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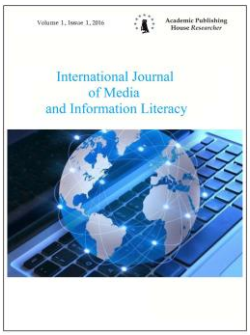

Film Comprehension Strategies in Hungarian Blogs

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Abstract

The starting point of the study is that blogs show peculiar culture-historical processes determined by web2 communicational medium, represented in the film comprehension strategies and language use of the authors speaking. The study examining comprehension strategies represented in the texts of blogs. Electronic environment has thoroughly altered possibilities of public address: while it was critics of journals who spoke about films, literature or theatre before Internet appeared, nowadays we are faced with imperspicuous variety of sites. Democratisation of communication has its impact on meaning formation practice of reception communities, after all on the processes of the formation of the cultural canon. It is worth dealing with the topic in media-language and art pedagogical context as on the one hand we are witnesses of the transformation of the language of film critics, on the other hand schools have to adapt pre-knowledge and the interpretation strategies of students formed by blogs.

Keywords: web2, blogs on films topics, motion picture comprehension, film comprehension strategies, motion picture pedagogy.

1. Introduction

The starting point of present study is that blogs show peculiar culture-historical processes determined by web2 communicational medium, represented in the film comprehension strategies and language use of the authors speaking. This way in my study I am examining comprehension strategies represented in the texts of blogs. I consider blogs as manifestation of self-expression and comprehension practice representing entirely new strategies of reception behaviour: electronic environment has thoroughly transformed film-watching habits, communicational medium of reception community and the language describing films. In this study I examine only blogs in Hungarian language, however, later I wish to extend the research to texts published in other languages.

When recalling the preceedings of my present study I define the theoretical background and conceptual framework I use to examine the language of blogs on film topic. In my study published in 2012 I defined blogs as forums creating new public spaces of film comprehension (Szíjártó, 2012: 333–338). The huge blog universe is layered itself, that is different forums can be found from columns close to serious press – Hungarian journal *Filmvilág* also has a blog mutation[i] – to subversive style surfaces. However, the majority of the texts are not of analytical intention, does not have analytical approach, but determinedly subjective, that is the examined sites are dominantly not identified as defining-analysing forums but surfaces markedly publishing personal opinions. That is while traditional and academic speech and publications of mainstream press is characterized by distance from the topic, theoretical approach and impersonal tone, the language

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use of blogs is characterised by personality manifested in the language resources of the authors, imaginary richness and innovativeness.

The publications also are as much about the cultural and personal self-identification of the author as about the films themselves – although it is the same in traditional publicistic texts as well, what is more, it is a permanent feature of arts competency. Primary expression of opinion is often preferred to expertise by authors of blogs.

Electronic environment has thorougly altered possibilities of public address: while it was critics of journals who spoke about films, literature or theatre before Internet appeared, nowadays we are faced with imperspicuous variety of sites. Democratisation of communication has its impact on meaning formation practice of reception communities, after all on the processes of the formation of the cultural canon.

In the texts all the authors presumably activate those arts competency procedures which they have acquired at school, from professional press or other sources. It is true even if we add the following: the authors very often determinedly disassociate themselves from using school-like, professional ways of interpretation and emphasize that their opinion is based on bias, accidental, direct experiences. And this is the essence of blogs: they represent different kinds of opinion, half-truth, a commonly held wisdom, cliché, this way they represent film comprehension, cultural orientation, after all ethos of the comprehension community. In this sense certain part of blog texts is of contr-cultural character, that is they come from non-dominant, not preferred interpretations or try to keep themselves away from them.

2. Materials and methods

The main sources: monographs and scholarly publications, blogs on films topics. The main methods: comparison, extrapolation, theoretical analysis and synthesis.

3. Discussion

When reading the blogs I realized that the research can proceed by analysing other written sources, since I discovered similarities in interpretation strategies appearing in blogs and in written works of secondary school- and university students. I made connection of motion picture competency strategies and opining system of students when examining film analyses of students in higher education (Szíjártó, 2014a: 21–26).

While reception in the cinema or of a traditional television is singular, linear and connected to time (programme schedule), reception through computer needs lower intensity of attention resulting in fragmented reception. This way of film consumption – and also that recepients can relatively easily interfere into the texture of films by eg. re-editing finished films – has resulted in total transformation of the images about the whole of a text. In the interpretation procedures of recipients the way of approaching films can mostly be characterized by Lev Manovich' database narrative (Manovich, 2001). According to Manovich certain texts are disorganised conglometates of data in which recipients can browse the way they wish. It is referred to in notes of blog writers: „after the first quick seeing", „if you just wind into the film", „parts can simply be missed out".

The third preceeding of this present study is a guestionnary survey made with my colleagues with secondary school children (Borbás et al., 2015; Borbás et al., 2014; Szíjártó, 2014b). Here I mention one particular line of the findings which can be related to the following ones. An outcome of the questionnary survey is that three recipient groups can be made in connection with films. They may be named: „internet orientated", „influenced by personal connections" „school orientated". It can be seen that film-related view points are mostly influenced by the peer group, since youth community is the determining component of the first two groups of the three. Young authors of the blogs this way represent attitude and aspects of their age group.

4. Results

Elements of competency strategies

Giving title. Giving title to the sites would deserve a study on its own. *Filmgay, filmdroid, filmmaniac,filmgobbler* or *filmaddict*[ii] define self-interpretation of the authors. Spoiler appearing in the title also reflects on the fan's attitude. Spoiler meaning "praise" in the jargon is being embedded into Hungarian language. The sites are functioned by two kinds of mentality, besides devotion there is also refusal going sometimes to extremities. These attitudes practically appear in

the same heightened, colourful style: both are resulted in the dominance of subjective tones and getting rational-analytic tools outstaged.

Author's self. The most frequent component of the tone of blogs is the motive of „no taboo", „we speak about everything", total unpretentiousness (which in this context means: programmed pretentiousness). The personality of the author is often present – as they say it – in the gesture of "I will say it", which may be combined with bearing the site the name of the author-owner.

Author'sroles. Analysers often misunderstand analytic-interpretation view-point. Very often can be seen statements like: "how the film should have been directed differently", "what I would change on the film". Here can be mentioned the spread of fault-searching sites as well, we mean those internet sites where production- and technical bloopers are listed. A line of booper-search is when consequent autenticity is hauled up for the films. For instance if a weapon used in the film was developed after the time of the plot of the film, it is considered a serious mistake. However, it cannot be omitted, that a film is qualified not by the hundred percent material autenticity, but the epic validity, that is how successfully the realness has been fulfilled.

Films in process. Before I have mentioned uncertainity of the physical outline of films analysed in blogs tousling the receptive images connected to the concept of the creation. The starting point of the articles often is that the authors have not necesserily seen the film. The subtitle of a site says: „The latest news, trailers, novelties from the world of film"[iii]. Whole sites or total columns of certain sites are about films which are being planned to be made by their creators, or the shooting has just started, or the after-work is being done on them. The news leaked from shootings, background information connected to filmmaking is often imbedded in the analysis about finished films, which naturally greatly hinders text-centered interpretation.

The authors following the shooting of the film and the after-work welcome it when the film is screened, evaluate the final outcome immediately, doing it by the know-all of the insider. Some database may show the close relationship between the recepients and the creators and the films when – besides different data – the authors give even the height of the director.

Professional language. A layer of the vocabulary of blogs consists of those technical terms which are taken over by the authors from arts-theory in a broader sense or the dictionaries of different film theory schools. The presence of these shows that there is some kind of wish to conceptual approach of things in the mind of bloggers. However, as soon as certain theoretical ideas, certain terminus technicus phrases get into common use, the rules of arts sciences concerning concept use – not very consequently exact anyway – get loose and the original meaning of the words gets faded. Some examples: *drama* in blogs is almost any film that is not a comedy; *in medias res* in the ideas of bloggers is a kind of beginning of a story where introduction is missing („get down to the facts", which can be read at an extremely lot of places); *catarsis* is called any impact made in the spectator; *narration* as complex narratological concept is simplified to mentioning the voice of the speaker; surreal in a film is everything that is a bit different from the real way of description.

Praise of the works and creators. This phenomenon presumably coming from tabloid culture hinders analysing approach, since it signs a confidential relationship between the recipient and the creator. Some examples: (about Hungarian films of the beginning of the 60s): „great creations were born"; (about the films of this period): „perfect ending", „cleverly created picture about the period and the characters", „uses great tools", „the sounds are cleverly used".

The role of the film title. It rhymes to the sentences of blogs because the authors expect to have close relationship between the title and the whole movie product. It is general move that blogs separate the title from the movie and analyse it as an independent factor. "Does the title fit the movie?" – most of the authors look at the titles in its narrow meaning: some go backwards, they read the title from the side of the movie ("I have expected something else by the title" – as if the title gives some kind of forecast about the movie's nature), on the other hand they assume that the title predicts the whole movie itself.

The role of the trailers. Trailers are the main sources when discussing films. For example: A Hungarian movie, *Coming out* had already had comprehensive opinions based on the trailers ("the heralding is not good, so I do not like the movie"). Two citations from microanalyses by students at the university can show us good examples: "In my opinion the trailers made their point because they woke up my interest for the movie but the whole movie was a disappointment because

of the lack of the increased dynamism which I had expected to have." "All together the movie was not as good as the trailer, because in that few minutes I had experienced more conflict".

The problem of the film as a complete one. A basic recipient expectation is to specify the completeness and unity of the work of art. In case of written creations it seems easy, because the text seems easily identifiable and separable from its environment – obviously it has changed with the internet and the nets based on hypertext. In my observations what happened to films is that before all the premieres there are plenty of metatexts: preliminaries, heraldings, shooting reports and leaks, trailers, werkfilms, creative interviews. These trailers define and preform the expectations about the films being created, this way the authors haul the films for them. This echoes on different blogs: "compared to the trailer the movie made a different experience", "I expected something else after the trailer". It often happens that the analysts assign the information of the trailers to the complete film as if the trailer was a smaller version, extract or replacement of the whole movie. The viewers' knowledge comes from the shooting reports and author's information. The judgement of the blogwriters is based many times on the fact that we already know the movie even before it is made or screened because the trailers and author's statements give us a complete picture about it.

Opinions about filmculture. As I have observed there are two kinds of opinions on films' place in the whole of the culture. One says filmculture has two sides, on one side there are the so called serious movies which have deeper meaning or message. In is side it is not so hard to see the marks of the school system in Hungary. On the other hand there are movies in which the creators only want to entertain so these are not so remarkable and perhaps less valuable. And then there is another notion that the movie is a masscultural phenomenon so the movie is basically an intention for entertainment. This is noted in statements like "the movie pulls you", "enchants", "the magic lasts only for a few hours".

The problem of the plot. Above we identified as general the following statements of blogs: "the films telling simple stories are not good". Related to it is that almost in every writing the plot is described. It is possible that in the background the authors identify the movie with its plot and plot and the quality of the plot could be a basic trait of the film. I just want to point out the relationship of blogs and works of students: The students very often tend to discribe the plot. The phenomenon could be related to the fashion of the "obligatory readings in short" or literary adaptations in movies are watched with the intention that in the film we can get the plot of the novel – so this gives a replacement of the work of art.

Use of information other than in the film. The question of the text-centeredness is an agelong dilemma, that is the analysis-technics problem, whether it is allowed to use information other than the text in the analysis. This phenomenon is mostly manifested in analysing the text on biographic basics, that is the work of arts is based on biographic moves of the author.Let us see how the authors of blogs use information out of movies. A statement about the movie *Drive*: "... all the scenes are prefectly cut (it is thanks to that during the shooting they cut the movie in his flat to get a better result).[iv]" So the author uses the following logics: the movie's inducing effect works so good because the authors did a workphase in a given condition.

5. Conclusion

I wish to summarise all the different ways that I have tried to identify in my study about comprehension strategies of blogs.

1. The writings are as much as about movies as cultural and the personal self-identification of the author.

2. The writings have many understanding ways which come from art studies at school (a few examples: the works are directly expressing the author's own experiences; the viewer looks for identification opportunities in movies; as the authors say – to analyse is against the art of work).

3. To identify a movie with its own plot, downgrading the simple-plot movies.

4. Uncertainty of the roles of analyst - the analyst behavior is weak.

5. The self-reflection, the constant review of the viewers' judgement is missing; the opinion of the blog writers is of primary making is more important than expertise.

6. Theoretical separatation of fun and the so called serious content.

7. Overvaluation of authors' manifestations (interviews, fragments of self-interpretation).

8. Background information about movies are implied in analysis (interviews with authors, reports on shootings, prognosis).

9. Trailers have become main sources for discussions about films, evaluation of a trailer has often replaced evaluation of the movie it self. Some kind of essence of trailers and titles from which everything is understandable – film descriptions, tsantsas, concentrated re-edits of movies almost take over the place of the total film in interpretation.

Since it is palpable that the language use of blogs affect movie analysis of the so called serious news, and also film analysis practice of secondary and university students, it is worth dealing with the topic in media-language and art pedagogical context as on the one hand we are witnesses of the transformation of the language of filmcritics, on the other hand schools have to adapt pre-knowledge and the interpretation strategies of students formed by blogs. In my opinion blogs influence the audience but they have not renewed the language about motion picture and have not increased the standard of film comprehension of the recipients.

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