

The Cinematic Tapestry of "Parasite": An Analysis of The Film Elements We Studied in Communicating Social and Economic Issues.

Introduction

The cinematic landscape is a realm where storytelling converges with visual artistry to convey unthought-out messages about society. Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite" (2019) exemplifies this synergy by intricately weaving film elements to communicate a multifaceted context. This essay critically analyzes how selected film elements, mostly Mise-en-scène and Cinematography, operate within the broader realms of social and economic contexts in "Parasite."

Thesis Statement

"Parasite" utilizes Mise-en-scène and Cinematography to magnify the social disparity and economic tension that we can observe in contemporary society. By diving into the intricacies of these film elements, this paper aims to unravel the many nuanced layers of Bong Joon Ho's masterpiece and expose in a new light how its impact on societal perceptions and cultural ideas changed.

Background

Before delving into the specific film elements, a brief overview of "Parasite" is important for reminding people of the main story and catching people who might have never seen the film up to speed. Directed by Bong Joon Ho, the film revolves around the symbiotic relationship between two families, the affluent upper-class Parks and the middle-class Kims, highlighting the socio-economic disparity prevalent in modern South Korea. Winner of the Palme d'Or at the

Cannes Film Festival and four Academy Awards, including Best Picture, "Parasite" stands as a cinematic milestone that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries.

This was the first non-American-made movie to ever win Best Picture at the Oscars marking it as a true cultural phenomenon.

Mise-en-scène: Unveiling Social Norms

Encompassing elements like setting, costume, and lighting, plays a pivotal role in conveying the social context of "Parasite." The film employs a stark visual dichotomy between the top 1 percent and impoverished families, creating a tangible representation of the unfortunate but ever-present socio-economic divide. The Parks' luxurious, minimalist mansion is a visual testament to their wealth and high standing, characterized by spacious bedrooms, high-end furniture, and high-taste aesthetics. In contrast, the Kim family inhabits a cramped semi-basement apartment, filled with clutter, dampness, and an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia.

The juxtaposition of these living spaces not only visually accentuates the class difference but also serves as a narrative device (Coulter, Cathy A., and Mary Lee Smith 2009), mirroring the characters' psychological states. The Parks' residence becomes a symbol of their out-of-touch detachment from reality, shielded by money and noncaring, while the Kims' dwelling reflects their constant struggle for survival in the underbelly of society that too many people all over the world can relate to.

Furthermore, the meticulous attention to detail in Mise-en-scène enhances the impact the film's social commentary carries. The choice of props, such as the peach-scented insect repellent,

subtly reinforces the economic hierarchy. The Parks can afford these seemingly mundane yet expensive items, while the Kims can only hope to experience such luxurious everyday items.

Cinematography: Framing Socio-Economic Disparity

The cinematography in "Parasite" serves as a powerful tool in framing and capturing the socioeconomic disparities prevalent in South Korean society. The film employs strategic camera angles, framing techniques, and shot compositions to underscore the contrasting worlds of the wealthy and those less fortunate.

One notable example is the camera people's use of vertical space to depict hierarchy. The camera often tilts upwards to capture the grand nature of the Parks' mansion, which emphasizes the social elevation of the upper class. Conversely, downward angles are employed in scenes that feature the Kims, accentuating their subservient position in the unfair societal hierarchy. This visual metaphor is particularly evident in the climax of the film's basement confrontation, where the camera descends into the concealed space, unveiling the harsh reality hidden beneath the surface.

The movie also uses long takes and seamless tracking shots to enhance the immersive experience, allowing the audience to experience and navigate both the luxurious realm of the Parks and the squalid conditions of the Kims without interruption. The cinematographic choices create a visceral connection, compelling viewers to confront the uncomfortable truths of our own socio-economic disparity.

Intersectionality of Mise-en-scène and Cinematography: Symbolism in Spatial Dynamics

The connection between Mise-en-scène and Cinematography in "Parasite" goes further and beyond individual elements, manifesting in the spatial dynamics of the film. The physical spaces inhabited by the two families become symbolic battlegrounds, where social and economic tensions play out.

Consider the recurring visual device of stairs, a spatial element that becomes a narrative device reflecting the characters' ascent or descent in social standing. The staircases in the Parks' mansion are elegant and symbolic of their ability to climb up the corporate and social ladder freely, while the Kims must navigate a literal uphill climb in their journey from destitution to financial stability. The spatial symbolism, supported by Mise-en-scène and Cinematography, underscores the systemic challenges faced by the lower class in their pursuit of socio-economic improvement.

Economic Context: The Parasitic Struggle

Moving beyond the visual language, the economic context of "Parasite" is embedded in its name, exposing the parasitic nature of a society driven by economic disparities. The Kim family's infiltration into the Parks' lives acts as a metaphor for the economic struggle faced by the lower class. The term "parasite" itself implies a symbiotic relationship, where one person, animal, or entity benefits at the expense of another.

The film deconstructs traditional notions of what a parasite is, portraying a complex codependence of sorts between the two families. While the Kims exploit the economic vulnerabilities of the Parks, the latter unknowingly perpetuates a system that thrives on the exploitation of the lower class. This cycle of the nature of economic parasitism is masterfully

woven into the narrative, challenging the audience to question the ethical ramifications of a society built on divisions in class.

Social Context: The Illusion of Upward Mobility

"Parasite" also delves into the social context by exploring the illusion of upward mobility in a pre-set society. The Kims, driven by a desire to escape their socio-economic constraints, start on a journey of deceit to integrate into the world of the top one percent. The film cleverly plays with the audience's perceptions, subtly pushing them to empathize with the Kims' aspirations while simultaneously critiquing the societal structures that make such deceit by the family necessary. The facade of social change is exemplified by the character of Ki-woo, who initially gets employment as a tutor for the Parks' daughter through a forged university degree. This deception becomes a metaphor for the systemic barriers that limit genuine advancement for the lower class. The film questions the ethical boundaries individuals are willing to cross in their pursuit of a better life, shedding light on the desperation bred by social inequality and the lack of humanity all too common in real life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, "Parasite" stands as a cinematic masterpiece that transcends genres to deliver an insightful commentary on the socioeconomic fabric of contemporary society. Through the intentional integration of Mise-en-scène and Cinematography, Bong Joon Ho crafts a visual picture that magnifies the stark disparities between those who are well-off and those who aren't

as fortunate. The economic and social contexts of the film are intricately placed into its narrative, encouraging the audience to confront uncomfortable truths about societal structures (Shim 2021).

The film's influence on society and culture is undeniable, it sparked global conversations about class struggle, economic inequality, and the illusion of "pulling yourself up from your bootstraps". "Parasite" serves as a mirror that reflects the inherent flaws within societal systems, urging viewers to question and reevaluate their perspectives on class, privilege, and the pursuit of the so-called "American Dream." As an artistic triumph, Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite" not only entertains but also educates us, leaving an undeniable mark on the cinematic landscape and the collective consciousness of its audience.

****Works Cited****

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