

Film Review as Interactive Process: An Application of Symbolic Interactionist Theories of Temporality

Richard L. Gee

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Western Illinois University
1 University Circle, Macomb
IL 61455 USA

Patrick J.W. McGinty

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Western Illinois University
1 University Circle, Macomb
IL 61455 USA

Shana L. Porteen

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Western Illinois University
1 University Circle, Macomb
IL 61455 USA

Abstract

Borrowing from Denzin's (1995) understanding of the cinematic gaze, this paper employs a symbolic interactionist framework to analyze the interactive and interpretive film viewing event: the film review. Using film reviews as a form of evidence of a film viewing event, this research contends that the film review can be analyzed not only for information about the film (in this case "W"), but also understood as evidence of the relationship between filmgoers, the film as a whole and the characters within the film. The evidence provided asserts that the viewing and review of films is a mediated, interactive and interpretive process undergirded by interpretations and perceptions of "the past" on the one hand and attributions of past experiences on the other. The paper concludes that such understandings demonstrate the potential for sociological analyses to make sense of both film and the film review as grounded, powerful, socially constructed phenomenon.

Keywords: Film, social processes, social theory, sociology, symbolic interactionism, temporality

1. INTRODUCTION

The images on television of election officials peering through punchcards have been emblazoned upon political spectators and participants for years to come. From November 7, to December 13 the outcome of the presidential contest between Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican candidate George W. Bush was debated in the courts, media and the public sphere. On December 13, Al Gore conceded the election after the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Bush v. Gore*. Dershowitz (2001) declared the decision "the single most corrupt decision in Supreme Court history" (p. 174). The contested election began the controversial presidency of George W. Bush's (Renshon, 2004).

Throughout George W. Bush's presidency, the polarization of Congress and subsequently the American public increased with the passage of highly divisive policies. Most notable of the divisive and contested policies were the passage of the Patriot Act which was suggested to be a threat to civil liberties, the basis for going to war with Iraq in the 2003 state of the union address with the infamous 16 words, "The British Government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa" (Woodward, 2006, p. 218), and the 1% doctrine coupled with the policy of pre-emption. However the citizens of the US made sense of the policies and procedures during the George W. Bush presidency, there continues to be considerable debate on the impact of his administration even after the transition into a different administration under a Democratic president. This debate has been extended into books, newspapers, and in film.

Oliver Stone in his film, “W” (2007) catalogs the presidency of George W. Bush. Stone’s film is a unique site, one which highlights the interactional processes of the cinema and lived experiences because of George W. Bush’s controversial presidency. In addition to presenting snapshots of events from W’s youth and pre-political endeavors, it recounts events during his administration as President of the United States. The uniqueness of this film compared to others of Stone’s films such as “JFK” (1991) or “Nixon” (1995) is that this film was created and released contemporarily to Bush’s presidency. At the time of the film’s release Stone claimed that the majority of the events depicted in the film were merely representations of accounts such a press briefings, news reports, documented meetings and biographical material. Furthermore, given the timing of the film’s release, for the viewing public as well as for the Bush presidency the power of the film and its presentation of events blurred the line between the everyday and the cinematic.

Norman Denzin (1995) highlights the significance of the blurring boundaries of fiction and reality, claiming that movies have become a technology that brings meaning to the lives of ordinary citizens. Suggesting that, “the cinematic imagination is now asked to work between two versions of reality; the cinematic and the everyday (Denzin, 1995, p. 36).” Furthermore, Denzin (1995) articulates the power of cinema in American society as the activity of social beings comparing their everyday lived experiences with what they have seen played out on the cinematic screen. Of interest to us, is the question of how do people construct meanings concerning their present experiences while interacting with films that present depictions of an experienced past? Our contention is that taken in conjunction with Denzin’s (1995) concepts of voyeur and gaze, there are interactional processes between “doing” as spectator and “being” as spectacle. Focusing our attention to readings of professional reviews of “W”, we demonstrate the interactional processes of rectifying experiences in the present with an implied objective past.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 The Voyeur and The Gaze

The synthesis of the cinematic and everyday lived experience involves two important facets of experience: the voyeur and the gaze. Films in their telling of stories, either fiction or recounts of events, present to us characters as voyeurs with located gazes. Simultaneously we as spectators experience the voyeur’s gaze in the films with our own voyeuristic gaze in the presence of the spectacle. Not only has the presence of the Denzin’s (1995) voyeur become central to modern film making, documentary or otherwise, but the gaze of which is employed by the voyeur is central to understanding cultural, historical, and social constructions of meaning given off by the film and the interpretations by an audience. According to Denzin (1995), the voyeur “becomes a metaphor for the knowing eye who see through the fabricated structures of truth that society presents itself” (p.2). During the advent of the cinema, American culture held dear social restrictions on certain spaces or activities that were not to be observed, both private and public. For example, political figures were known to engage in extra-marital activity, however this information was never covered in the press prior to about the 1970’s. Not only did everyday citizens tend to abide by this cultural proscription, but also institutions with considerable power over the dissemination of information to the public dutifully followed this social rule.

According to Denzin (1995) in his historiography of films of the 20th century, early American films projected this cultural sensibility on screen as well as actively regulating portrayals of certain activities that could be considered the perverted pleasure of a “peeping Tom”. The power of the camera’s gaze was understood as an apparatus that perpetuated the “realist” sensibilities deeply rooted in modern, positivistic projects in that it was believed that the lens could capture reality as it is (Denzin, 1995). The application of this power of the lens as a means of surveillance of society is well articulated by Foucault (1979, 1980). There was a fundamental shift in the perception of voyeurism to a certain degree during this period in the 20th century. Not to deny the tension between cultural sensibilities that prohibit “poking your nose in someone’s business” and the desire to “keep a watchful eye on the flock”, the power constructed around the camera’s lens redefined some types of voyeurs as “necessary evils”. In other words, turning the eyes to spaces that were once perhaps off-limits to gazing were being reconstructed as places where “real truth” may be uncovered. In line with Denzin (1995), we contextualize the voyeur as an epistemological stance.

2.2 The Voyeur’s Gaze and the “Truth”

As the mid-century voyeur came on the scene in the 1950’s, Alfred Hitchcock was, according to Denzin (1995), to be the “voyeur’s director” (p.116).

According to Denzin (1995), the gaze was central in each of Hitchcock's films throughout his cinematic career. The various shades of the gaze for Hitchcock included the illicit, investigative, political, accidental, and erotic. Accordingly, suggests that this notion of the relationship between being voyeur's director and the shading of the gaze is rooted in two premises:

1. The camera allows for the spectator's desire for scopic pleasure along with the need to reveal moral truth; and
2. Simultaneously, the camera acts as a moral authority (so that we may see the final truth) and the story demonstrates how those who violate moral codes are punished and brought to justice (Denzin, 1995, p.163).

Oliver Stone has been known to employ his voyeuristic camera as an agent of moral/political truth. Some of Stone's films where this is apparent are in films about past US presidents, such as "JFK" and "Nixon". According to Denzin (1995), Stone aims to uncover "Truths" that have been obscured by the power elite (Mills, 1956) or ignored by those with the power to officially reveal history. In his quest to present to the spectator alternative visions of truth, Stone employs various "texts" such as actual soundbytes or video, like the Zapruder film from Kennedy's assassination, to construct what Jameson (as cited in Denzin 1995, p.163) calls "conspiratorial text" to unveil reality that has been obscured or forgotten. To that end, the "conspiratorial text" is what Stone has been known for and thusly it is an offering of a once veiled reality that is expected by spectators. To some degree, the expectation of a conspiratorial text is based upon the new technologies that allow for the viewer to desire increasingly invasive forms of scopic pleasure. Technologies such as hidden cameras, email, and social networking sites provide for such voyeuristic pleasures as well as a "real" representation of the facts. Simultaneously though, it is assumed by many that those "in power" will manipulate the representation of the facts in order to maintain power. No matter the controversy, or political persuasion of the spectator, the "conspiratorial text" is expected in Stone's films and is recognizable even to the spectator who rejects Stone's presented reality.

2.3 The Conspiratorial Text

No matter the case thus far, in order to appreciate the interpretive processes associated with film, one must understand films and film review as more than "texts"- they are events, and they are acts, but the manner in which meaning is constructed out of them is a social process. The aforementioned claim rests on Mead's theory of temporality and the past. More specifically we are primarily interested in Maines, Sugrue and Katovich's (1983) argument that Mead's theory has four unique analytical dimensions: the socially reconstructed past; the social structural past; the implied objective past; and the mythical past. The *symbolically reconstructed past*, is the most commonly understood dimension of Mead's theory as it is the component that is grounded in the assertion that time is an ongoing, processual, directional endeavor (Maines, et. al., 1983).

The *social structural past*, according to Maines, et. al. (1983) hinges on an appreciation of change, sequencing, and continuity. Here, change is a process that involves both the reconstruction of pasts, but also the necessity that the past conditions action and thought in the present. The *implied objective past* hinges on Mead's assertion that, "the past is what must have been before it is present in experience as a past (Mead, 1929, p. 238)." Maines, et. al. (1983) note that Mead's reference is to the proposition of "a situational ontology pertaining to consensus about the facts of the past (p. 164)." Or, in other words, following the interpretation by Maines et. al., Mead is asserting the necessity of some past action around which consensus about the facts of the past is based on the obdurate realities that must have taken place in the past given the conditions of the present. That is to suggest, the implied objective past is the product of the symbolic reconstruction of the past to the extent that the symbolic reconstruction of the process demonstrates and allows for a collective acceptance of the factual basis of the relationship between the present and what was. Finally, the implied objective past is also quite possibly the result of the construction of a *mythical past* – a past which was constructed to support some intention or interest, but which is presumed to be a true and accurate accounting of the way things were (Maines, et. al., 1983).

The legitimation of a mythical past is found not in its empirical consequence, but rather in its continuity into a present. Mead, when referring to the empirical validity of pasts, writes "the validity of these pasts depends upon the continuities which constitute their structure (1929, p. 241)." Maines, et. al. interpret this phrase as suggesting that "the creation of a legitimate mythical past depends on ... a complex interactive process that links assumed courses of previous acts to an anticipated and apparently continuous direction (Maines, et. al., 1983, p. 165)."

Most significant among the ideas presented is the *implied objective past* – a unique analytic dimension of Mead’s theory of the past – is itself conditioned by its relation to and reliance upon the symbolically reconstructed past, and the potential for the construction of mythical pasts. On the one hand, symbolic reconstruction gives meaning to the memories of the past. On the other hand, there remains the potential for that which is remembered and/or the manner in which it is remembered to be a fictional or mythical construction. Clearly, the implied objective past is conditioned by its relation to the other analytical dimensions of Mead’s theory. Collectively, when dealing with film – which in these terms we understand as a symbolic re-construction of a set of intentionalities – it is critical to be able to account for, speak to, and analyze the relationship between the implied objective past, the symbolic reconstruction, and the mythical possibilities associated with the symbolic reconstruction of past(s) and past experiences as presented in the film.

2.4 Mead and Denzin

Our pasts are conditioned by our social environments and the way we perceive and interpret the present (Zerubavel, 1997). In the review of a past, the position of perception and the context in which the event or phenomenon is occurring provide insight into the implied objective past. This review of the past in relation to the present occurs from a particular location. Denzin (1995) new social type, that of the voyeur, articulates this location. Denzin (1995) uses the voyeur to articulate the gaze through which one views a film. This social type provides an area for blending between Mead and Denzin. The voyeuristic gaze formulated by Denzin (1995) and the issues of temporality and pasts formulated by Mead intertwine to form an analytic interactional framework for analyzing film and reactions to film. Symbolic interactionism and postmodernism rest on a similar theme that allows for the integration that we propose. “One theme shared by symbolic interactionism and postmodernism is that there is always an ongoing reification of the socially constructed world” (Musolf as cited in Reynolds 1993, p. X).

The voyeur’s gaze is connected with the other as exogenous to the individual and yet can be subject and object simultaneously. One takes on the other to view themselves and their own behavior. “I create my visible world through my acts of perception” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pg. 134). This creation of a visible world is the mechanism through which the implied objective past conditions meaning in the present based upon the act of perception into the past. The voyeur engages in reflection on pasts to make sense of their present. This conditioning of the present by pasts can occur as the interactional process of watching film. The film becomes a mediated form of interaction by which the elements of assembly and production and the viewer all engage in a conditioning of their present at all stages of production and reflecting upon their implied objective pasts. The voyeuristic gaze requires the conditioning by the past to provide continuity of the present interaction.

Mead’s concepts of the implied objective past and mythic pasts are present in film in as the viewer/reviewer interacts with the movie. As the voyeuristic gaze provides a position from which to interact with the film, the voyeur engages in a process of conditioning the experience with implied objective pasts or mythic pasts. The review of these pasts provides context through which the present experience is framed. The voyeuristic gaze as a social type bound to the human condition is past reflective. That is the voyeurs’ present is conditioned by the voyeurs’ interpretation of their pasts.

Viewers of cinema use their implied objective pasts to evaluate their present experience. This can be particularly evident for films of political events. Based upon a political affiliation or identification in conjunction with a particular implied objective history, one perceives the events represented in cinema. This evaluative and meaning making process is particularly of interest in the context of political film. The viewers participate in an interactive process of comparing congruity between their implied objective pasts and the present film. As the reviewer engages in their position of evaluator of film, they employ an implied objective past to provide commentary as to the storyline, camera use, acting, and other aspects of the film. The congruity or incongruity between the implied objective pasts and the present experience determine their evaluation of the film. In political film, this could also include their experience as associated with the politics presented in the film. This is particularly anyone who watches a movie based a lived experience. The viewer evaluates the film version of their implied objective past. Upon completion of the movie, the congruity or incongruity between the implied objective past and the present – the expectations of the viewer – are laid bare.

3. THE CASE

3.1 Types of Evidence

But what about “W.”? Were we offered up a copulation of fiction and truth that birthed a “factional account” of President Bush’s reign? According to Stone, he meant no malice or ill intent against the President with this film. Stone claims to merely offer up documented evidence of events in a cinematic forum. Consistent with Denzin’s (1995) claim that the reflexive cinema questions the presentation of truth through the camera, evidence is supplied to support the “truth”. According to Denzin (1995), the types of evidence are based on three criteria: “1. Was the source able to tell the truth?; 2. Was the primary witness willing to tell the truth?; 3. Is there any external corroboration of the details under examination?” (p.35). The corresponding evidence for the film is addressed by Stone. In addition to what was presented in the film, Stone provides corresponding evidence on a website (<http://www.wthefilm.com/guide/>) that provides corroborating information for each scene in the movie. One may follow along with the evidence as they watch the film as if to substantiate the substantiated, since most of what is presented in the film was information that was already public in some fashion.

The case we make is a theoretical one based on available empirical evidence. In order to make the case about the discontinuity of implied objective pasts (and the subsequent construction of mythical pasts through film) we rely on empirical evidence expressed through the professional film review. The film review provides evidence of the voyeur’s gaze being compared with the implied objective past of the reviewer. We assessed “professional” reviews of “W.” which collectively demonstrate unique trends with respect to reactions to the film. These reviews fell into two broad categories of “discordant”, and “accordant” interpretations of the film. Generally speaking “discordant” interpretations represent those where the implied objective past/reality of the viewer does not successfully align with the voyeuristic gaze allowed, presented, and defined by Stone – the film’s director. “Accordant” interpretations on the other hand suggests a synchronicity between expectations of the voyeuristic gaze of Stone, and the implied object past/reality of the viewer..

3.2 Discordant Reviews

The discordant review represents a disconnect between the director’s gaze and viewer’s expectation, as well as their divergent definitions of pasts (either of Bush as president or Stone as director), and even differences of assumptions about what is real. For some reviews and reviewers, the incongruence is based on an emboldened liberal critique of President Bush:

Considering Oliver Stone has created some of the most powerful and inflammatory political biopics in recent years, and the richness of the pool that is George W. Bush, it’s unfortunate that he misses the mark with W. The story of one of the most important and grotesque international figures of the last eight years got away...While the film looks good, it fails to engage making this not a compelling biography. It comes off as a record of Bush milestones, overshadowing how he got to be the way he is. It’s cool blamelessness is to be expected, but it’s too light handed to let us feel the heat Bush gave off” (Brody, 2008, p. 1).

Approaching George W. Bush, a Chief Executive with a shattered record and abysmal approval ratings who’s now ignored or avoided by even his fellow Republicans, might seem way too easy a task for Stone. Historians have for years placed Bush at the bottom of presidential rankings, and *The Daily Show*, considering his legacy, chillingly guessed that Dubya is aiming to be not only our worst President but also our last. Turns out Stone doesn’t want to be the final guy to join the lynch mob. (Corliss, 2008, p.1)

Here, the reviewer’s interpretation of the implied objective past of Stone’s previous biopic films suggests that W. should have, could have and would have been equally inflammatory. However, that is clearly not the gaze that Stone developed. In another case, a similar discordance is based on an incongruent interpretation of the role of director and how they could or should empower certain causes:

“W is an entertaining film that’s highly watchable and even downright fun at times; but the main problem is that the film is not controversial enough to stoke any long-smoldering fires of animosity...nor is it expository enough to reveal anything we didn’t already know. Oliver Stone is more entertaining being Oliver Stone, even if we don’t always agree with what he has to say or how he says it. Stone mentions that he and screen writer Stanley Weiser had no intention of bringing malice or judgment on the Bush administration, choosing to let the events speak for themselves. Admirable traits for gentlemen, not for filmmakers” (Wilkins, 2008, p.1).

How can skilled filmmakers who clearly want to make Bush look bad end up making him likeable? Maybe it's just by comparison to the other characters in the movie, whom they clearly hate much more. (Hoopes, 2008, p.1)

Stone gets points for speed and efficiency — he shot the picture over 46 days this spring and summer on a tiny \$30 million budget and gave it a rich, polished look — but not for the scope of his vision. *W.* isn't tragedy or farce; it's illustrated journalism, based mostly on extant Bush biographies and memoirs of early Bush appointees. All the incidents are there but not the insight. What's missing is the one thing Stone films have never lacked: a point of view (Corliss, 2008, p. 1).

Stone started shooting *W.* in May 2008, and his desire to be the door that hits **George W. Bush** in the arse on his way out of the White House has resulted in a film which is trivial, fatuous and – of all things for a Stone film – boring. (Mueller, 2008, p.1)

Or in other words, Stone not only adopted a heretofore unexpected gaze of impartiality, but that he did so with the end result of becoming a bad filmmaker, capable of producing little more than an entertaining film. Clearly, there is a disconnect – a discordance. Or in other words, the forms of incongruence suggest that while technically a good or entertaining film, as such the filmmaker adopted the wrong gaze and produced a film that was inconsistent with an implied objective reality. That is, the film did not expose new truths, it did not hold President Bush accountable for his actions, or as a filmmaker Stone did not do enough to condemn the President for his actions. In any event, one source of incongruence is that the film lacked in substance and perspective as well as the controversy some viewers expected (based on an implied objective past).

Interestingly, another form of discordance develops where the reviewers reject the film because of the implied past of the film's director as well as on the basis of the film's treatment of the subject matter.

Toss professionally incendiary Director Oliver Stone in the biopic ring with the worst president in U.S. history, and you rightly expect something more than a walk on the mild side. Josh Brolin is truly electrifying in the role of George W. Bush, from fuck-up son of privilege to fuck-up commander in chief, but Stone and Wall Street screenwriter Stanley Weiser can't decide whether to stick it to our departing president or just hug it out. Whatever you think of Dubya, he has balls. The movie doesn't (Travers, 2008).

Mr. Stone's take on the president, as comic as it is sincere, is bound to rile ax-grinders of every ideological stripe...he goes easier on Mr. Bush on screen than some of his off-screen remarks suggest...Mr Stone's work has never been located in restraint, but in excess (Dargis, 2008).

Another form of incongruent interpretation suggests that Stone's presentation was mostly satirical and comedic. Perhaps this notion is best summed by the thought that the film is comedic at times pulling some punches and the end result was equitable with "leftist" undertones. Or even more to the point: Yes. "W." is definitely satiric in intent and execution, and it has no love for the actions and policies of the man who has led, as the film's advertising puts it, "a life misunderstood." But those yearning for a red meat entrée, a kind of "Natural Born Killers" meets "JFK", will be disappointed...There are reasons to smile in this film, but not nearly as many as you'd think. (Turan 2008, p.1).

Stone presents that dynamism as a kind of animalism: Dubya is forever stuffing food into his mouth like a ravenous, non-house-trained dog. And it's used to malicious ends, as when he encourages racist political commercials - euphemised as "strong stuff" - to be broadcast in order to boost his father's presidential chances. (telegraph.co.uk)

In any event, the case remains clear that from this perspective, what Stone has produced and delivered is clearly not a truthful reality.

3.3 Accordant Reviews

Unlike the discordant interpretations, the accordant interpretation suggests that the film accounts exactly who and what Bush is and that the offering of events is sufficient enough to come to these conclusions. Furthermore, the congruent review also accepts not only the reality offered by Stone, but also the gaze used to deliver that perspective. The following review by Roger Ebert (2008) clearly illustrates this notion:

Oliver Stone's "W.", a biography of President Bush, is fascinating. No other word for it. I became absorbed in its story of a poor little rich kid's alcoholic youth and torturous adulthood. This is the tragedy of a victim of the Peter Principle. Wounded by his father's disapproval and preference for his brother Jeb, the movie argues, George W. Bush rose and rose until he was finally powerful enough to stain his family's legacy.

Unlike Stone's "JFK" and "Nixon," this film contains no revisionist history. Everything in it, including the scenes behind closed doors, is now pretty much familiar from tell-all books by former Bush aides, and reporting by such reporters as Bob Woodward. Though Stone and his writer, Stanley Weiser, could obviously not know exactly who said what and when, there's not a line of dialogue that sounds like malicious fiction. It's all pretty much as published accounts have prepared us for. (Ebert 2008, p.1).

Moreover, the congruent review alludes to the possibility of actually feeling sorry for President Bush after all is said and done. Ebert (2008) continues:

One might feel sorry for George W. at the end of this film, were it not for his legacy of a fraudulent war and a collapsed economy. The film portrays him as incompetent to be president, and shaped by the puppet masters Cheney and Rove to their own ends. If there is a saving grace, it may be that Bush will never fully realize how badly he did. How can he blame himself? He was only following God's will (Ebert 2008, p. 2).

By accepting both the reality and the gaze offered by Stone, the congruent interpretation of the film develops a less politicized, less stringent attack on either the film (or its characters) or the film-maker. W...offers a clear and plausible take on the current chief executive's psychological makeup and, considering Stone's reputation and Bush's vast unpopularity, a relatively even-handed, restrained treatment of recent politics...For a film that could have been either a scorching satire or an outright tragedy, "W." is, if anything, overly conventional, especially stylistically. The picture possesses dramatic and entertainment value, but beyond serious filmgoers curious about how Stone deals with all this president's men and women, it's questionable how wide a public will pony up to immerse itself in a story that still lacks an ending. (McCarthy, 2008, pg. 1)

The congruent review explains and explores – even becoming an apologist for the film-maker – how and why accepting the gaze and reality that Stone offers is a satisfactory one. In the end, what develops is the general sense that despite difference in political persuasion, the power of the film (as well as the power of film) is not simply in the acting or screenplay, or the direction, but rather in what was or was not accomplished through the film. Moreover, of equal importance what is the realization that "truth" - no matter what political persuasion is represented – becomes the recognition of a shared experience, based on the accordance or discordance of our interpretations of the various mythical or implied pasts in which we are enmeshed.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

What were we expecting of Stone in his film "W."? We were expecting or anticipating Stone's lens to be an agent of moral and political truth or a lens for *misinformation*? *This of course depends upon one's symbolic reconstruction of the past and the implied objective past(s)* being utilized or claimed. Those spectators who wanted Stone's lens to be the moral authority and bring to justice the ones who transgressed against basic human moral codes did not get what they had hoped. This is based in their implied objective past of an administration that was ideological and unjust. The other spectators who were convinced that Stone's film would be an entirely mythical reconstruction of the past could not argue against the reality he presented. This interpretation is based upon the implied objective past in relation to Stone as a director. According to Roger Ebert (2008), the film was "even handed". Much like the characters of the film, Stone, too, avoids being brought to justice because so many just do not know what to do with his "crime".

The power of Stone's gaze rests in what he did not do. He did not offer up the "conspiratorial text" and/or a politicized cinemagraphic bloodbath. At the same time, he did not provide the reconstruction of the past which wasn't without political commentary. In this sense, much like the tailor in the story of "The Emperor's New Clothes", Stone convinced us to wear his version of reality (which may or may not have been in any way distanced from actuality) and left us all naked.

The viewers were presented with a central character that undeniably violates basic human moral codes and is never punished for this. In addition, we as spectators are led into feeling a sense of pity for George W. Bush even if we held him in contempt. Moreover, Stone violates our expectations of either the “conspiratorial text” or misinformation and we have difficulty pinning accountability on him. The simple imaginary fabric of reality that Stone directs us to wear, leaves all of us in a specious present in which we have been caught naked by the voyuer's director.. As participants in human social life, as demonstrated by the available evidence in this case, we continually offer interpretations of the phenomenon around us. Accordingly, our interpretive, mean-making, sense-making, schema and commitments are not simply switched off (in favor of being entertained) during a film viewing episode. Instead, the film – as evidenced here – becomes an active part of our processual interpretations of our worlds, just simply in the sense that we give a film our attention during the viewing episode. In this sense, our reviews – spoken or written, professional or amateur – become the evidence of our interpretive processes during the viewing episode.

Given the evidence of a viewing episode, social actors demonstrate a commitment to particular versions, visions, or interpretations of the past (and the present) since those mythical, objective and subjective, real and perceived understandings of what was, must be made to make sense in light of what we witness during the viewing episode. The director of the film, using cinematic skills and techniques offers a particular vision which is either concordant and discordant with the perceived socially-derived versions of the historically conditioned realities in which we live. Film reviews then reflect the discordant or concordant nature of the relationship of the presented version of reality with our own historically, socially, and experientially conditioned realities.

The case presented here, and the proposed framework for the analysis of the joint interpretive processual understanding of film and film review offers a couple of significant positive contributions to the sociological literature in this area. First, it highlights the capacity for the study of social organization and classical symbolic interactionist theorizing to inform the effective use of post-modern theories in productive and useful ways. Second, to the extent that the generic assumption of symbolic interactionism is the processual elimination of theoretical dichotomies, the ability of the perspective to recast post-modern theories of the social significance of film as interactive, interpretive phenomenon shouldn't be too surprising. However to be able to effectively demonstrate how film viewing episodes is an active interpretive endeavor is a significant accomplishment. By illustrating the power of the conditioning influences associated with the production of film reviews, this case does present evidence to such a claim. Third, this framework moves the symbolic interactionist analysis of film into the realm of action-oriented, processually constructed social phenomenon. In accomplishing this, we are reminded that all social phenomenon can be analyzed as occurring within ongoing interpretive social processes. This is to suggest that the prospect of using theoretically informed research to promote the “uncovering” of general social processes is an idea that must be taken seriously. To the extent that this framework can be extended to other cases is a matter for empirical investigation. However, based on our findings in this case we offer an open call for our colleagues and peers to seek out opportunities to apply this framework to historically-conditioned, interpretatively-laden, social phenomenon.

REFERENCES

- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Brodie, A. (2008). “W- Movie Review.” [Online] Available: http://www.monstersandcritics.com/movies/reviews/article_1437660.php/w._-Moive_Review (March 18, 2010).
- Cheung, T., Ferwerda, E., Graves, P. D., Hon, J., Mapp, C., Ortenberg, T., Sterchi, T., Street, M., Whealy, D. & Yeung, A. (2007). *W: The Movie*. Emperor Motion Pictures.
- Clegg, S. (1989). *Frameworks of Power*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- CNN.com. (2001). “Bush says it is time for action.” [Online] Available: <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/ret.bush.coalition/index.html> (September 14, 2010).
- Corliss, T. (2008). “Oliver Stone’s Verdict on George W.” *Time Magazine*. [Online] Available: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1851110,00.html#ixzz1foFGUYvC> (January 8, 2009).
- Denzin, N. (1995). *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur’s Gaze*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dershowitz, A. (2001). *Supreme Injustice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Ebert, R. (2008). "W". *The Chicago Sun Times*. [Online] Available: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081015/REVIEWS/810150285> (March 18, 2010)
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punishment*. NY: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Hall, P. M. (1985). "Asymmetric Relationships and Processes of Power." In H. Farberman & R. Perinbanayagam, (Eds.), *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* (pp. 309-344). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Hall, P. M. (1997). "Meta-Power, Social Organization, and the Shaping of Social Action." *Symbolic Interaction*, 20, 397-418.
- Hall, P. M. & McGinty, P. J.W. (1997). "Policy as the Transformation of Intentions: Producing Program from Statute." *The Sociological Quarterly*, 38, 439-467.
- Hoopes, T. (2008). "Did "W" Backfire?". *National Review* [Online] Available: <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/226094/did-i-w-i-backfire/tom-hoopes> (January 7, 2009).
- Lacan, J. (1988). *The Seminar, Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, H. N. (1963). "Mead's Doctrine of the Past". *Tulane Studies in Philosophy*, 12, 52-75.
- Lindsey, L. L. (1990). *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Lyotard, J. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Maines, D., Katovich, M., & Sugrue, N. (1983). "The Sociological Import of G. H. Mead's Theory of the Past". *American Sociological Review*, 48, 161-173.
- McCarthy, T. (2008). "Film Reviews: W". *Variety*. [Online] Available: <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117938628?refcatid=31> (January 12, 2009).
- Mead, G. H. 1929. "National Mindedness and International Mindedness". *International Journal of Ethics*, 39, 382-407.
- Mead, G. H. 1936. *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. M. H. Moore (Ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Meuller, Andrew. (2008). "Film Review: W". [Online] Available: http://www.uncut.co.uk/film/oliver_stone/reviews/12394 (January 11, 2009).
- Milchan, A. (1991). *JFK*. Warner Brothers Pictures.
- Renson, S. A. (2004). *In His Father's Shadow: The transformations of George W. Bush*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reynolds, L. T. (1993). *Interactionism: Exposition and Critique*. (3rd ed.). Dix Hills, NY: General Hall, Inc.
- Satre, J. (1956). *Being and Nothingness*. NY: Philosophical Library.
- Stone, O., Townsend, C., & Vajna, A. G. (1995). *Nixon*. Cinergi Pictures Entertainment.
- Telegraph. (2008). "W, Oliver Stone's Biopic of George Bush: Review". [Online] Available: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3562954/W-Oliver-Stones-biopic-of-George-Bush-review.html> (January 7, 2009).
- Travers, P. (2008). "W." *Rolling Stone*. [Online] Available: <http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/22717752/review/23638454/w> (February 25, 2009).
- Turan, K. (2008). "A Compassionate, Conservative W". *Los Angeles Times*. [Online] Available: <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/oct/17/entertainment/et-w17> (January 11, 2009).
- Wilkins, Frank. (2008). "W". [Online] Available: <http://www.franksreelreviews.com/reviews/2008/w.htm> (February 25, 2009).
- Woodward, B. (2006). *State of Denial*. NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Zerubavel, E. (1997). *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.