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# THE MESSAGE AND THE MOVIES

## CINEMA AS IDEOLOGY

### Week 9: Consume, Conform, Obey!

#### *They Live* (1988)

Directed by John Carpenter

- Nada' means nothing in Spanish
- He arrives at a homeless camp to seek work
- We see numerous images of people gazing blankly into TV sets – allowing the vapid content to wash over them
- It is clear that something is wrong with America

*"10 minutes of cognitive dissonance as sublime as anything in the history of paranoid cinema."*

**Jonathan Lethem**

- It's at this point the movie – essentially a cheap 50s style B Movie, becomes a thinly veiled critique of a consumerist society

*"They Live, Carpenter's 1988 paranoid freak-out, deserves to be thought of as a masterpiece, an artist's defiant last grab at substance before losing the thread. It's a cheesy but lovable movie about a working-class hero, struggling to find work in a harshly class-riven Los Angeles. He discovers, after slipping on a pair of special sunglasses, that the city's abundant population of yuppies are aliens. It's that simple: Yuppies are aliens."*

**Rolling Stone**

- A reaction to the Reagan years
- Working class hero
- A down beat blues style soundtrack – depicting the mood of the country?
- Presents us with the 'reality' of the American Dream
- Is explicit in showing us that the media is implicit in this problem

#### The Protracted Fight Scene

- Many have criticized it as either being there to please Roddy Piper or as fleshing out
- This scene could also reflect the sad truth that many parts of society are directed towards attacking each other – when their enemy is often above them
- The amount of time the fight takes can reflect the amount of time some people need to accept 'the truth' about their situation
- Often our anger is drawn away from true source of our problems
- The media/ideology directs us to criticise 'the other'
- Different cultures ('terrorists')
- Refugees ('swarms')
- Poorer people ('scroungers')
- The disabled ('benefit cheats')

*"They Live is also an essential film for the current socio-political moment; it has much to teach the American people as they struggle to make sense of wanton police brutality against people of color and the poor in the new Gilded Age, an era of toxic white masculinity, and perverse reactionary right-wing politics."*

**The Salon**

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*“You have to understand something: It’s a documentary. It’s not science fiction.”*

**John Carpenter**

### **The Greenbaum Effect**

- At a major medical conference in 1992 Doctor Corydon Hammond claimed that–
- A Jewish scientist (Greenbaum) worked with the Nazis during WWII
- He is supposed to have taught them satanic mind-control techniques learned from the kabbalah
- After the war this sinister figure came to the United States, where the CIA recruited him in their efforts to perfect brainwashing
- In this anti-Semitic fantasy Greenbaum helped create a demonic America made up of “mental robots” engaged in everything from gunrunning to child molestation rings

*“Hammonds claims call for chilly sarcasm. His age-old anti-Semitic tropes and laughable suggestions of satanic influence, however, hide the fact that almost every one of his unsustainable claims has a real-world analogue, a refracted mirror image of his easily falsifiable assertions.”*

**Poole, W.S. (2022) p.66**

- The CIA and the Pentagon *did* recruit Nazis to work toward American hegemony in the Cold War.
- The CIA also engaged in experiments with mind-control, primarily with LSD, focused on the prison population
- And while there is no evidence of satanic child molestation covens, gunrunning has been a foundation of American foreign policy

*“The Greenbaum effect is the tendency of Americans to choose outlandish and unsupported conspiracy theories while ignoring the conspiratorial actions of political and economic elites that are backed by evidence.”*

**Poole, W.S. (2022) p.66**

### **Eyes Wide Shut (1999)**

Stanley Kubrick

#### **Masks**

- Masks play a key visual part in the film
- Masks are found everywhere
- Masks are linked to bedrooms throughout the film
- Perhaps hinting that we can only truly fulfill our sexual desires when we wear masks

#### **Infidelity**

- Fidelio – the password Bill is given is the name of Beethoven’s only opera
- (*Fidelio/Leonore, or The Triumph of Marital Love*) - The film’s main theme is faithfulness/infidelity

### **Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman**

- They were the ‘IT’ couple of their day
- The film seems to mock this level of celebrity fakery and its pre-nups and veneer
- The couple within the film (Alice and Bill) wear ‘happy masks’ in public to hide the broken relationship

### **Alice**

- Many scenes where Alice is looking into a mirror
- Perhaps suggesting this is 'Alice' peering into 'The Looking Glass' looking for an 'alternative reality'
- There are scenes which hint that Alice is only with Bill for his money
- She knows where his wallet is
- She 'solves' a maths problem for her daughter by showing how men can be compared in terms of wealth

### **Rainbows and Multi-coloured Lights**

- We see Rainbows at key points in the film
- This is also underscored with multi-colored lights – in virtually every scene Bill walks into
- This may hint again at the fakery of modern celebrity
- The only place not daubed in rainbows or multi-colored lights is the mansion – to emphasize its separation from 'reality'.