

Practice Makes Perfect

Reel Appeal

Campus Digest News Service

Movie trends are usually caused by one movie of such popularity that producers rush to copy the ingredients. "Airport" was released in 1970, and no more than two years later, the disaster picture was upon us. "Star Wars" was released in 1975 and one year later, science fiction movies were reborn. In other words, a popular movie of a new genre will be copied with far less competence and exploited for every penny that can be made.

That has been a rule of the motion picture industry for years. From "Earthquake", "Tidalwave," and "Hurricane," to "Battle Beyond the Stars," and "Battlestar Galactica," there seems an endless supply of these formula rip-offs. The idea is this: Movie A makes a lot of money. Therefore, if movies B-Z include the very same ingredients, they should make money too.

Unfortunately, what is usually left out of these unoriginal products is the imaginative artistry that made the first movie so special. The result is a barrage of forgettable pictures that quickly grow tedious.

As unfortunate as all of this is, there has never been a more disturbing movie trend than the one that we presently have. In 1978, "Halloween" was released and successfully managed to scare every audience who saw it. Not only did it catch fire at the box-office but soon became a mold for more than two dozen assembly-line horror movies.

"Halloween" was about a missing lunatic who stalked a group of girls with a long, silver knife trying to dice and slice them to death. It was competently made by John Carpenter who generally had one thing in mind, to provide a scare like never before. How he accomplished this goal was through slick camera work, credible pacing, and an exuberant telling of plot. "Halloween" is full of scares but it doesn't have as much gore as we think it does.

Carpenter knows the key to making good, scary movies. It isn't what you show, it's what you conceal.

The barrage of "Halloween" carbon copies stole three basic elements that show up in all of their plots: 1) they include a mentally disturbed killer on the loose in some secluded setting, 2) that killer is usually after far more women than men and 3) the "bad girls" are the ones to die while the "good girls" miraculously survive the nightmare.

"Prom Night," "Friday the 13th," "Silent Screams," "The Boogey Man," "Schizoid," and "Terror Train" are only a few of the movies inspired by "Halloween". In each film, a terrible killer is on the loose in some unusual setting. In "Silent Screams," the background is a college apartment, in "Prom Night," the horrifying violence takes place at a prom dance (this movie was also a "Carrie" rip-off) and in "Friday the 13th," the setting is a summer camp.

All this means is that we have a new movie trend of the very same structure as the trends of the past. That is hardly worth a mention but where this trend slips beyond tastefulness is in its repeatedly degrading use of women.

Returning to "Halloween" for a moment we can see exactly where this all started. A group of girls are terrorized by one killer who roams the neighborhood on a lonely, halloween night. In the end, only the virgin survives. The girls who fool around don't live long enough to feel guilty the next morning.

"Halloween" appears to be making a moral judgement it has no business making. Although some critics found the movie to be the best in horror since "Psycho," it is a little more than a good scare, with some questionable values.

Fortunately, those questionable values are well enough disguised by John Carpenter's clever direction. The joy of the movie is not in

the girl's suffering but in the killer and when he will or won't pop out next.

It is precisely this element where the clones of "Halloween" differ. They lack any artistic integrity and seem to exist solely for their brutal attacks on defenseless, "naughty," women. Their camera is filled with slow-motion slashings, brutal stabbings, and horrifying rapes. Unlike "Halloween," there appears to be no fun in even making these movies. We could almost visualize Carpenter smiling and having a good time as he tried to shock and scare, but here, there exists a depressing attitude toward the subject material.

"I Spit on Your Grave," was one movie that two famous Chicago critics, Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel, called the worst they had ever seen. Both of the reviewers worked to have the film taken out of the sleazy theatres at which it was playing.

"I Spit on Your Grave" could very well be the worst and most offensive movie ever seen and yet, the basis for its lack of integrity can be found in the more familiar horror movies as well. It's about a woman who is brutally raped and beaten three times before she returns for a hideous revenge.

There is no attempt at character development or establishing a storyline.

The movie isn't merely bad. It must have been made by sick people. There is no other reason or possible explanation for its existence. The movie is nothing more than a collection of vulgar images photographed with no more care than a home movie.

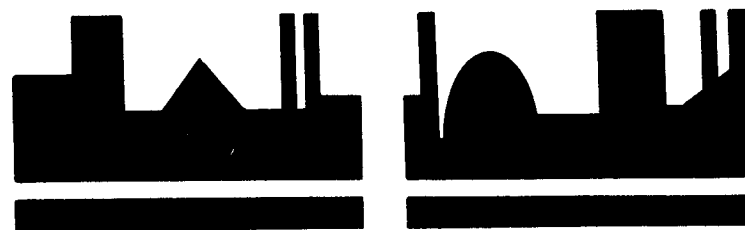
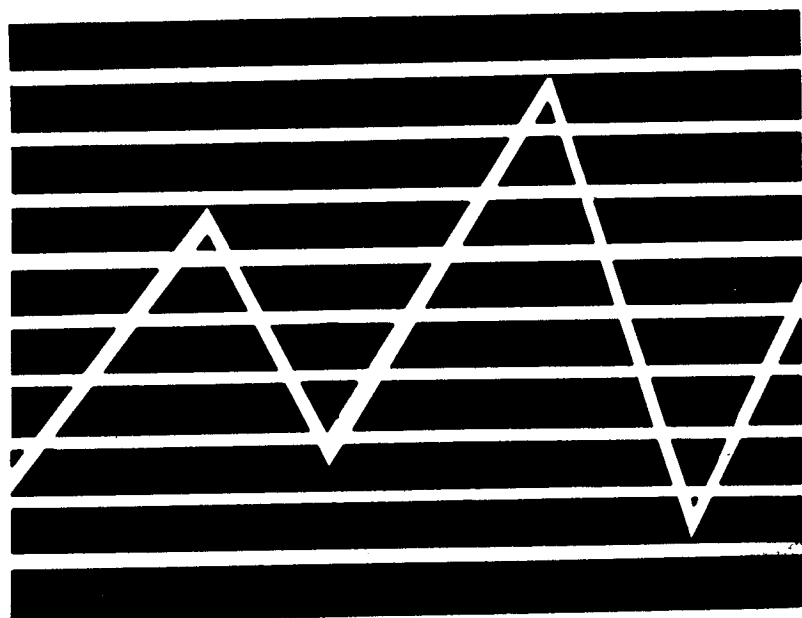
Films like "Prom Night" and "Silent Screams" may not be quite as bad but they are missing the same art, the same values. Sadly enough, people are flocking to their local theatres to see these shallow, brutally violent stories. For movies that call themselves horror movies, that's a sad and scary thought.

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