

Violence and Film in the US

Complexities in Film Violence

- “Violence” is not a single thing.
- Is only physical violence violence, or are emotional and psychological violence to be considered?
- How violence is defined and the steps taken to regulate it are *political actions*.

Complexities in Film Violence

- Elements to be considered in analysis:
 - the act
 - the actor (perpetrator *and* performer)
 - the victim
 - the motivation of the act
 - the representation of the act
 - the narrative context in which the act occurs
 - the tone or mood of the film
 - the purpose for which the act is presented
 - strategies of spectator attachment
 - reception situation

How Violence Is Made Palatable

- narrative and style
 - constructive versus destructive violence
 - secure/paranoid endings
 - violence as ritual
 - **iconic stars**
 - **iconic weapons**
 - displacement in time and/or space
 - **stylized violence, cartoony excess**
 - **non-realistic cinematic style: nondiegetic music, obtrusive cinematography and/or editing, obvious CGI and SFX**

De Quincey's two-handled cup



Example: *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)



Violence as Ritual



Iconic Stars



Iconic Weapons



Stylized Violence



Tarantino and the 1990s: Balletic Bloodshed and Mixed Responses



Cartoony Violence



Problematic Example: Spectator Attachment



Problematic Example: Using Violence to Critique Violence



Criticism of the MPAA

- “Ratings creep”
- most apparent in PG-13 and R categories
- filmmakers push for PG-13 ratings for commercial reasons
- nonviability of NC-17 → R ratings for extreme content

Common Beliefs about Mediated Violence

- A cathartic way to cope with fears
 - *no evidence for this*
- Viewers attach to perpetrators of violence
 - *little evidence for this in horror films*
- A social safety valve for aggression
 - *no evidence for this*