

Groundhog Day as a Model for the Repeating Spectator and the Film Academic: Re-Watching the Same Films Again Can Create Different Experiences and Ideas

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Abstract : Groundhog Day (Harold Ramis, 1993) may seemingly be a fairly unremarkable Hollywood comedy film in the 90s, it is argued that the film, with its protagonist Phil (Bill Murray), inadvertently, but perfectly, demonstrates an important aspect in filmmaking, film spectatorship and film research: repetition. Very rarely does a narrative film use one, and only one, take in its shooting. The multiple 'repeats' of Phil's various endeavours due to his being trapped in a perpetual loop of the same day — from stealing money and tricking a woman into a casual relationship, to his multiple suicides, to eventually helping people in need — make the process of doing multiple 'takes' in filmmaking explicit. But perhaps more significantly, Phil represents a perfect model for the spectator/cinephile who has seen their favourite film for multiple times that they can remember every single detail. Crucially, their favourite film never changes, as it is a recording, but the cinephile's experience of that very same film is most likely different each time they watch it again, just as Phil's character and personality has completely transformed, from selfish and egotistic, to depressed and nihilistic, and ultimately to sympathetic and caring, even though he is living the exact same day. Furthermore, the author did not come up with this stimulating juxtaposition of film spectatorship and Groundhog Day the first time the author saw the film; it took the author a few casual re-viewings to notice the film's self-reflexivity. And then, when working on it in the author's research, the author had to re-view the film for more times, and have subsequently noticed even more things previously unnoticed. In this way, Groundhog Day not only stands for a model for filmmaking and film spectatorship, it also illustrates the act of academic research, especially in Film Studies where repeatedly viewing the same films is a prerequisite before new ideas and concepts are discovered from old material. This also recalls Deleuze's thesis on difference and repetition in that repetition creates difference and it is difference that creates thought.

Keywords : narrative comprehension, repeated viewing, repetition, spectatorship

Conference Title : ICCFMS 2017 : International Conference on Cinema, Film and Media Studies

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : June 28-29, 2017