# Spectatorship

Spectating Self / The Gaze / Suture Theory

# Spectatorship

*Study:*

- *How the spectator has been conceived both as 'passive' and 'active' in the act of film viewing*

- *How the spectator is in dynamic interaction with film narrative and film features designed to generate response*

- *Reasons for the uniformity or diversity of response by different spectators*

# Spectatorship

*Study:*
- *The impact of different viewing conditions on spectator response*

- *The analysis of narrative, visual, musical, performance, genre and auteur cues in relation to spectator response.*

- *The possibility of preferred, negotiated, oppositional and aberrant 'readings' of film."*

# Uses and Gratifications

- Blumler and Katz first proposed that audiences actively select media to use for their own benefits (as opposed to being passively manipulated)

- ● They identified a range of different 'uses' that offered specific pleasures (gratifications), that they grouped under: Education/ Information, Personal Identification, Social Interaction, Escapism/ Entertainment.

- ● The 'Uses and Gratifications' Resource sheet breaks these categories down in more detail

# Stuart Hall and 'Encoding/Decoding'

Stuart Hall was part of The Centre for Contemporary Culture (also known as the Birmingham School) who in the 1970s was amongst the first Media Studies academics in the UK.

- He said audiences created meaning from a text in three main different ways.

- Firstly, the creator of the text 'encodes' an intended meaning.

- The 'reader' then 'decodes' the meaning. The 'preferred' meaning is the one intended by the author.

- But there may also be a 'negotiated' meaning - where the reader recognises the intended meaning but may not entirely believe or accept the message.

- There is also an 'oppositional' or 'aberrant' reading, where the viewer may deliberately reinterpret or mistake the meaning, creating a new message/response from the text.

# David Chandler and the Gaze

Chandler identified a number of different ways that the 'gaze' is produced - and represented - within a film. There are some films that are 'self-reflexive' i.e. they draw attention to the fact that we are watching a film.

These challenge the spectator to reflect on their own spectatorship.

- Spectator's Gaze - the viewpoint of the camera, usually offering voyeuristic pleasure (we are watching someone's intimate life without them knowing we are watching)
- Intra-Diegetic - the characters look at each other (we empathise with their responses because of use of shot reverse-shot)
- Extra-diegetic - the characters looks directly at the camera, becomes aware they are being watched (either by another character or the spectator)
- Camera's Gaze - the film reveals the 'mechanics of the gaze', reminding us we are watching a film
- 'Text-within-a text' - the characters are also watching/making a film, and for a time we watch the film they are also seeing or constructing.

# Multiple Spectating Selves

This theory proposes that when we watch a film, we do so from the perspective of many different selves, each of which gain a particular pleasure from the experience.

They are:

- Social Self - gains satisfaction from having a similar response to other spectators, with similar values.

- Cultural Self - 'gets' references and meanings generated by the memory of other films, TV, news, etc.

- Private Self - generates personal and unique meanings based on personal memories.

- Desiring Self - brings un/conscious energies and responses that have little to do with surface content.

COGNITIVE THEORY
Just take the key ideas away!
This idea is rooted in scene analysis.

Murray Smith breaks down the ways in which we identify with characters into three separate categories; *recognition, alignment,* **and** *allegiance*.

**Recognition**, as Smith puts it, is the *"...spectator's construction of the character: the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, as an individuated and continuous human agent"*

**Alignment** is a kind of exclusive access to a character. This of course stems from recognition.

**Alignment** is achieved, as Smith explains, by, **"...two interlocking functions, spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access…"**. Spatio-temporal attachment simply means the way that the narration keeps spectators visually 'glued' to the actions of one or more characters while subjective access refers to a kind of "in-the-head" knowledge that is awarded to the spectator through the film's narrative.

https://youtu.be/OLCL6OYbSTw

Finally, **allegiance** *"pertains to the moral evaluation of characters by the spectator"*. This consists of viewing and evaluating the actions of a character morally based on knowledge of a character's cognitive state.

There will be a moment in your film when the protagonist makes a poor decision, a challenge to the audience allegiance.

# How does allegiance change in this scene?



https://youtu.be/oGfvV3Syud8

# ⊞ Spectatorship

## Why is Spectatorship important?

Why do we respond the way we do to a scene? Why do we cry or laugh? The director has constructed the film to encourage us to emote with or maybe even distance us from characters and situations. We can go along with the director's 'instruction' or we can oppose it.

## How the spectator has been conceived both as 'passive' and 'active' in the act of film viewing:

Spectators often **switch** between the two viewing perspectives; it might be the director's intention for the audience to do this or it could be down to the **cultural capital** of the audience.

### Some theories assume the spectator is Active:

- The **Uses and Gratifications** theory suggests that we choose our level of engagement for one of the following reasons/pleasures **Entertainment, Information, Identification** & **Interaction**.
- **Multiple Spectating Selves** - Different parts of our 'self' get different pleasures from watching a film Social Cultural, Private Desiring.

### Some Theories assume the spectator is Passive:

- We **suspend our disbelief and immerse ourselves in the spectacle of cinema**.
- The camera places/**stitches** us into the scene.
- **Hypodermic needle theory**.
- **Copycat theory**.

### Oppositional Reading (Hall):

What would an oppositional reading of the film be? Who might think and feel this way?

### Preferred Reading (Hall):

How has the director encoded the film to encourage a way of thinking/feeling/emoting?

## How the spectator is in dynamic interaction with film narrative and film features designed to generate response:

Cinematography - the camera is our eye, what are you being made to look at and why?

The Edit - how long are you forced to gaze upon a character and why?

Sound achors meaning, and gives us an opportunity to emote, how does sound guide our emotional response? Self-Recognition (Metz):

We see a version of ourselves

### Identification (Smith):

**Recognition** - how do we identify the protagonist? Is there an alteration in the style of cinematography or editing when we 'notice' this character?

**Alignment** - we are given spatio-temporal proximity (we gaze at them closer and for longer) to our protagonist in order to create an emotional bond.

**Allegiance** - the spectator is ultimately required to make a choice; do we agree with the choices of the protagonist - or not? How the camera moves around the character at this point of our decision is important.

### Chandler & the Camera's Gaze:

How does the camera look/gaze at the subject?

- **Spectator's Gaze** - The camera is your eyes. How does the camera offer voyeuristic pleasure? Does it linger or gaze on the subject?
- **Intra-Diegetic** - How do characters look at each other? Is the audience positioned within this look? When is the shot reverse shot used and why?
- **Extra-diegetic** - Do characters break the 4th wall and look at the spectator? How do we react to it? Is it threatening? Is it to involve us in a joke? Is it combined with a voice over?
- **Camera's Gaze** - Do we see the process of filmmaking? Do you see the crew? Or is the spectator invited into the edit suite?
- **'Text-within-a text'** - are the characters in the film making a film? Or do they watch a film? Are we watching them watching? Or watching them creating?

## Reasons for the uniformity (The response of the homogenous mass) or diversity of response by different spectators:

### Gendered Responses:

**Mulvey & the Male Gaze**: Are the female characters there 'to be looked at' does the camera objectify the female characters?

Is there evidence of the **'Female Gaze' (Soloway)**? - What is foregrounded in 'the look'? The body or the emotion? Do characters 'return the gaze'?

### Age:

The age of the spectator will alter their response to the actions of the character, would your grandparent emote with a character in the same way you would?

### Race:

Is there a limited perspective in this film? What does this reveal about the director and the society which it is reflecting? Spectators can be positioned to align with characters of different races. What is a spectator's response when they are represented on screen?

### Multiple Spectating Selves:

Multiple Spectating Selves - Different parts of our 'self' get different pleasures from watching a film Social Cultural, Private Desiring.

### Political allegiance:

What political messages are evident in the film? Are they to the left or right of your own? Are they 'other' to the politics of the era? Are they controversial or threatening? What is the spectator's response when asked to question their politics?

# SUTURING THE AUDIENCE

Suture film theory essentially defines the means upon which a subject experiences a film through positioning such that they are not actually "seeing" but instead "reading" the film itself. According to suture film theory, the spectator is stitched into the world of cinema that is fabricated during the film process such that the result is subjects within the film which are drawn into the storyline.

As a result of this suturing, we experience a film according to the film's own terms. Therefore suture represents a critical term that can be used to further make sense of a film. A film sutures us, generally without necessarily suturing us into a particular position. However, we are generally sutured into a film through positive identification with a particular character or other real world elements of the story which we can relate with or otherwise identify with.

https://beverlyboy.com/filmmaking/what-is-suture-film-theory/

# SUTURING THE AUDIENCE

# Stanley D Williams, How Filmmakers connect with audiences.

- **Physical Suturing**

- This consists of employing camera and sound techniques to put the audience "physically" in the film.
  - We see things the protagonist sees with POV (Point of View) shots, or over the shoulder shots.
  - There are long wide takes to simulate us being in the room and watching from a distance.
  - Long extreme close-ups (ECU) of a character allow us to ponders a situation or decision along with the character.
  - In some movies we hear what the character hears, the internal diegesis.
  - There are also visual and narrative gaps (ellipsis) that the audience automatically fill in, as when a character drives across town, but we only see him get into and out of his car.

- **This is a different way of describing Recognition and alignment, spatiotemporal attachment and subjective access.**

# Emotional suturing:

- Filmmakers emotionally suture the audience into the story by creating characters and situations that generate sympathy, jeopardy, and relatability.

- Audiences are drawn to characters who are "attractive" — characters that are funny, powerful, skilled, beautiful, charming, and hospitable.

- When characters embody such attributes, audiences want to be close to and identify with them.

- It is a purely emotional reaction based on the character's outward appearance and behavior.

- This idea can also be described as gaining pleasure from the Gaze

# Moral suturing:

•At the heart of every successful film is a conflict of values that was universally chosen to be understood by the audience. It is this conflict of values that describes what the film is "really" about. The value conflict engages audiences at a value or heart level by allowing the audience to identify with the various characters and helping them decide what moral choices to make. Thus, moral suturing, is not a passive experience, but an active decision making and rooting experience.

•Successful moral suturing occurs through story structuring technique called "**The Moral Premise,**" which describe the core values around which the story produces conflict. This is because all physical action and conflict begins as psychological decisions derived from the character's moral values.

•Thus, the Moral Premise Statement (MPS) is a single sentence, or statement, that describes the natural consequences of a character choosing a virtue vs. a vice as motivation for pursuit of a goal. For instance the selfishness of the antagonist against the selflessness of a protagonist. Or, perhaps the conflict of values is greed vs. generosity, or prejudice vs. respect.

•This idea can also be explored as **ALLEGIANCE** and BINARY OPPOSITIONS

# Theorists

• There is **no need to 'name drop theorists'** but you can USE the ideas and concepts and the key language.

• For each film in the selection there WILL be a key spectatorship debate, a way the director is manipulating the response or giving the audience space to morally evaluate, students need to engage with the 'how far' part of the Question. Think of this as a 'debate' question.

# Scene analysis:

- How are the audience positioned / stitched / sutured? & Why.

- What phase of response are the audience in?

- How is the director manipulating audience expectation? & Why.

- In the Gas station and Carla Jean scenes how are we positioned / stitched / sutured?

- Does this change over the course of the

# KEY SEQUENCE ANALYSIS

- When you are analysing your scenes you must explore the relevant micro elements and use these to justify the points being made.

  - Cinematography
  - Mise-en-scene
  - Editing
  - Sound

- The micro elements are the visual / audio language that the director is utilising in conveying and positioning the viewer.

- When analysing I would always use this order:

1. Cinematography

1. Mise-en-scene

2. Editing

3. Sound

# KEY SEQUENCE ANALYSIS

Pick three moments (using screengrabs) from the start of the scene, the mid-point (especially during the shoot out), and the final scene with Carla Jean / crash.

**'How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship?' Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film.** **[40]**

I want your essay response to this question for next Wednesday only on No Country for Old Men.

| AO1 (20 marks) Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of elements of film | AO2 (20 marks) Apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to analyse films |
|---|---|

**The Assessment Objectives for this question are testing your ability to:**

- **AO1 Demonstrate knowledge (20 marks) – you can do this by referring to the films, concepts and contexts you have studied which are relevant to the question. Use the key words in the question to figure our which elements/concepts/contexts of film you should demonstrate knowledge of.**

- **AO2 Apply knowledge to analyse films (20 marks) – you should apply the knowledge you are demonstrating to analyse the film, drawing on specific, detailed examples, including sequences, from the films you have studied.**

**'How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship?' Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film.** [40]

This question asks you if there is a **CONSTANT SHIFT** in the two films you have studied in relation to **SPECTATOR RESPONSE**.

It asks you to refer to **ONE SEQUENCE** from each.

**'How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship?' Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film.**                                    **[40]**

The statement requires you to locate specific examples of spectatorship which may shift in its response. Your plan needs to indicate sequences you can use to illustrate this view and develop an argument for preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings.

**'How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship?' Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film. [40]**

| Introduction | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Key sequence analysis | Links to spectatorship | Critics/context/theory |
| Big idea 1: | | | |
| Big idea 2: | | | |
| Big idea 3: | | | |
| Conclusion | | | |

**'How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship?' Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film.** **[40]**

## Example Opening

SET OUT YOUR STALL or where you stand in the debate using key phrases from the question:

*No Country for Old Men was the Coen Brother's return to thrillers after a successful series of comedic movies, they had cemented themselves as successful indie comedy directors but had still to prove themselves as box office commercial directors. They adapted the novel by Cormac McCarthy themselves bring much of their old testament sensibilities to great a dark, moody gothic western which proved a huge box office success.Through the use of cinematography and mise-en-scene the Coen Brothers create a world where the hero and antagonist make the viewer shift their alignment. And questions the moral choices made by the characters causing a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship.*

Top Tips
✔ Aim to write a strong, focused opening.
✔ Clearly address the question.
✔ Introduce your film. (This should be integrated rather than "I have studied X and

Keywords

*Mainstream, active, passive, constant, spectatorship, comic-book, origin movie, anti-hero, genre, align, preferred readings.*

**'How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship?' Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film.                    [40]**

Top Tips

Use key words from the question.
This is a two film study. You do not need to compare your two films.
Try to talk about the films evenly.
Make 2-3 key points for each film.
Use detailed evidence including sequence analysis from your films to support each point in your argument
Use appropriate film language and terminology throughout
Use your introductory paragraph and words from the question to help conclude.

You have 50 minutes to write your answer.

- In band 3, responses will consider how cinematography might create a response in the spectator by close reference to sequences from the films studied. In bands 4 and 5, analysis and evaluation of the importance of cinematography will be more precise, detailed and sophisticated.
- In bands 4 and 5, responses will develop more complex explanations of how and why cinematography may, or may not be, important in influencing spectators' responses and may question the idea of film 'creating' a response.
- Responses in band 3 are likely to focus more on one film whereas responses in bands 4 and 5 will be more even and balanced in their approach.
- **Band 5** responses may recognise that spectators do not always respond in the way that they are encouraged to by the use of cinematography. They may discuss the complex interaction between film and spectator by providing sophisticated reasons for this.

-An analysis and EVALUATION of the importance of film form and its influence on spectatorship
-Remember that you can always argue against or debate the question
-A low level response would simply cite examples of spectatorship from the films.

# Main Body:

**'How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship?'** Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film.

*Topic sentence one*: The preferred reading of the opening scene of the film is for the spectator to feel sympathy for the character of Bell while also introducing from the Strat the brutality of the world seen in Chugurh's violent assault.

*Topic sentence two: T*he gas station we see Chugurh's sensibility and begin to understand some of his motivations which engage us as a viewer there is more depth to the character. Than purely a murderous killer.

*Topic sentence three:* The confrontation with Carlas Jean and the loss of power of the coin toss.

# Conclusion:

What are your findings? What is the intended purpose of the director? What is there to be said about this as a piece of mainstream cinema?

*The Coen brothers similarly use film language to encourage both passive and active spectatorship in the film, especially seen in the opening sequence where the non-diegetic, ominous dialogue of Sheriff Bell is used over long establishing shots of the vast landscape in the West to position the audience in an active role, recognising how the world is no longer understandable by the "old men" with the rise of drug-related crimes and growth of toxic masculinity. The fact that the audience is encouraged to passively look over the landscape pushes the audience to engage more closely with the dialogue, sympathising with Bell as the first character who is introduced in the film. When looking at the wide shots of the landscape, the audience is positioned to view the man made objects as invading the peacefulness of the landscape and disrupting the view. The rickety barbed wire fences and turbines appear as old and dated, leading the audience to the preferred view that they are what symbolises the "old men" who, although are still working to the standard they know, are not working to the best in society where things have changed and the crimes are not as easy to solve.*

*An oppositional view of this sequence, reinforced by the dialogue, is that Bell is simply an "old man" who cannot come to terms with his aging and lack of control. As you get older, things inevitably do change, so his naivety in confronting and adapting himself to that change can be seen as putting him in a position of weakness in which the audience cannot fully sympathise with him. The landscape is alternatively reinforced by the warm colour palette to give the audience the view that it represents a place of safety and comfort in which the people in the Western community pride themselves on and work to make better. The fact that there are man-made objects in the landscape leaves society's mark on the environment and highlights its significance to them agriculturally, with the turbines bettering economic production in the poorer communities. This is similar to 'Beasts of the Southern Wild' where the community relies on agriculture and using the resources to survive, seen with mid-shots of Hushpuppy fishing and close-ups of preparing caught sea-food.*