

Smith, G. (2010). "It's just a movie": Why you should analyze film and television. In What media classes really want to discuss: A student guide (chapter 1). Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/templeuniv-ebooks/detail.action?docID=557321>.

Synopsis

Smith illustrates the importance of analyzing media texts, noting that films and television programs are, “highly scrutinized, carefully constructed” (p. 1) texts created by a team of mediamakers. He asserts that films/TV programs are not always created with the purpose of having a meaning/message, and that unconscious components of the creators’ identities often slip into the media. He also states that the audience plays a part in deciphering their own personal meanings in a text based on their own lives. In this way, he notes, media relies on viewers’ relationships with a text to create meaning. He also discusses the idea of reading into a text, noting that mediamakers rely on audiences’ understanding of basic messages in the text to help them understand the purpose of the text. He cites horror films and TV series like *Seinfeld* to emphasize this point. He demonstrates that even if a piece of media seems insignificant, it is still worth examining because the audience can learn much about the beliefs and values of the society or culture in which the work was created. He concludes the chapter by contesting that the ability to analyze films/TV programs can further increase one’s appreciation and understanding of media, while dismissing the idea that deeply analyzing media texts ruins the simple pleasure of watching them.

Key Concepts

- **Sender-message-receiver (S-M-R) model:** A model that focuses on the ability to properly convey and understand a message being sent/received. It “includes an awareness that the channel/medium affects the overall communication; that there is ‘noise’ on that channel that can interfere with the message; and that the receiver/audiences can communicate ‘feedback’ to give the sender a sense of whether or not the message is getting through” (p.4).
- **Mediamaker(s):** A term used to encapsulate the many people involved in creating a film/show/song, since there is never only one person producing a text (p. 2).
- **Italian neorealism:** An Italian filmmaking movement that began after WWII in which mediamakers “turned their poverty into an advantage” to make films that went against professional Hollywood films made at the time by using real locations, available lighting, nonprofessional actors, and a "looser, more episodic way of telling stories" (p. 3).

Key Quotes

- “Nothing in a final film or television episode is there without having been examined by scores of professionals who have carefully chosen the components. You can trust that if something is in a movie, it’s there for a reason” (p. 3).
- “Examining a film or television program can give us clues about the meanings and assumptions that are shared by the members of a culture...All cultural products carry cultural meaning” (p. 9).
- “The outcome we hope for in a media analysis class is not to ruin film and television but to increase the complexity of your enjoyment” (p. 10).

Essential Question

- If media literacy in the context of examining news/articles is considered very important, why isn’t analyzing entertainment media also considered that way?