

Visual Culture as Empathetic Trend in Higher Education for Teaching Law and Communication: A Case of Jonathan Demme's "*Philadelphia*"

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Abstract

Law and Literature as visual texts have much to offer to contribute to the communication studies. There are many a literary text in different manifestations and forms that it adopts to stand for teaching laws that communicate human values and the structuring of the various systems in the society that helps an individual to understand rights and roots to live and occupy space with dignity. A text in broader sense of the term pertains to large number of visuals and films that beautifully communicate the meaning of the expressions in the forms of quotes, scenes and indicators for bringing about criticism and sustenance in life. These films and visuals stand exemplary in educating the stakeholders, students in general and legal professionals in particular to understand and interpret the laws that emerge from human society where rights associated with the birth of being a human becomes remarkably a priority above all laws as life is the greatest gift of God. The power of communication that exists in these visual texts is understood therapeutically, and through a realization that establishes laws for structuring human society and not humans as a society to go for stringent laws. A Case of Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* presents Visual Culture and Visual Texts as Empathetic Trend in Higher Education for Teaching Law and Communication. Human child is born with a competent brain to read and criticize the ingredients and variables that satisfies him or her for a good living, if not better. The priority and the choices that one makes up to defend his rights to live with dignity is deeply realized, and the heart of the audience coincides to make an agreement with the same in a forceful manner through the portrayal of this visual texts. This paper uses A Case of Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* as a tool to teach and educate people regarding the issues that structuralizes the existing systems in general, and laws in particular in our society.

Keywords: Law, Visual Culture, Philadelphia, Communication, Rights, Literature

There are many a literary text in different manifestations and forms that it adopts to stand for teaching laws that communicate human values and the structuring of the various systems in the society that helps an individual to understand rights and roots to live and occupy space with dignity. In this series, a literary text in broader sense of the term pertains

to large number of visuals and films that beautifully communicate the meaning of the expressions in the forms of quotes and statutes for bringing about criticism and sustenance in life .These films and visuals stand exemplary in educating the stakeholders , students in general and legal professionals in particular to understand and interpret the laws that emerge from human society where rights associated with the birth of being a human becomes remarkably a priority above all laws as life is the greatest gift of God . The power of communication that exists in these visual texts is understood therapeutically, and through a realization that establishes laws for structuring human society and not humans as a society to go for stringent laws. Human child is born with a competent brain to evaluate enough of the variables that satisfies him or her for a good living, if not better. The priority and the choices that one makes up to defend his rights to live with dignity is deeply realized, and the heart of the audience coincides to make an agreement with the same in a forceful manner through the portrayal of such visual texts, and can be used as a tool to tech and educate people regarding the issues that structuralizes the existing systems in general, and laws in particular in our society.

The world of cinema is often a true reflection of human life with all its emotions, gestures and behavioral patterns, and shows a complete society in miniature. It prepares a base for a unique kind of visual language that speaks very high affecting the mind of the receptor directly. In a way, no mental filter is required to receive the message as intended and portrayed through a particular cinema .It affects the grey matter in such a way that it connects the ideas directly to the heart, and therefore, directs the action of the audience or the receptors. Every cinema is itself a form of literature where there is an open space given to the audience to react upon without making any kind of delay in interpreting the substructure of ideas ,which is portrayed in the form of fiction ,non-fiction or any other form of literature .The assisting scenario of any film ,for instance, its backdrops with reference to light ,landscape ,symbolic features, music and other related settings, directs and adds an additional meaning to interpretation process attempted by an audience or individual who rates this cinema or film as the plethora of working ideas and behavioral patterns, that consciously or unconsciously becomes the part and parcel of this kind of audience. Cinema can bring a momentum of good and bad both, can correct or say it incorrect , can judge or defy ,can match or betray the emotions of human kind .Sometimes a human being engrossed into so many activities fails to register with us the wrongs that utterly need our attention for a better survival and a better society. We cannot guarantee that the suffering bore by the person in front will never become a part of our lot .In other words what is happening with the one person in cinema or any other text can also happen with other and it shows us the patterns that remain insensitive towards such wrongs that ail our society else it would become the ailment for the masses bring sinister effects on humanity.

The case study of Hollywood film *Philadelphia* brings to us the reflection of one such society which can be seen as having narrow escape from the travails and tribulations that life inflicts upon it. Andrew, an outstanding lawyer, doing immensely good for the life of self and others, is someday being exposed as a homosexual AIDS patient. It is also a fact with reference to the society concerned, that "if popular perceptions of AIDS mainly reflect the realities of the epidemic, recent public opinion data should show a decreased tendency for the American public to think of AIDS primarily in terms of homosexuality. However, if public reactions to AIDS continue to serve substantially as symbolic expressions of attitudes toward homosexuality," (Gregory M. Herek & John P. Capitanio 2).

From here onward Andrew, the protagonist faces a society which not only neglects him but tries every reason to devastate the remainder of his existence. Having felt as neglected and suffocated person, Andrew brings forth to us to us to think on not only the rights that a human being possesses and should fight for, but also brings to fore the case of a professional in true sense of the term. Andrew has been vocal in finding his well built reputation and dignity towards his remaining survival. The portrayal of Andrew's struggle and his stands against the odds of the society is very inspiring especially to the budding lawyers towards making them great in their professions.

In the film, Andrew Beckett is shown, a very successful lawyer who conceals his sexual orientation and HIV status from his senior associates and employers at Wyant & Wheeler, the law firm where he works. When he was promoted to the position of "Senior Associate," he is shown to have given, a very important case. Andrew Beckett, somehow found himself infected with HIV virus and became a regular visitor to hospital. Under the supervision of the doctors, he had a desire to keep contributing to legal services that he could serve in his best capacity to the people for whom he finds befitting to bring justice. He did his best to satisfy his clients and hope to do the same in future too. He has always been on the expectations of the law firm, Wyatt and Wheeler for which he worked. At a point of time in his life, when he tried to hide his disease, he was exposed as incompetent lawyer in making up preparation for a case whose back up files were also missing for sometime, which lately appeared before his case was taken in the court. Andrew, here, felt emotionally derailed.

With the movement of the plot of *Philadelphia*, later on an important development takes place which brings unfortunate effects. A document related with this important case is misfiled at the same time, when Kaposi's Sarcoma lesions of an irrecoverable nature appear on his face. Because of the misfiling, of this case, Andrew was accused of incompetence, and of becoming a negligent lawyer. Subsequently he is fired from his job. The plotting and firing against Andrews can also be a case of homophobia¹ (a coinage by George Weinberg). However, the strong willed Andrew smelled something fishy and well

plotted about the entire story against him, as the cause for being fired from the firm. He was somewhere sure that he was fired because of his HIV status and sexual orientation.

In a true professional spirit, he goes in search of a lawyer who could take up his case to defend him in winning spirit. Finally he hires Joe Miller, an African-American outstanding lawyer, known as “Ambulance Chaser”. Joe Miller represents Andrew against the firm Wyant and Wheeler. He finds that this discrimination is based on an individual’s health situation.

It is, important here to ponder over those laws where discriminating behavioral patterns of the society emerge and regulate the entire mechanism with this kind of scepter in which innocent individuals are swayed, and are completely devastated morally as well physically, as is the case of Andrew Beckett. On this pretext, it is shown how the partners of the law firm at Wyatt and Wheeler justify their action of firing an extremely well gaining professional –Andrew Beckett. However, one can always argue that firing Andrew because of his homosexual orientation and his AIDS sickness would prevent unnecessary grapevine stories and unhealthy time pass talks that might hamper the smooth working styles of the other individuals of the law firm, and therefore, the mass progress of the firm would not be hampered but on the other hand, the space of the individual is victimized for the reasons uncontrollable for him.

Andrew could realize that the firm’s decision to fire him all of a sudden on fake charges of he being a negligent job professional, was a blunt blow to his entire legal services that he extended to the firm and the people concerned. Andrew, somewhere, had a clue that since his partners at the firm were aware of his sexual orientation, and later on used his ailment used a particular kind of pretext to fire him of his position which instigated his litigating mettle that he actually has a very strong case to represent him in the court of law. That is the procedure adopted by the partners at the firm itself was a law firm, which was enough for a brilliant lawyer like him to be emotionally challenged. For him, it was beyond the scope of business and professional ethics to understand this kind of decision. This trope again opens before the audience the vast vistas of scope of misunderstanding, hidden motives of the partners of the firm at Wyatt and Wheeler in on discussing the case Beckett’s ailment and his sexual orientation frankly with him why the partners did not find fit to discuss the case of Beckett’s deadly ailment and its future consequences to his physical and emotional health? Even though they being his good friends. Moreover they could have discussed the effects of Beckett’s ill health and deteriorating physical and mental health consequences on the other individuals and mass professionals of that law firm who has every right to work in a health and sustainable environment-the partners could have also discussed the other increasing cost burden on mass individuals of the firm due to health insurance policies and other related prospects and there could have been more possibilities

of strengthening Andrew's emotional side of the case in this realization to accept his separation from the firm, leaving him with the scope of understanding his case as a separate individual who should opt for an alternate space to lead his further life. Andrew, as audience, we have observed as a compassionate and understanding, rational and extremely talented and educated fellow. Had he been given a chance for a fair talk and frank opinion of discussion, the entire scene might have been observed differently.

In view of the collective wellness of society it may be argued that each mini narrative is significant and proves contributory in regulating the social set up of society. Laws, codes, statutes and just procedures have a pivotal role in structuring our society. Legislations should have their implications in furthering a society towards growing humanity and popularizing civilized culture for a harmonious and peaceful co-existence of the system and for the system, else there would not be its long lasting identity and it would be loosened with the mainstream system in a short span of time. Laws are for the people and for their sustainable growth and development, moreover its foregrounding on which it is based is also to be checked time and again to meet emergent situation or situations of society. In case of *Philadelphia*, we come across a society where there is one law for one specific individual and for the masses working in the same environment, it is the other. This paradox and dichotomy is visible everywhere. Conclusively the syllabi that are structured to teach and communicate the relevance of existing laws in our society justify the inclusion of such visual texts as *Philadelphia* that has a far reaching impact in creating a vision that longs for a harmonious society where fair justice shall prevail.

This attempt of reading a visual text, therefore, offers immense scope of not only understanding the statutes and codes or rules that govern our society but also therapeutically treats human psyche, heart and mind to read between the lines the gap that is needed to be bridged for a harmonious society with humanitarian values. Visual texts, Media and Film studies can help us to understand the inclusion of exemplary and illustrative cultural and popular ingredients decoding theoretical knowledge as evident practices prevalent in our society. Higher Education, therefore, can opt to include such readings in the curriculum for not less than translating difficult ideas in everyday terms for suggesting lawmakers or policymakers to evaluate rationality and reasonable code for governing a society of diverse colors yet united.

Note

(i)Psychologist George Weinberg published "Society and the Healthy Homosexual" (1972) and introduced this term that was new to most of his readers, homophobia. With that one word, Weinberg neatly challenged entrenched thinking about the "problem" of homosexuality."

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