



A-LEVEL FILM STUDIES

Winter's Bone

Let's Get Started

This lesson's focus is to explore spectatorship.

Before you start go over the elements of ideology we explored last lesson as this will underpin elements of spectatorship, if there is anything you are not sure of raise in Friday's lesson as we will go back over both spectatorship and ideology.

BIG PICTURE

Analysing Winter's Bone

KEYWORDS

Micro elements, mise-en-scene

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

What is mise-en-scene and what is the impact this has on the viewer.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

**Analyse key scenes from Winter's bone explaining how the use of mise-en-scene creates meaning for
Take your seat. Bag under your desk.**



Ideology - Winter's Bone

- Feminism - Ree's journey
- Depictions of masculinity - violence and threat
- Patriarchal Society - Chump Milton
- Matriarchy - Merab
- Isolation - Ozark - how is the world portrayed.
- Family and Inheritance - the dream sequence, what you leave behind.

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.

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

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.

How does recognition and alignment work in this scene?



https://youtu.be/KZBFeweU3d0?si=_Puj6W1LE6LOI53n

ALLEGIANCE

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/LZpqsWo6adg?si=uQw-iKdJNfoA4oTe>

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 anchors 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/>

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 ponder 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

Essay Plan

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.

Reflecting on what we have looked at today how would you construct an essay plan for this question in relation to Winter's Bone.

Spectatorship

- There is a really good example from a student exploring spectatorship here.
- <https://filmstudiesleeb.wordpress.com/category/component-1b-american-film-since-2005/>
- Read through this and consider the points made and what points you have made what similarities and differences there are.