from Media to Receiver.

So, this is one idea which Media Literacy can use when analyzing media messages: who interprets the message?

The factors we have examined above (age, education, gender, class....) can be used in combination not separately.

WEEK 3 : The Film as a Medium

In this section, we will discuss a new medium : the film. This is a very important medium to know because it is one of the dominant media which is prevalent in the media scene nowadays. We will study this through the following main points:

I/ The main characteristics of the film

II/ The main Genres of the film

III/ The Film as business

IV/ The Functions of Films

I/ The main characteristics:

What distinguishes a film from other media.

The film is different from other media in the way it communicates / expresses itself.

The film uses both dialogue (the verbal, language as we know it) and non verbal features (another 'language').

The verbal part of the film is very small, whereas the non verbal is the dominant one.

This 'language' (non verbal) needs to be understood in order for it to be interpreted properly.

Understanding the non verbal features/

This is essential for a good reading (interpretation) of a film.

Non verbal features are called a 'language' because like the ordinary language, it communicates / it expresses

The non verbal features include the following items:

1. 'Body Language':

The face: this can be used to communicate different feelings such as: sadness, happiness, worry, fear...

The face can express / reflect what a person feels inside. It makes what is invisible (the feelings inside), visible (clear).

The expression of the face is spontaneous (cannot be controlled as words can), it betrays feelings which exist inside. We cannot control the face to hide the feelings.

The face expresses the truth; it is more sincere than words.

The same (reflection of the inner self, spontaneity, truth and sincerity) can be said about the other non verbal features.

Examples of these are: body language features in addition to the face.

The eyes: they are considered the windows to the soul/inner self. They can show whether a person feels fear, hope, enthusiasm, worry.

The tears are used with the eyes: to express joy or happiness.

The mouth: People can whisper, shout, scream, smile, laugh..

When we talk about the mouth we talk about

the **voice**: loud, shaking, low..

We can also discuss **silence** in relation to the mouth.

Silence can be expressive: shock, fear....

The gestures: these are related to the hands:

Can express a variety of emotions: warning, threat, nervousness...

The movements: the way we walk can express whether we are depressed, upset, desperate, or confident, happy...

The walk can be slow and heavy or quick, certain. Each expresses a state of mind (what a person feels inside).

The posture: the way a person stands: confidence, weakness. inferiority, superiority...

WEEK 4 : The Film as a Medium: non body language features

2. Non body language features:

Space between people: distance indicates status, intimacy. In some cultures space refers to privacy.

Clothes:

The film uses clothes to express certain messages or feelings.

Clothes vary in terms of style, color, whether they are formal or casual, classical or modern ..

In films, clothes are called costumes.

They can express:

- Class: high, middle or low class,
- Personality: classical, modern,
- state of mind: happy, sad (black clothes)
- historical period: for historical films

so, costumes are not chosen at random; they are carefully selected to be expressive.

Darkness (night):

Some actions are situated in darkness to create a special effect. To enhance / to increase their impact.

Music: This is another non verbal feature. This is usually played in the background.

It accompanies actions and scenes and helps emphasize their mood: the happiness, the sadness, the fear, the suspense.

The music may be quick or slow; loud or soft, depending on the scene being presented.

The music may replace or help an action or scene to express itself.

The image: This is one of the most important features which the film uses:

an image is much more effective than just words.

In order to understand how an image is expressive we have to break it into its many features: body language, clothes, weather.

WEEK 5: Importance of non verbal features in films

A filmmaker can use a combination of non verbal features to create an effect and convey a message.

An important aspect of non verbal features is that they can be more effective in expressing what a person feels.

This is so / the case because words are limited in their expression.

Moreover, words sometimes cannot express what we feel; in here the non verbal features replace the words.

For example, expressing thanks and gratitude. Or when giving gifts.

In here both the gesture and the gift are considered non verbal features.

When we use interpretation of the non verbal features, we have to take into account

- Their ability to reflect concretely the inner self
- Their spontaneity
- Their sincerity
- Their ability to express emotions more effectively than words
- Their ability to replace words.

All these five points show the significance of the use of non verbal features.

All these features combine together to produce a specific effect and create a special mood and convey a particular message.

In conclusion, we may say that films are made to be watched, not read.

This is why they use a specific language (non verbal), in addition to the word (verbal).

All this makes the film a very powerful means of expression, because the visual elements used by the film create a strong effect on spectators.

If we do not pay attention to this language, if we do not understand it and interpret it, we may not get a full understanding of the movie we are watching.

WEEK 6 : The main Genres of the Film

II/. The main genres / types / categories of films:

Comedy: the use of humor to make spectators laugh: we have funny people; funny situations, funny language.

The purpose is to make them feel relaxed and forget their problems and routine.

In addition, there is the happy ending: this makes spectators happy.

So, the focus of a comedy is to provide entertainment.

Tragedy: it is characterized by conflict, pain, suffering, many deaths. Its end is very sad and tragic.

These films may teach some spectators how to avoid the problems which caused people to suffer and die.

In here, the tragic film has a didactic function.

These films may even make spectators accept their own problems when they compare them with those of the people in films.

Adventure: it presents new and strange places, people and events (happenings).

Its purpose is to offer spectators an opportunity to escape from their world into a completely different one.

This film makes spectators forget about the daily problems they face, for a period of time (for example, two hours).

Action: spectacle: fights, car chasing...

We have to suspend disbelief: we should not use logic when we watch an action film.

very high budget to create the desired effects.

Some spectators admire action and violence.

These are performed by stunts : these are specialists in performing dangerous actions.

It entertains; but it also helps spectators to externalize their inner violence.

Romance: a love story which shows the power of love as a means to make relationships strong;

It ends happily.

There are many people who desire to watch a love story because everybody wants to live a love experience imaginatively through identification.

But most romances are tragic: such as Romeo and Juliet.

These are perhaps the best romances.

They show the power of love: ending conflicts between families.

WEEK 7 : The film as business and functions of films:

A/ The film as business:

We have a diversity of genres because we have a diversity of spectators.
These various spectators have a variety of needs.

Films try to satisfy these needs, so it creates many genres so that spectators will find what they are looking for and interested in.

So, a film is a business: it is based on demand and supply which is a very important rule in the market.

The film studies audience's needs and tries to give them what they need.
The filmmakers base this on market research.

So, an example is the Box Office which indicates what people need.

In general, this is not ethical: it is not morally acceptable. For example, there are spectators who want violence in films. Filmmakers do not care about morals; they want money.

It is wrong to make violent films simply because some spectators want them.

Sometimes, violence in films can lead to tragic consequences in life: as when kids imitate violence because they think it is natural.

Another example is when criminals are presented in a positive way.

B/ Functions of films:

Like the other types of media, films have the following roles / functions:

1. Entertainment: which varies from spectator to another: different spectators find different entertainment in different genres.
2. Education: culture: customs, traditions, values... of different countries.
3. Create awareness about some important issues in a very effective manner: through the image.

These are positive functions / roles: but there are negative ones, the most important is:

The perpetuation of stereotypes which lead to people hating each other because it creates conflicts between them.

Stereotypes include stereotypes about gender, race, religion. This is dangerous because the film is a very effective way of expression.