Access all Areas?: Censorship and Cult Cinema in the Digital Era


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Abstract

The neoliberal character of western film regulation has, across the last two decades, oscillated between the apparently contradictory poles of liberalising and restrictive regulatory practices. Beginning within a comparative analysis of US and UK regulatory contexts, this chapter draws out some of the key differences between the practices of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC); in particular, it considers the impact of their policies on the cultification of violent and controversial forms of cult cinema, and examines how these two institutions have responded to an increasingly divided cultural landscape by catering to both ends of the spectrum of popular opinion, albeit in very different ways. Developments in the regulation of cult cinema are also considered in the context of changing patterns of film distribution and issues around digital piracy. The second half of the chapter then discusses the regulation and circulation of Antichrist (Lars von Trier, 2009) Grottesque (Koji Shiraishi, 2009), A Serbian Film (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010), The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence) (Tom Six, 2011) and Hate Crime (James Bressack, 2012), as case studies for considering whether or not instances of film censorship are capable of generating the same levels of subcultural cachet as they did in the pre-digital age. These shifts in regulatory processes and policies, which have played out against the rapidly evolving backdrop of digital distribution networks and the rise of Netflix culture, are thus evaluated in terms of their significance in relation to the cultification of cinema in the digital era.

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© UEA 2009. All rights reserved. University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK. Telephone: +44 (0) 1603 456161 Accessibility Statement Legal Statements The cinema of the United States, often metonymically referred to as Hollywood, has had a large effect on the film industry in general since the early 20th century. While Frenchmen Auguste and Louis Lumière are generally credited with the birth of modern cinema, American cinema soon came to be a dominant force in the industry as it emerged. It This era witnessed the beginning of the breaking apart of censorship within movies as they shifted toward more frank portrayals of realism. The once forbidden issues of sex and realistic violence slowly emerged onto the silver screen as films addressed the topical and controversial more often. This dramatic change within American cinema in terms of censorship and the increase of portrayals of sex and violence are exemplified in the 1960s films The Last Picture Show, Sunday, Bloody Sunday, and The Exorcist. The Last Picture Show (1971), a film about the decline of cinema, America, small town life, and traditional values, personifies the end of censorship in the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.