

ANNETTE SEIFERT

### Cloverfield (2008)

It's been a while since I've been this drawn into a movie while watching it and it's definitely one of the most visceral movie experiences in recent years.

On the outside, *Cloverfield* comes across as yet another monster movie with the twist of being filmed with a hand-held video camera (reportedly causing some motion sickness in some viewers). The story is simple – Rob is about to leave for Japan where he's landed a plush job, so his friends decide to throw him a surprise goodbye party, to be documented through testimonials given by the attendants and filmed on a digital camera. When things go wrong for Rob on a personal level, disaster strikes on a much bigger level in the form of an unidentified monster wreaking havoc on Manhattan. Of course Rob's girl gets trapped during the attack and him and three friends set out to rescue her against all odds.



The plot may sound clichéd and in a sense it is. But what makes the movie stand out is the camera work. Filmed in a *cinéma vérité* style with shaky, grainy footage that will remind many viewers of *The Blair Witch Project*, the movie comes across as the most exciting home video you have ever seen, effortlessly drawing the viewer into what's happening by making it look like any one of us may have filmed it (driven home by hordes of people snapping pictures on their cell phones throughout). But don't let the *Blair Witch* comparisons fool you, this movie is so much more.

First of all it succeeds thanks to wonderful actors and beautiful special effects that don't come across like special effects since this doesn't look like your usual, polished Hollywood movie. And don't be fooled by the monster movie description, either. It is just that on the surface, but it is so much more when you look at it a bit closer. It is no coincidence the footage at the beginning is more than reminiscent of 9/11 in the way it mirrors shadowy figures coming out of the dust and debris from fallen skyscrapers, down to pieces of paper gently floating down to earth, filmed on a handheld camera that is too painfully similar to the shaky footage of the planes hitting the Twin Towers. And with the World Trade Center gone, the filmmakers turned to the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of America, in a brilliant moment that is almost as good as the final reveal of the original *Planet of the Apes*. And even that is only scratching the surface – themes of homeland security and a terrorism in the face of which we seem to be powerless are all there.

Just as clever is the way the movie manages to contrast the sudden terror with a seemingly normal world, also only possible because of the way it was filmed, without giving too much away.

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Yes, definitely the best home movie ever – cultural trauma reworked in a unique and fitting way, I suppose, while also hinting at the consequences of just that trauma. And who is the filmmaker now?

