Case Study: Super 8
Super 8 is 2011 Science-Fiction Adventure Film, directed by J.J. Abrams. The film is an homage to 70s and 80s Spielberg films in script and in style, causing many reviewers to recall films from that period and genre. Some of the descriptions overlap with the director’s stated influences, others are inferred similarities.

Structure - Properties of A Film Mixture

A strong Transformers meets Monty Python, in space!

Qualification Description Twist

X meets Y X/Y/Z mix of X and Y mashup of X and Y combination of X and Y Offspring of X and Y

With a great Tarantino French Tim Burton Kubrick Lynch British Star Trek Japanese James Bond Hugo Scorsese Christmas Maplet

Common Patterns of Description through Mixture

Sherlock Holmes meets Godzilla

Film Description through Comparison

PETER ORGANISCIAK meets MICHAEL TWIDALE

Archetypes

Many films recur often as archetypes: a Rosetta Stone for a shared language of film. While occasionally the reason for the similarity is noted, generally the purpose of a citation is unspoken, assumed to be apparent. When mixed, the contexts of what the cited films represent also mix, alternating between facets such as genre, themes, and atmosphere.

Introduction

Describing things briefly, clearly and well is hard work. We know that – we study it and try to do it in many parts of US. Describing a movie is quite a challenge – especially if you are trying to do a good job in just a few words. Using a set of nearly 8 million Amazon user reviews of films we find that some people are able to use a very terse and yet surprisingly effective way of describing some aspects of what makes the movie stand out - a qualified mixture of other films.

These descriptions seem to get to the heart of the movie, in a way that many people who have seen the movie can agree with. They are clearly inspired by the popular culture view of the movie pitch – where an idea for a movie has to be described to busy executives as clearly and quickly as possible.

We explore examples of this activity through 7,911,684 Amazon user reviews of films (McAuley and Leskovec 2013) to understand how, and when they are effective and speculate on the potential of this approach to inform novel information organization and access.

Questions

How do people describe films by the "pitch", eliciting other films for helping a listener understand a film?

How efficient is it to create these descriptions? What would be lost if we tried to generate them?

How effective is this form of description for the receiver? When do these descriptions fail? How does it apply to our ability to communicate information objects in any medium in a clear, understandable way?

In Their Own Words

Reviewers explain the reasons because their citations

"Take Kane (kids experimenting), Close Encounters (the grand evacuation), ET (in the end, the alien was a misunderstood cute), Transformers (the self assembling cubes), Closecounter (the monster is a reduced copy)"

"Coming of age characters reminiscent of The Sandlot, Stand by Me, and The Wonder Years - I grew up with kids just like these... A story about the military and an alien that is ever bit as enjoyable as Close Encounters and ET."

"This film also reminds me of Stand By Me because it truly captures the mind of a 13 year old perfectly"

Examples

Film: "a cross between Mr. Mom and Kindergarten Cop"

Film: "12 Monkeys meets The Terminator"

Film: "a cross between Toy Story, Superman, and Office Space."

Film: "Mad Max Meets Star Wars"

Film: "Dances With Wolves meets Miami Vice"

Future Directions

- Satisfaction survey do recipients feel that they understand a film that has been described through a mixture?
- Generation: can we adopt the findings of this study to describe new films or other information objects?
- Can this approach be useful for things other than movies? Books? Research papers? Datasets?