

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON “SPIDERMAN”

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Abstract

Talking about CDA or “Critical Discourse Analysis” means talking about power domination, ideologies and concepts employ in certain community. The reflection of power, ideologies, concepts or event traditional values can be found easily nowadays in the entertainment section with products like movies, songs, advertising, and many more. Since the values are packed with attractive features, some people are allured with the features and forget the power that drives some people to create the products which enable them to portray their beliefs and values. This research is trying to reveal the critical aspect of the movie “Spiderman” (2002) which contain Christian beliefs, bias concepts in American’s humanity and heroism. The method employs in the research is descriptive analysis based on the data taken from the scenes of the movie, tagline, dialogues. The result shows that through this movie, American unveils the ideology of liberalism covered with the values of humanity and heroism to drive people into the hegemony: American is the only power domination and the source of great heroes.

Key word : *Critical Discourse, power domination, ideologies*

Introduction

Why do English department students study CDA? There are several reasons for studying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). One of them is taking interest in social and cultural issues, and how these issues affect society as a whole, looking at how social injustice is portrayed, and how certain social groups may be misrepresented in discourse. These two aspects, social and culture, are closely related to language, in a way language is a medium for society to introduce ideas, concepts and identities. It means that CDA is a way to show the world how enormous as well as significant is the impact of using certain language or words to represent power (politics). Language and power is a subject that the English department students study in Sociolinguistics. Furthermore, studying CDA allows students to explore their interests in certain topics, not to mention that CDA also provides depth understanding for students on the linguistic usage beyond the academic matters, such as in daily life, when reading newspapers or magazines, watching news and movies, or listening to popular songs.

As it is mentioned before, discourse in a broadest sense describes as “an entity of sequences, of signs, in that they are enouncements ([Michel Foucault](#), 2009).” An enouncement (from [French](#) *l'énoncé*, meaning "the statement") is not a unit of [semiotic](#) signs, but an abstract construct that allows the signs to assign and communicate specific, repeatable relations to, between, and among objects, subjects, and statements. Hence, a discourse is composed of semiotic sequences (relations among signs) between and among objects, subjects, and statements. The term discursive formation conceptually describes the regular communications (written and spoken) that produce such discourses. This means, anything in this world could be a discourse; articles, song lyrics, comics and definitely movies, since they all have concepts, ideas and symbols within.

Speaking of movies as discourse means decoding the symbols they use, reveal the implicit messages, while not forgetting to uncover the concepts, ideas and statements they desire to convey to the world. In this essay, the writer divides the analysis into three parts, they are respectively; linguistic analysis, semiotic analysis and cultural analysis. Linguistic analysis can be used to analyze text covering a wide range of lexical to grammatical choices made by the discourse author. Next, semiotic analysis describes how certain symbols, logos, codes (including numbers) and other things like colors, settings, and patterns represent meaning. Finally, cultural analysis provides information on the historical background, context of production which includes both places and time, political and economical aspects, socio-cultural aspects which the discourse is embedded and the most important thing of all: the relationship between the discourse itself and the ideology (a set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that constitute a perspective on the world).

Methodology of the Research

One particular eye-catching object in this movie is the spiderman’s costume which resembles the physical feature of a spider with the color blue and red. Apparently, spiderman is not the only hero who wears blue and red costume. Other heroes are superman and captain America. It is no longer a surprise for many people why these heroes wear blue and red costumes, since the colors of American’s flag consist of blue and red as well. Blue symbolizes the truth while red represents the

heroism and bravery. This interpretation explains to us why many American heroes wear blue and red costumes. It implies that the real heroes are from the United States of America. In spite of the country's bad image in real life, through these colors' representation, people can see how hard is the American trying to rebuild its positive image to the world.

Besides colors, using spider as the representative of true hero is also an interesting topic to discuss. Taking from the ancient Scottish history, the symbol of this animal reveals a small creature with paradox. Why paradox? *Paradox is a situation or statement which seems impossible or it is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics.* For centuries, spider is considered as a scary, disgusting and ignorant animal. However, if we take a look at it closer just the way King Robert the Bruce (from Scotland) did in the past, we might find out that this small creature has amazing traits. When a spider builds its web, it falls many times, but it never gives up. It focuses on its goal and everytime it falls, it manages to rise again through it all. These efforts symbolize perseverance, determination and patience. All of these characteristics are positive and these traits are the qualifications to be a true hero. Speaking of hero, the definition of hero is a person who is admired by many people for having done something very brave or having achieved something great. In his effort to achieve greatness, sometimes hero encounters difficulties and in the same time he must consume the bitterness against all odds, yet the hero never plans to yield because everytime he is forced to break under pressure and he falls, he manages himself to stand up again and rises again through it all. Here we can see the similarities in actions between a spider and a hero.

Finding and Discussion

Sam Raimi's Spider-Man 3 has been released, starring the inimitable Tobey Macguire as Peter Parker, we may want to pause to consider the power of this enduring American icon. For almost half a century, Spider-Man has been a remarkable American hero full of rich moral and psychological complexity. A lot of people argued that superheroes like Spider-Man capture the imagination of the masses because they are glamorous, meaning that film audiences emotionally bond with superheroes through "a sharp mixture of projection, longing, admiration, and aspiration. Critics notes that

superheroes embody the mastery we desire over our bodies and our longing for solidarity with other people (Justice League). This is a very interesting “audience-response” model for thinking about the popularity of Spiderman, but what about the symbolism of Spider-Man? What does he mean? How do we begin to talk about the cultural work that Spider-Man does? The writer looked to some academic scholarship for answers, or, at least, the brief information. The writer found several articles in the *Journal of Popular Culture* on the subject that she would like to write about below. They provide contrasting views of how we can talk about Spider-Man.

The writer will start with an article by the distinguished writer Salvatore Mondello, “Spider-Man: Superhero in the Liberal Tradition”. Mondello offers a historical periodization of Spider-Man beginning in 1962 and ending in the mid-1970’s, after Watergate (Mondello, 1976). According to Mondello, between 1962 and 1967, the comic *The Amazing Spider Man* must be seen as an extension of a conservative view of politics and public life. This is because Spidey’s heroics are placed at the service of Cold War politics (battling Communists) and, in one case, personal gain (helping out with Aunt May’s mortgage). Between 1967 and 1973, Spidey becomes a social crusader targeting problems such as drug use and other public causes. After this period, Spider-Man becomes more of an escapist entertainment disconnected from social problems (Mondello suggests that this is a result of the disenchantment sown by Vietnam and Watergate) Based on a close reading of certain issues of *The Amazing Spiderman*, Mondello ultimately concludes that “During the late 60’s and early 70’s, Spider-Man had helped to keep alive American liberalism among the young, a tradition stressing cooperation among individuals and minorities rather than conflict, moderation in politics rather than extremism, and the right of each American to social recognition and economic opportunity.” The writer is questioning what Mondello would say about the Raimi adaptations. Is Spider-Man still an icon who symbolizes classical American liberalism?

The Marvel Comics Group’s Spider-Man is an Existentialist Super-Hero; or “Life Has no Meaning Without My Latest Marvels”, gives us a whole different take to consider (Palumbo, 1983). Palumbo reads Spider-Man through the lens of the history of philosophy, specifically Existentialism. Palumbo explains that existentialist figures like Spider-Man have a worldview in which an individual’s idealism and the ugly, absurd

realities of the world clash. As a result, existential heroes tend to reject god, have troubled relationships with father-figures and live on the margins of society. Palumbo reminds us that although Peter Parker and Spidey never explicitly talk about existentialism, we do know that he reads books by Sartre, Camus and Jung. Regardless, a careful reading of many of the comics shows us that indeed, Spider-Man is an alienated figure who questions his place in the world and his ability to transform it, sometimes to the brink of madness. By the time of this writing, the writer hasn't written any analysis on *Spider-Man 3* yet, but it would seem that the madness part (as expressed through Venom's hold on Spidey) may be an important piece of the story.

Finally, we come to Niall Richardson's *The Gospel According to Spider-Man*, which analyzes the first Spider-Man movie. Richardson writes: "Spider-Man not only employs famous scenes from the Bible but also examines the theology of Christian belief. The film's narrative, like Christian ideology, centers on the hero's shame for his flawed and his attempt to transform shame into atonable guilt." Richardson notes the negative cultural connotations of spiders and how these may be linked to sexuality as something dark and dangerous. He observes that Peter Parker's camera functions as an expression of his lust toward Mary Jane, and that Parker's vain attempts at self-aggrandizement ultimately lead to the death of Uncle Ben. Thus, Parker violates a principle that is essentially Christian in nature: use one's power for the greater good, not for pleasure. However, it also reflects Peter Parker as typical human being, born to make mistake and sometimes can not avoid sins. Other article by Richardson's reading of Parker's physique in relation to Christian images of "Saints crucified and tortured" and by his allegorical reading of the choice between saving his sweetheart Mary Jane and a bunch of innocent kids at the end of the movie. This tormented situation is created by Spiderman's enemy the Green Goblin. It shows us that hero faces dilemma, suffers from unbearable pains, deals with extreme challenges and experiences psychologically complexity in everyday situation.

Conclusion

To sum up, no popular hero or symbol can remain the same to become everlasting and socially relevant (or trendy) without changing over time and taking on the problems of the day. Now, there are some new Spiderman movies release with

different version from this one. The researcher hasn't had a chance to think too much about it, but she suspects that Spider-Man today is persistent to keep some of the themes that made him popular in the past while also speaking to the moment of post 9/11 anxieties and other global issues. Finally, through Spiderman production 2002 which was directed by Sam Raimi, the Americans share the secret behind this so called popular culture, the effort of hegemony and power domination with the shades of humanity and heroism.

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