

Nyburg: Experience creates a false sense of community

Continued from page 5

theater make me some kind of bizarre, postmodern, fragmented individual completely disconnected from his fellow human beings?

Bullshit. Watching a movie in a theater is a community experience like staring at a car wreck from a moving vehicle is a community experience. I get no sense of interaction from this. A hundred people sitting in the dark watching flashing lights and hearing loud noises is more akin to a psychological experiment than it is to human togetherness. At least at a concert you can talk, move around and be vomited on, activities that connect to the rest of humanity better than sitting around like a pack of hypnotized herd animals does.

So let me make a radical suggestion: Let's burn down the multiplexes. Hell with them. They rarely show independent works; studios only use them as launching pads for films, and even that practice is proving less profitable. Studios make all of their money from other media, i.e. television broadcast rights and video sales. Theaters are hardly worth the trouble anymore. They exist to give a false sense of legitimacy to a film, make it seem like more than a direct to video fare. But production values are all that distinguish high-class Hollywood films from the non-theater-screened drivel. Why not just cut out the middleman?

I'll make an exception for certain cases: revival houses, some art theaters. These serve a purpose for the community, giving a mode of expression for upcoming filmmakers. And I actually like seeing old movies with an audience of respectful film snobs. It carries that community experience the big theaters lack. Also, there are some things that just need

to be seen on the big screen.

So maybe we can reach a compromise between what we have now and arson. First, eliminate the ads before movies. I have never heard a positive response to these, though I know advertisers are banking on the fact that the next generation will just accept them because they won't remember a time without them. For now, I actively do not buy products I see advertised before a movie (as for ones that are advertised in the movie itself, keeping track of those is a little more difficult).

Second, theaters should start offering movie passes. For, say, \$20 people could see as many movies as they want. This would get people in the theaters more often, which means more concession sales, which is where theaters make real profit. But studios might not like the idea because it would cut into their slice of the pie (though that slice getting progressively slimmer anyway).

I'm not going to make a grand prediction about the decline of theaters over the next few years or for direct-to-video/on-demand rental being the wave of the future for movies. I make no claims to clairvoyance. But if you want a definite trend toward home viewership rather than theater going, look at the horror film genre. A good chunk of the most interesting horror films are released direct to video or with such a limited theater run they might as well have been. "Dagon," "May," "Ginger Snaps," "Bruiser," "King of the Ants," "Dog Soldiers" etc. Each one better than the last Wes Craven film and each one more intelligent than the remake of "The Amityville Horror."

How's that for a wave of the future?

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