

Some thoughts on...

HOW TO WATCH A FILM

found on gregwillson.com/resources

Loving Our Culture

Art is society's existential statement, in answer to the question, "Why live?" –International Arts Movement

Also, understanding that we are indelibly part of our culture as well—it's not us versus them—brings on a godly form of humility and a correct understanding of what it means to be human.

Jeremiah 29:1-9

The tendency for exiles to separate themselves (esp. vv. 8-9) or completely assimilate God's third way:

Seeking their city's peace: radically similar *and* radically different.

How for the Israelites? How for us?

Learning About Ourselves (And Our Faith)

"Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other." – John Calvin, the first sentences of *Institutes of The Christian Religion*.

"A book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us." - Franz Kafka (the same should be said of film)

Imago Dei: present in believers only, or all people?

cf. Balaam's donkey in Numbers 23 & 24, the stones that would cry out in Luke 19.

Lewis: the true "myth" from which all other myths are derived.

The Story from which all of our stories get meaning.

Investigating Form

Medium: film (if so, what kind? Is it gritty/grainy, vignettted?), digital video

Pacing/editing: single shots, multiple cuts, lengths of time in scenes, between cuts, etc.

Color: is it in full color? Saturated, de-saturated, vibrant, etc.?

Types of shots: from close ups to long shots to angles

Music: Does the soundtrack (or lack thereof) supply for and/or support the rest of the film?

How are these being used—what emotions or reaction are invoked?

Investigating Content

The power of story telling: why use a narrative?

The prophet Nathan going to David after his affair with Bathsheba

"Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" –Emily Dickinson

The Moral Imagination: stories give us scenes of moral ambiguity for us to enter in to, without the real world effects.

Characters: believability in acting, dialogue, mannerisms. What was the intent? Were you drawn in? Are they interesting? Are they supposed to be any of these things?

Events: How was the story told? Did the narrative arc fit the content? Was there logical continuity in the screenplay?

Genre: What is the film's genre and how does it adhere to it? Where does it deviate?

Respect for the viewer: does the director think we're stupid? Typically found in heavy handed story telling devices, leaving little room for the viewers to think for themselves.

*What is the film trying to say through the content and form of its story telling?
How does it make sense of the world?*

Modern/Post-Modern Debate

The dilemma: the artist's original intent and our subjective interpretation are always different

Modernism: mostly interested in the artist's intent. The subject's experience not as important.

Post-modernism: mostly interested in the subject's experience, not so much the artist's original intent.

A third way: covenantal interaction

The artist's intent is important *and* our own subjective interpretations of the work are important

Art is not created inside a vacuum, and the way that art fundamentally works is *because of* this dialogue between object and subject.

They must inform each other.

“Entering In”

“The first demand any work of art makes upon us is to surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way.” –C. S. Lewis

Not just “I liked this,” or “I thought this was cool.” Why did you like it? What was moved inside of you?

How do we interact with immorality or anything else that might be offensive?

Being informed by the Incarnation: how do we take on the flesh?

It involves **taking time**. Some of the pieces we encounter will be hard to get, hard to watch, will require a long attention and maybe you won't get it right away, or even soon. But that doesn't mean it's pointless. Like anything hard/worthwhile, time is required by the participant.

It involves **active participation**. As we experience broad slices of life and art (and, therefore, theology and humanity), let's try to not keep a cold distance. Put yourself inside the film. Let it affect you, that is, let your emotions become involved (as well as your brain).