



TRANSCRIPT

Cinema Review – The Social Network

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Broadcast Monday 15 November 2010 at 8.30pm

Repeat broadcast Friday 19 November 2010 at 9am

When I was about eleven or twelve years of age, I somehow acquired an American penfriend. I don't recall just how this came about: maybe he wrote to me out of the blue, or perhaps I found his name and address in the back of a comic. I used to read a lot of comics in those days.

My friend's name was Joel C. Stockert – a very American-sounding name - but I can no longer remember where he lived. At the time I was keen to find out stuff about life in the United States so we sent snapshots of each other and our letters went back and forth sporadically for a couple of years. I don't think that – as kids - Joel and I had very much in common. I don't think we would have chosen each other as mates in the schoolyard.

So, after a couple of years, our correspondence sputtered to a close. I don't think I found out much about America through Joel's letters so I continued my self-education about the United States in the same way that I'd always done: through the distorting mirror of the movies.

Times have changed in the world of penfriends and nowadays, I believe, it's very easy to collect a swag of penfriends. You can have up to six hundred million of them – if you're that desperate to find a friend. All you have to do is fire up your computer and log on to something called Facebook. How did this tectonic shift in the pen pal network come about? Well a new movie called *The Social Network* touches on this issue but, irritatingly, doesn't really explain it. More about that irritation later.

Now I would be the first person to happily admit that I am not very computer savvy.

I have never logged-on to Facebook and I don't see any reason to do so. When it comes down to it, I am somewhat resistant to the idea of throwing my name and other personal details out into cyberspace in the hope that someone who I have never met – and probably never *will* meet – will send me a message telling me what they had for breakfast this morning. And the mind boggles at the rather appalling thought that six hundred million people might call me up to tell me the same thing.

So a movie which bases itself on the origins of Facebook has got to work pretty hard to engage my attention – let alone my enthusiasm. As I suggested earlier, *The Social Network* would probably have been of more interest for me if it had attempted to provide even a rudimentary explanation – of how this speed-dating via the internet actually works. Instead, we are asked to accept the proposition that the person at the heart of the story – a man called Mark Zuckerberg who was nineteen years old at the time – had an acrimonious break-up with his girlfriend and, with a sudden teenage rush of blood to the head, decided to demean the girl in front of as many people as possible.

Being clever with computers he set about doing this demeaning by hacking into the websites of a number of universities and posting improper information not just about *his* girlfriend but about many other girls as well. But *how* does he manage to do this?

Well, in the movie, the expression *algorhythms* gets thrown about a bit and, at one stage, someone scrawls a mathematical formula in chalk on a window but, mostly, there is a lot of what one might regard as *smoke and mirrors*. All of this is in the first ten minutes or so of the movie and, as the story unfolds, we are asked to believe that what starts out as a vindictive piece of character assassination eventually morphs into the global phenomenon called Facebook.

However, we are also told that Facebook was not the creation of Mr. Zuckerberg acting alone. A number of other people apparently contributed both financial and intellectual capital to the project. However, it seems that when the profits started rolling in, the other contributors were sidelined by the wily Mr. Zuckerberg. Given that the alleged profits from the enterprise quickly amounted to *billions* of dollars the people who had been short changed by Mr. Zuckerberg came after him accompanied by teams of lawyers rather angrily seeking what they saw as their fair share of the boodle.

By the way, there is another irritating outbreak of *smoke and mirrors* in the movie when it comes to the issue of the allegedly vast profits and it is never satisfactorily explained just how these profits were achieved.

Anyway, having set up the legal confrontation between Mr. Zuckerberg and his erstwhile friends, much of the movie then takes the form of a kind of courtroom drama in which ó from opposite sides of a conference table ó Mr. Zuckerberg and *his* lawyers face the former Mates and *their* lawyers. In the best schoolboy tradition ó and, the major contenders are, after all, little more than schoolboys ó both sides do a lot of shouting of what amounts to “*did*” and “*did not*” at each other. In the real world, the supposed events upon which the movie is based took place in very recent times and it seems that some of the litigation is still not resolved

With loose ends like this in mind one might have some concerns that the movie has been somewhat of a rush to judgement by its producers. In the end some outcomes are made clear but there is still a lot that is unclear. I felt that there were too many unanswered questions: too much that was glossed over by slick dialogue.

The screenplay was written by a man called Aaron Sorkin who was the person who brought you the TV series *The West Wing* which was characterised by people wandering through the corridors of Washington power or sitting around office desks all the while delivering veritable tsunamis of politico-speak dialogue. So youøll know what I mean when I say that *The Social Network* is something of a gab fest. The words come at you like scything volleys of machine-gun fire. Despite their rapid delivery the words are very well enunciated ó itø just that there are far too many of them.

What *The Social Network* comes down to is the depiction of a bunch of filthy rich young geeks fighting over a very lucrative bone. A kind of a Geek tragedy ó there, I had to say that. Itø not a very edifying spectacle and, even though the competent cast of unknowns work very hard at it, I donøt think it makes for compelling drama. I liked some of the early location shots which effectively establish the ivy-league atmosphere of a hallowed University and, largely for this, I gave the movie two stars. But donøt take that as much of a recommendation.

Goodbye for now. Iøll see you in the back stalls.