

2010

Home Movies

Taylor Scott
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©2010 Taylor Scott

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt>

Recommended Citation

Scott, Taylor, "Home Movies" (2010). *Honors Program Theses*. 840.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/840>

This Open Access Honors Program Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

HOME MOVIES

A Documentary

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors

Taylor Scott

University of Northern Iowa

May 2010

This Study by: Taylor J. Scott

Entitled: Home Movies

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors

April 28, 2010
Date

Professor Francesca Soans
Honors Thesis/Project Advisor

5/14/10
Date

Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

1. Introduction

As an electronic media major I wanted to create a thesis that exemplified all of the video editing and creative skills and also the media theories I have learned at the University of Northern Iowa. To me, one of the most interesting topics in the electronic media field is the strong influence amateurs have on mass media, starting at the advent of the radio and through today on the internet. This is what inspired me to create *Home Movies*. I wanted to combine my interest in amateurism with the skills and knowledge I have learned as an electronic media student. This reflection will include an explanation of *Home Movies* and why I chose it, the steps taken to complete the project, a description, an assessment of its importance to the documentary industry, and the personal value of the experience. Also attached is the original treatment for the project, which was the original proposal of what I envisioned *Home Movies* to look like.

2. Explanation

Home Movies is a documentary that points out the relationship between home movies, documentaries, and horror films. I chose home movies and documentaries because they give the viewer a sense of realism and truth. Horror was chosen as the genre for the documentary because of past movies such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity* that have made the correlation between amateur video and horror obvious. It was important that this project be in documentary form because it is based on the viewers perception of what is happening in the film. Horror films manipulate fictional video to make the viewer believe that it is truth. *Home Movies* manipulates factual footage to make the viewer question whether it is truth or not. If this project had been written instead the audience would not have the opportunity to question the reality

of what they are seeing and why they believe it is reality. The documentary also relies on assumptions we have, as viewers, about the different aesthetics of amateur videos, documentaries, and horror films and for those assumptions to really be pointed out the viewer needs to see them, not just read about them. Reading about visual aesthetics does not give the same experience as viewing them and creating assumptions and perceptions first-hand.

3. Steps Taken

Completing the project was a very long process. After the initial idea was formed I knew it had to be refined to a less broad topic. I chose to use the horror genre instead of all mass media because I believed it would be the easiest for the audience to understand. I researched amateur video, home movies, documentaries, and horror films until I had an understanding of the genres and how audiences perceive them. Part of my research was also watching documentaries and horror films to get ideas and gain an understanding of how the genres interpret images to make audiences believe what is being shown is the truth. After researching I considered many different styles for the content of the documentary. Originally I planned on using a more traditional, educational format for the documentary but later decided to use a more creative approach. Once I had an outline of what I wanted I asked friends to bring me copies of their home movies. When I had the home movies it took many hours to log the footage and capture it. Once I had the footage and knew what I wanted to do I went through numerous edits and re-edits. After each edit I would get feedback from my advisor and my peers to make it a better documentary. One thing that separates the creation process of my thesis from almost any other thesis is that there are almost no written components. During the very beginning

stages I wrote treatments to convey my ideas to my advisor but since then nothing has been written. The story is based entirely around found footage so I shaped the story around what I already had instead of basing the footage on a script, like a traditional film.

4. Description

The final product of *Home Movies* is a documentary that builds suspense by playing with the viewers understanding of truth and the reality of what is being portrayed on screen. It starts off with raw home movie footage of people enjoying a vacation. As it switches to a birthday party the voice over starts to suggest that something ominous has happened, without specifically saying what. The documentary then shows more amateur video, mixed together with interviews set up to mirror traditional documentary aesthetics. These interviews also allude to something tragic that happens during or just after the camera is rolling on these seemingly innocent home videos. As tension mounts music is introduced, making the viewer begin to question whether or not these are actual events or if they are all part of a horror film. As music and more obvious edits, such as changes in color and speed, are introduced the viewer no longer thinks that the events are reality but instead are a part of a horror film. Finally the documentary end abruptly, leaving the audience to question what, if any, of the documentary is reality and why they assumed it was reality to start with.

5. Assessment of Importance

I think this work is important because it addresses not only the assumptions viewers have but also why popular films, like *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity* have been so successful at frightening audiences. They convince audiences, through amateur and documentary aesthetics that they are not just films but a reality.

Home Movies draws the audience's attention to these aesthetics and how manipulation of the same footage in different ways can change the audience's understanding of the reality of what is happening. It gives typical audiences an understanding of why horror films seem so frightening. It also will make audiences question the validity of documentaries and home movies, making them more critical of what is being presented as truth.

6. Value of the Experience

This experience has been challenging but very rewarding. Relying on footage from outside sources was challenging because I had no control over what was shot, only how I manipulated it. Looking for exactly the right clips and arranging them in a way that not only made sense but supported my point was very difficult. It did however give me good experience working with unfamiliar video. The research was also very beneficial to the overall process. Before doing research I had only a vague idea of what I wanted to portray but the research gave me insights into the different genres and the effect each of them has on audiences. Research like this will be a valuable skill to have in the future as I continue to produce videos. At times the research seemed pointless to a creative project and could be very frustrating but it was essential to the development of my ideas and added greatly to the quality of the documentary. Finally the outcome is that I have a documentary makes a very good point and is interesting to watch as well as having gained valuable research and editing skills.

7. Treatment

The documentary opens with a fade into a typical home movie. A family sitting in a living room and in a kitchen, opening presents and eating a meal together. The family looks happy and nothing out of the ordinary is happening. This will cut to an interview

where the subject describes something ambiguous that happened after the camera stopped rolling. She will say something similar to “No one saw it coming” Another seemingly normal home movie will be shown at a little faster tempo, another interview will appear with the subject claiming to not have known something was coming without naming what the “something” was.

Next there will be a series of shorter clips of children playing in the rain and families sitting together. These will be cut into shorter clips with frequent jump cuts. Interviews will be inserted into this footage with subjects giving worried answers such as “I was too young to understand” and “everything was perfect before that”. Another shot of a group of people being watched from above will play and an interview will explain “we didn’t know we were being watched.” Interviews will get more urgent as the footage increases in intensity.

Next will be even quicker edits of home movies. There will be quicker and jerkier edits and no sound. More extreme close ups will be used mixed into quick pans and shakier shots. An interview will appear with the subject in a mostly dark area sounding scared. Their interview will describe being terrified of something but not name what. As the interview progresses “scary” music will begin to fade in. The interview will be interrupted with more home footage, but now edited together to mimic a horror film. It will be color corrected to look darker with added jerky effects. The footage will become more and more horror film like until it ends in black.

Works Cited

- "A scream made for a song; A \$10,000 movie has stormed the US by scaring the pants off its audiences, Kevin Maher reports." *Times* [London, England] 6 Nov. 2009: 2. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 7 Mar. 2010. <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/gtx/infomark.do?Z3950=1&contentSet=IAC-Documents&docType=IAC&action=interpret&type=retrieve&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=001&docId=CJ214480911&prodId=AONE&source=library&userGroupName=uni_rodit&version=1.0>
- Barth, Nicole. Video Interview 13 April, 2010.
- Benischek, Megan. Video Interview. 13 April, 2010.
- Benischek, Megan. Home Video.
- Brainsaw. "Music for the Paranoid Schizophrenic." *Archive.net*. 2004. <<http://www.archive.org/details/saw01x2>>
- Breznican, Anthony. "'Paranomal' has 'magical elixir' for horror: Realism, subtlety but not gore." *USA Today* 12 Oct 2009. Web. 3 Mar 2010. <http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2009-10-12-paranormal-activity-side_N.htm>
- Buckingham, David, and Rebekah Willett. *Digital Generations: Children, Young People, and New Media*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006.
- Cartmell, Deborah, Hunter, I.Q., Kaye, Heidi, Whelehan, Imelda, eds. *Trash Aesthetics*. London: Pluto Press, 1997.
- Chrenen, Aaron. Video Interview. 13 April, 2010.
- Chrenen, Aaron. Home Video.

Dillard, R.H.W. *Horror Films*. New York, NY: Monarch Press, 1976.

Dokoupil, Tony. "The Revenge of the Expert." *Newsweek* 06 Mar 2008: 1-2. Web. 26 Oct 2009. <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/119091>>.

Ellis, Jack C. McLane, Betsy A. *A New History of Documentary Film*. New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Group, 2005.

Hampp, Andrew. "How 'Paranormal Activity' hit it big; The low-budget horror film may become one of year's most profitable." *Advertising Age* 80.34 (2009): 4. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 3 Mar. 2010. <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/gtx/infomark.do?Z3950=1&contentSet=IAC-Documents&docType=IAC&action=interpret&type=retrieve&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T001&docId=A209632314&prodId=AONE&source=library&userGroupName=uni_rodit&version=1.0>

Gilbey, Ryan. "Heir to Blair: simplicity is a highly effective tool in horror films, writes Ryan Gilbey." *New Statesman* [1996] 30 Nov. 2009: 54. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 7 Mar. 2010. <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/gtx/infomark.do?Z3950=1&contentSet=IAC-Documents&docType=IAC&action=interpret&type=retrieve&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T001&docId=A215074817&prodId=AONE&source=library&userGroupName=uni_rodit&version=1.0>

Keen, Andrew. *The Cult of the Amateur*. 1st. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001. 18-60.

McCready, Tara. Video Interview. 13 April, 2010.

McCready, Tara. Home Video.

Pfeiffer, Brinn. Video Interview. 13 April, 2010.

Pfeiffer, Brinn. Home Video.

Paranormal Activity. Dir. Oren Peli. Paramount Pictures: 2009, DVD.

Price, Cindy. "The Home Horror Movie." *The New York Times Magazine* 29 June 2003:

13. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 4 Mar. 2010. <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/gtx/infomark.do?Z3950=1&contentSet=IAC-Documents&docType=IAC&action=interpret&type=retrieve&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T001&docId=A104507519&prodId=AONE&source=library&userGroupName=uni_rodit&version=1.0>

Prince, Stephen. *The Horror Film*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Reassemblage. Dir. Trinh T. Minh-ha. Moongift Films: 1982, DVD

Rhodes, Gary D. "Mockumentaries and the production of realist horror." *Post Script* 21.3

(2002): 46+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 4 Mar. 2010. <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/gtx/infomark.do?Z3950=1&contentSet=IAC-Documents&docType=IAC&action=interpret&type=retrieve&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T001&docId=A95501717&prodId=AONE&source=library&userGroupName=uni_rodit&version=1.0>

Rhodes, Gary D. Springer, John Parris. *Docufictions*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc, 2006.

Sink or Swim. Dir. Su Friedrich. Downstream Productions: 1990, DVD

Scrivner, Eric. Video Interview. 20 April, 2010.

Susan, Wloszczyna. "How to make a film go 'boo' without breaking the bank" *USA*

Today n.d.: *Academic Search Elite*. EBSCO. Web. 6 Mar. 2010.

