

Film Spectatorship and Subjectivity: Semiotics, Complications, Satisfactions

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Ben', written over a large, faint watermark of the University of Cambridge crest.

Date:

19/02/2007



SUMMARY

Spectatorship is an essential aspect of the film industry, and hence a key facet of film studies. In film studies, however, the notion of subjectivity is marginalized in a preference for broad generalizations. This is because any consideration of subjectivity leads to indeterminate results. Such research is consequently of no use to filmmakers in guiding them on how best to accommodate mainstream consumer preferences, which is most often the objective of spectatorship studies. However, apart from this, subjectivity is a key component in film reception as every human being views ‘reality’ subjectively and therefore films also. Although the outcome of studies that include the notion of the ‘subjective individual’ will be indefinite, it is an important aspect of any study of spectatorship. The notion of the ‘subjective individual’, as opposed to the generalized notions of ‘audience’ and ‘spectator’, is thus crucial and consequently underlies my entire discussion.

In an attempt to demonstrate the importance of subjectivity in film spectatorship studies, I address three primary notions in film reception studies – the text’s structure, cultural complications and psychological satisfactions. In doing so, I consider how each of these notions significantly involves the ‘subjective individual’.

In addressing the first notion – the text’s structure – I examine the role of the spectator in relation to the film text, particularly during the reception process. I show how codes function, are organized, and are very specifically encoded into the text by the filmmakers. I then examine how the spectator – the recipient of the communication, who is positioned by the text (interpellated) to receive the narrative – decodes the text’s message. This process thus involves not only subjectivity in the filmmakers’ choices, but also in the ‘reading’ position that the spectator adopts, according to his/her personal interpretation of the text.

The second notion – cultural complication – involves the aspects which condition both the encoding and decoding processes of film, namely: ideology, polysemy, the

overlapping ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres, and the unconscious desires of spectators. Each aspect has a profound affect on spectator response and, consequently, on the study of spectatorship. Moreover, each aspect entails the notion of the ‘subjective individual’.

The third notion – psychological satisfaction – deals with unconscious desires and thus addresses subjectivity in spectatorship in its most intense form. Lacan’s ‘Mirror Stage’ theory and Freud’s work on dream analysis demonstrate how personal the desires motivating the viewing of films are, again revealing subjectivity as a key aspect in film spectatorship study.

In amalgamating these ideas, I draw on the phenomenon of celebrity. The film celebrity, originally an ‘object’ of the film text, has become central to popular culture for reasons of psychological satisfaction. I explore how spectatorship and what generates it – the film industry – have co-created the film celebrity and, in turn, how this phenomenon moulds popular culture and affects ideology; subsequently affecting the “theory of ‘reality’” by which we, as individuals in society, live. Since this “theory of ‘reality’”, although constituted by the dominant ideology, is personal and conditions the way we (as human beings and film spectators) view everything, spectatorship studies cannot ignore spectators as ‘real’ people – ‘subjective individuals’.

OPSOMMING

Kykerskap (*spectatorship*) is 'n wesenlike aspek van die filmbedryf, dus is dit 'n kernfaset van filmstudie. In filmstudie geniet breë veralgemenings egter voorrang bo die nosie subjektiwiteit wat grotendeels gemarginaliseer word. Die rede hiervoor is dat enige oorweging van subjektiwiteit vae resultate oplewer. Die doel van navorsing oor kykerskap is meestal om die voorkeure van hoofstroomverbruikers te bepaal. Navorsing wat op subjektiwiteit fokus, is gevolglik van geen waarde vir filmmakers nie. Desnieteenstaande is subjektiwiteit egter 'n sleutelkomponent in filmresepsie, aangesien elke mens die 'werklikheid' subjektief benader. Dit sal dus ook op films van toepassing wees. Alhoewel die uitkomste van studies wat die idee van die 'subjektiewe individu' insluit onbepaald sal wees, is dit 'n belangrike aspek van enige studie oor kykerskap. Die konsep van die 'subjektiewe individu', teenoor die veralgemeende konsepte van 'gehoor' en 'kyker' is dus van die grootste belang; gevolglik vorm dit die grondslag van my bespreking in die geheel.

In 'n poging om die belangrikheid van subjektiwiteit in studies oor filmkykerskap te demonstreer, ondersoek ek drie primêre nosies in studies oor filmresepsie – die struktuur van die teks, kulturele komplikasies en psigologiese bevrediging. In die proses gaan ek na hoe elkeen van hierdie nosies die 'subjektiewe individu' op 'n beduidende wyse betrek.

In my verkenning van die eerste nosie – die struktuur van die teks – ondersoek ek die rol van die kyker met betrekking tot die filmteks, veral tydens die resepsieproses. Ek toon aan hoe kodes funksioneer, hoe hulle georden is, en hoe die filmmakers hulle op 'n baie spesifieke wyse in die teks encodeer. Ek ondersoek dan hoe die kyker – die ontvanger van die kommunikasie, wat deur die teks geposisioneer is (interpelleer is) om die narratief te ontvang – die boodskap van die teks ontvang. Hierdie proses het dus nie slegs met subjektiwiteit in die filmmaker se keuses te make nie, maar ook met die 'leesposisie' wat die kyker inneem, volgens sy/haar persoonlike interpretasie van die teks.

Die tweede nosie – kulturele komplikasie – het te make met die aspekte wat sowel die enkoderings- as dekoderingsprosesse van die film bepaal, naamlik ideologie, polisemie, the oorvleuelende ‘openbare’ en ‘private’ sfere, en die onbewuste begeertes van die kyker. Elke aspek het ’n diepgaande uitwerking op kykerreaksie en gevolglik op die bestudering van kykerskap. Daarbenewens omvat elke aspek die idee van die ‘subjektiewe individu’.

Die derde nosie – psigologiese bevrediging – het te make met onbewuste begeertes, en dus het dit te make met subjektiwiteit in kykerskap in sy mees intense vorm. Sowel Lacan se ‘Mirror Stage’-teorie as Freud se werk oor droomanalise demonstreer hoe persoonlik die begeertes is wat kykers motiveer om na films te kyk. Dit onthul weer subjektiwiteit as ’n sleutelaspek in die bestudering van filmkykerskap.

In die integrering van hierdie idees gebruik ek die verskynsel van die beroemde filmpersoonlikheid. Binne die konteks van die film het die filmpersoonlikheid, wat oorspronklik ’n ‘objek’ van die filmteks was, nou ’n sentrale plek in die populêre kultuur ingeneem, en wel omrede van psigologiese bevrediging. Ek ondersoek hoe kykerskap en dit wat daardeur gegenereer word, naamlik die filmbedryf, meegewerk het om die beroemde filmpersoonlikheid te skep. Ek kyk ook na hoe hierdie verskynsel die populêre kultuur vorm en ideologie beïnvloed en hoe dit gevolglik die teorie van ‘werklikheid’ beïnvloed waardeur ons, as individue in die samelewing, leef. Aangesien hierdie teorie van ‘werklikheid’ persoonlik is en die wyse bepaal waarop ons (as mense en filmkykers) alles sien – alhoewel dit deur die dominante ideologie gekonstitueer is – kan kykerskapstudie kykers as ‘egte’ mense, as ‘subjektiewe individue’, nie ignoreer nie.

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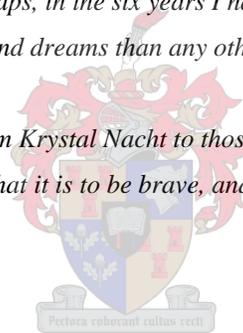
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***In memory of my special daps, Glenn Carboni, 1948-1989,
and my glamorous gran, Helga Ucko, 1916-1999.***

*Daps, in the six years I had with you, you taught me more about life,
love and dreams than any other father could do in a lifetime. Thank you.*

*Gran, from Krystal Nacht to those Beverly Hill's deck chairs, you taught me
what it is to be brave, and to never give up no matter what the price.*



You are both with me in spirit, always.

I love you.

CHAPTER 1:

An Introduction to Spectatorship

Film is, as Christian Metz put it, ‘our product, the product of the society which consumes it’. It is impossible to talk about film as a social practice without talking about its audiences (Turner 2003: 112).

Since the mid-1970s spectatorship has been a central discussion (and debate) in film studies. The investigation of the film viewer was instigated as a key aspect of reception studies as a result of “the impact of semiotics and psychoanalysis on film theory”; both these concepts are therefore crucial to any discussion on spectatorship (Haywood 2001: 343). In an attempt to reveal the fundamentals of reception studies, I shall begin by addressing the concepts ‘audience’ and ‘spectator’, and examine how these academic terms (employed for research purposes), are useful to filmmakers’ in providing ideas for ‘consumable’ film products. I then point out that the third academic term, the ‘subjective individual’, which takes into account the individuality of each spectator, is a concept which is often marginalized in film reception studies in preference of broad generalizations. This term does not provide ideas to filmmakers’; instead it complicates the topic of viewer preference to the extent of impossibility. Nevertheless, the ‘subjective individual’ is a decisive component of reception study – a study which involves three primary notions: the film text, ideology and satisfaction.

The chapters following will focus on these three notions, progressing systematically from the spectators’ relationship with the film text (in the film viewing process), to the issues involved (specifically ideologically) as a result of the encoding procedure in the creation of the film narrative, leading into a discussion of why spectators have in fact chosen to be film-goers. The underlying, motivating desires behind this third notion (consequently resulting in the satisfaction derived from film viewing), call for psychological analysis. In accordance with this intense desire to watch, filmic by-products, such as the film-star celebrity, have formed. An observation of the celebrity then, serves as a means by which to magnify each aspect of this film reception system – a system reliant on spectatorship – and equally centred on the ‘subjective individual’. This returns us to the need to

differentiate between the three concepts: 'audience', 'spectator' and 'subjective individual'.

The term 'audience' in film studies refers to the "collectives of people" who attend film viewings (Phillips 2003: 92). The audiences' attendance is necessary for the filmmakers' profit, and as such filmmakers construct their films very specifically in the hope of receiving substantial audience turnouts. This is significant as it "has meant that the product is predominantly audience-led" (Haywood 2001: 19).

Accordingly, in creating film "the operators of the movie industry are forced to develop a 'mental image of the anticipated or desired audience'" (McQuail in Jowett & Linton 1980: 29). In doing so, potential viewers, "while composed of unique individuals" are "grouped into diverse 'publics'" (Jowett & Linton 1980: 29). Thus, the potential viewers' personal tastes are disregarded and replaced by a simplified assumption of what the filmmakers suppose most people would enjoy watching. It may consequently be more appropriate to address these groups of viewers under Gans's label: "audience image", rather than 'collectives of people', as Phillips' definition proposes (Jowett & Linton 1980: 29). 'Audience image' seems more fitting to the generalized representation of audiences in reception study, as opposed to the coming together of individual persons that 'collectives of people' evokes. As such, the notion 'audience' becomes a problematic one. It refers both to unique persons and to a dominant depiction. In film studies therefore, the study of reception and decoding divides the viewer into three categories: the 'audience', the 'spectator', and the 'subjective individual'.

These three categories may be viewed as the important concepts in film reception, from which all ideas on decoding stem. I shall therefore begin this thesis with a detailed analysis of these notions; as the understanding of these is imperative to my focus on subjectivity in the chapters that follow.

The 'Audience'

As Phillips points out “the audience is primarily of interest as an object of study *before* and *after* the film” (2003: 94).

On a broader front we can say that we exist as audiences for a movie well away from the cinema. We are constructed as members of a ‘potential’ audience in at least two ways. We become exposed to the promotional and marketing hype designed to create expectations. We are also drawn into conversation about issues relating to a movie which may be circulating within our culture (Phillips 2003: 93).

Since the ‘potential audience’ of film in general refers to anyone in society (it must be noted here however that the ‘potential audience’ for any particular film is narrower, due to spectator preferences, cultural systems and ideological conditions), the investigation into and the study of audiences is a rather sweeping and generalized one. As Phillips points out, although film is an “industry dependent on consumer choice”; and as such it would seem likely that filmmakers investigate their audiences’ preferences in acute detail; “in practice, the audience is potentially so vast and diverse in its preferences that responding to audiences often means responding to a ‘core’ audience – the so-called ‘avids’ who go to the cinema most often” (2003: 95). This causes the problem of generalization to increase further as the more filmmakers respond to this ‘core’, the more dominant it becomes, and consequently, the more other interests and preferences are disregarded. Thus the term ‘audience’ is associated with a general partiality, or as Frith phrased it, refers to a “taste public” (Frith 2000: 210).

Audience-orientated criticism seeks to investigate reading [in this case film viewing] as essentially a collective phenomenon. The individual reader [viewer] is seen, in this perspective, as part of a *reading* [viewing] *public* (Suleiman 1980: 32).

Audience studies are useful to film in that, by way of generalization, the filmmakers may determine the kind of film to produce in an attempt to ensure widespread attendance and thereby greatest profit. Thus the study of audiences focuses on the dominant expectations

of the group as a whole, not as a group consisting of individuals with personal preferences.

The audience then, may be said to “disappear when the lights go out” in the cinema; “spectatorship theories...kick in at this point, with the audience de-aggregated into individuals before the screen” (Phillips 2003: 94).

The ‘Spectator’

In simplest terms the spectator is the individual viewing the film. “You and I are referred to as spectators when we position ourselves in front of a screen and engage in watching a film” (Phillips 2003: 92).

Spectatorship studies deal with individuals, while audience studies address groups. Consequently, reception studies on spectatorship may at first seem easier to analyze, or perhaps more accurate and certainly less broad, but in actual fact the dilemma is magnified. As Roberts and Wallis phrased it, “the minefield that is attempting to make generalizations about an audience can only become even trickier when dealing with individual spectators” (2001: 149).

Individuals each have their own preferences, and moreover, from the first moment of relation to film – that is, the simple act of choosing to attend film (thereby becoming a spectator) – it becomes clear that spectators possess more agency than the conceived notion of the group ‘audience’ implies. “In moving from ‘potential’ to ‘actual’ audience member, we have both an individual and a collective sense of what we are doing – we are self-aware” (Phillips 2003: 93). As spectators then, we have acted for ourselves, and are therefore thinking for ourselves – we are no longer a part of the mass conception ‘audience’ and must now be regarded as personal agents. It may at this point appear as though the concepts ‘spectator’ and ‘subjective individual’ are the same entity – they are not.

Phillips provides a neat synopsis of the problem with aligning the study of spectatorship and the study of the ‘subjective individual’:

Even though theories of spectatorship isolate the self, this self is an abstract concept, rather than a self with individuality and differences from other spectators. In other words, interest is not in observing and explaining the response of actual people but rather in the attempt to generalize about a ‘state of being’ common to all people when they position themselves before a screen and watch a film (2003: 93).

In this sense, spectatorship can be likened to the generalized ‘image’ of the audience preference. Once again, due to the commerciality of the film industry, the study of spectatorship (like that of the audience) is only useful on a broad spectrum, whereby the filmmakers can construct their product to suit the desires of the ‘ideal’ spectator. The most obvious example is the way film genres cater for a particular spectator type. On a very generalized note, the teenage male, both as a spectator and as an audience group of teenage males, is perceived as preferring an action-packed film, while the teenage girl (equally as a spectator and as an audience group) is perceived as preferring light-hearted romances. In each case, “the spectator for that film is already specified on entering the cinema as someone who is curious or expectant about a particular enigma, and demands that this curiosity should be satisfied in a particular way” (Ellis 1988: 79).

The distinction between the concepts ‘audience’ and ‘spectator’ then, lies not in the way they are dealt with by reception studies, but in their positioning in the film viewing and in relation to the film text. The audience is a group, recognized as a general ‘image’ preference, primarily before and after the film. Although the audiences of films attend the viewing process as this ‘same’ generalized ‘image’ group, the actual viewing experience is not collective, but individualized. Phillips addresses this idea:

While the lights are up and the advertisements or trailers are playing, we are aware of the other members of the audience. The popcorn being crunched and the drinks being slurped don’t annoy us particularly. When the lights go down and the film credits appear we are suddenly alone with the images on the screen and the sounds coming from the speakers. Now the crunchers and the slurpers run the risk

of seriously annoying us – we suddenly realize we have come here to lose ourselves in the images and sounds of the film (2003: 92).

It is due to the mechanisms of the medium – the way the screen is placed, enlarged and in the dark – that the viewing process is a one-on-one act of voyeurism. The medium sets up a relationship between viewer and image, based upon the act of looking. A group (audience) can look, but, “just because they are all looking in the same direction does *not* mean they are all seeing the same thing” (Roberts & Wallis 2001: 148). It is therefore not entirely correct to state that the audience (as a group) views films – rather – the spectator does. It is the spectator placed in this position as viewer, and generalized as an ‘ideal’ spectator (seeing that which the filmmakers wish him/her to see), that is the centre of spectatorship studies. It is that which the spectator as an individual *actually* sees which forms the basis of the concept ‘subjective individual’.

Thus the spectator, although an individual, is a stereotyped version of individuals, rather than the particular personal subjectivity of any one individual. Since personal subjectivity differs from person to person and because no person can know exactly what any other person is thinking, feeling or experiencing in a film, the topic of the ‘subjective individual’ is largely ignored in film studies. It is marginalized for the simple reason that it is impossible to come to any conclusions – the variety of response is indeterminate. Nevertheless, the individual as personal subject is fundamentally important in the encoding and decoding process of film, to the ideas regarding the psychology of the spectator, and to the subjects’ ultimate desire for ‘consuming’ film. As such, I go on to explore the notion ‘subjective individual’, which forms the focal point of my work.

The ‘Subjective Individual’

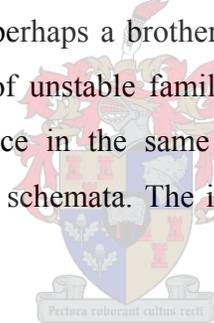
All texts (and thus film texts alike) are constructed and decoded in relation to the codes of communication in existence in society – this is how texts communicate. These codes (comprised of sign systems) are organized specifically to enable the viewer to fuse them into a comprehensible whole, thereby obtaining the message the text relays. The entire audience (that is, every spectator) is (under normal circumstances) able to decode the film

message, or at least is able to read the text in narrative form. This is because, as members of society, each viewer is familiar with the codes of communication, and simply applies these to film viewing. (This process, along with Stuart Hall's corresponding 'encoding'- 'decoding' theory, will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two.)

However, although every individual is a "social self who can make meaning in ways not very different from others with a similar ideological 'formation'", each individual viewer does have "a unique relationship with the film they are watching" (and furthermore, "this relationship is likely to change in subtle ways from one viewing of the film to the next") (Phillips 2003: 96). The reasons for this exclusive 'interaction' by the individual with the film are due to the complex system by which the individual forms an opinion of the film. Everyone can only judge and determine according to that which they already know. Thus, the prior knowledge of each individual viewer (be this in terms of life experience, upbringing, social interaction, circumstance or belief, to mention but a few influences which condition the human psyche) affects their response to the film. The response of each individual viewer to each filmic text will, therefore, differ from person to person and also over time as the individual's personal attitudes change (due to any one or number of influences). This in-depth concept comprises of what Bordwell terms, "*schemata*": "organized clusters of knowledge which guide the hypotheses we make about the world, and the inferences we draw from what we experience" (Turner 2003: 107). Thus our "prior knowledge and experience" – 'schematas' – "assist in all perceptual or cognitive processes and...play an important part in story comprehension" (Bordwell in Turner 2003: 107). Not only does the level of our understanding rely on our acquired knowledge, but the angle in which we view things is directly related to what we have previously experienced. Correspondingly, our assessment of anything comes about in accordance with what we know as 'right' or wrong', 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable', and so forth. In short, "the way we [the viewer] see things is affected by what we [as individuals] know or what we [as individuals] believe" (Berger 1983: 8).

The term 'subjective' in film studies, applies therefore, not merely to the personal opinion of the individual viewer, but to the viewing process as a "private experience"

(Suleiman 1980: 31). As Dave Morley phrases it: “subjects have histories”, and these histories are not those of countries, or even families, but following the premise of film viewing as a “private experience”, to each viewers’ personal life history (1992: 166). Included in this personal history is every event or circumstance that the individual has witnessed or been a part of since his/her birth, as well as the less concrete aspects such as social practices and moral principles guiding everyday conduct. This concept of history then, becomes even more involved when one adds the dimension of *experience* to the already complex privatization of this acquired knowledge through life and lifestyle. Experience, here, refers to the way in which the subject perceives his/her history, in accordance with the position of the subject in each moment in their history. Thus the individual subject has not merely had a private (personalized) history in terms of life and lifestyle, but also by the way in which he/she perceives, remembers, and reacts to the events, circumstances and social standings he/she has witnessed in his/her lifetime. Therefore, even if two subjects (perhaps a brother and sister) have witnessed the same event (for example, an instance of unstable family life), this does not mean that both subjects interpreted the occurrence in the same way. Each subject interprets every situation differently as a result of schemata. The interpretation of the film text is of no exception.



To clarify, I quote Phillips’s three examples of why schemata affect the way individual viewers (consisting of, as Phillips describes, three types of selves – a cultural, a private and a desiring self) interpret film:

1. A cultural self who makes particular intertextual references (to other films, other kinds of images and sounds) based on the bank of material she [sic] possesses.
2. A private self who carries the memories of her [sic] own experiences and who may find personal significance in a film in ways very different from others in her [sic] community of interest.
3. A desiring self who brings conscious and unconscious energies and intensities to the film event that have little to do with the film’s ‘surface’ content (2003, 96).

The concept 'subjectivity' is thus a complex one, which "needs to be viewed within [the] three different, if contiguous, contexts: within the film text itself, as part of the structuralist/post-structuralist debate on the subject and, finally, within psychoanalytic theory" (Haywood 2001: 375). These three aspects form the main points of address in most reception theory studies. Consequently, I attempt in the following chapters to demonstrate that subjectivity is a crucial component to spectatorship study.

Chapter Two will deal with the position of the film viewer in relation to the film text, by referring to semiotics and the types of spectator positioning. In Chapter Three I address the complications of this positioning in an investigation of ideology, polysemy, the cultural divisions 'public' and 'private', as well as the unconscious, stemming from structuralist/poststructuralist theory. Chapter Four examines why spectators are in fact (willing) spectators, in an investigation of the psychological satisfactions of spectatorship, thereby referring to the other origin of the notion Spectatorship in reception studies – psychology. Chapter Five forms an amalgamation of all the issues addressed in this thesis on spectatorship, by way of an exploration of the phenomenon of celebrity – a phenomenon based on satisfaction and individualism – and hence too, on subjectivity. Chapter Six, then, the conclusion, encapsulates these issues by focusing specifically on the aspect fundamental to them all – the 'subjective individual'.

CHAPTER 2:

Spectatorship and the Film Text

Film semiotics emerged in France in the early 1960s. Having stated this, it must be noted that sign systems did of course exist in films from the very beginning of filmmaking – it is through sign systems that films communicate – and hence it is simply the theorizing on this process that emerged years later.

In this chapter I examine the assembled structure of the film text, and its subsequent relationship with the film viewer, in order to demonstrate the degree to which spectatorship and the text itself are linked. This link occurs most concretely in the film viewing process. Consequently, this process is of the utmost importance in spectatorship study. I address the elements involved in this communication system by way of an examination of the theories on spectator positions and ‘reading’ positions. The first is concerned with the spectator’s role in the viewing process; the second to his/her viewpoints on the film. In discussing these aspects, I explore the notions ‘passive’, ‘active’ and ‘negotiating’ spectator. These notions in turn involve a detailed discussion of the signs and codes at work within the film text, the concept of the ‘interpretant’, the function of ‘language’, an analysis of the terms ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’, an exploration of the types of ‘reading’ positions available, and finally, an examination of the factors involved in promoting spectators to adopt these positions. Each of these elements involve the viewer and the filmmaker as ‘subjective individuals’.

To begin this detailed discussion of the film reception process, I address the mode of filmic reception – the way the text is presented to the viewer. Film reception is indeed unique in that, to borrow a phrase from Mast and Cohen, it allows the viewer to be “mechanically absent” (1985: 273). This viewing setup (the structure of the cinema auditorium) positions the spectator in front of a large screen, which together with the dimming of the lights, fixes the subject’s focus on the screen image, causing the film to be rather “exhibitionist” in character (Metz 1985b: 546). This term is not entirely

appropriate here, as, although the viewer watches it, “it doesn’t watch me [the viewer] watching it. Nevertheless, it knows that I am watching it” – or at least it has been constructed to be watched (Metz 1985b: 546). Thus the viewer spectates – he/she “is given a position of spectatorship, of voyeurism” (Ellis 1988: 81).

Films, then, are made to be viewed and this viewing process involves the viewer in ‘control’ of the viewing, as the film cannot interact with the viewer. By this I mean that the spectator’s gaze on the screen is entirely voluntary – each viewer watches at their will, and focuses on what they will; but of course this is guided by the filmmakers’ structural choices which narrows our focus, explaining my placing of ‘control’ in inverted commas. Since the beginnings of theorizing on the topic of film semiotics and reception, there has been a debate on whether or not the spectator possesses power in his/her relationship with the film text.

The ‘Passive’ and ‘Active’ Spectator Theories

Early semiotics theory on film (in the 1960s and 70s) proposed the model of the ‘*passive*’ spectator; this ‘passive’ spectator was considered “controlled” by the screen images (Phillips 2003: 93). The viewer simply watched and absorbed – one could say almost helplessly (this theory consequently provoked much debate regarding the ideological influence of film). Coinciding with this emerging theory, the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure presented the viewer (any individual) as “locked into language structures”; proposing that instead of the individual using language to speak, language in fact “speaks us” (Phillips 2003: 105). The position in which these theories placed the spectator has been summarized as follows:

The spectator’s ‘passive’ role is even pronounced – not only unable to intervene in the work of the film, but unable to think outside the language-like structures it employs (Phillips 2003: 105).

According to this ‘passive’ spectator model, viewers are completely powerless in their relation to the film text.

However, this argument presents obvious problems, for, as discussed above, the reception process itself provides the viewer with his/her “position...of power” in that “the film is offered to the spectator...the spectator does not have anything to offer the film apart from the desire to see and hear” (Ellis 1988: 81). Since the act of viewing is voluntary, the film text is reliant on the spectator and is hence in a passive position in its relationship with the viewer to begin with. Certainly, once the viewing is in process, the text does possess a type of power over the spectator in terms of providing a specific narrative, and to a large degree structuring that which the viewer sees. Moreover, the text has authority over the spectators’ suspense – ‘withholding’ the narrative conclusion until the very end of the viewing process – keeping the spectators in suspense until the text concludes. Nevertheless, as contemporary film semioticians argue, the viewer still holds a position of authority over the film text as he/she must actively process (and integrate) the codes within the film text in order to understand the narrative presented. The narrative as a whole exists only in the viewers’ processing of it. Iser provides a neat summary of this concept:

If communication between text and reader is to be successful...the reader’s activity must also be controlled in some way by the text...the guiding devices operative in the reading process have to initiate communication and to control it. This control cannot be understood as a tangible entity occurring independently of the process of communication. Although exercised *by* the text, it is not *in* the text (1980: 110).

Before addressing this model of the ‘active’ spectator, it is necessary to explain the film text in terms of its coded structure. In the most basic terminology, the text may be described as a “series of signs producing meanings” (Haywood 2001: 26). The term ‘signs’ and the importance of the plural in ‘meanings’ make for a more complex system.

A sign is a signifier of an object or idea – it stands for something – the sign (image) of a car refers to that car. The car in the sign is the sign’s object – “it is that for which the sign stands” (Stam *et al.* 1993: 5). However, although signs are single unit signifiers, standing alone, suggesting simply the object they represent (in film’s case perceptually (“cinema’s

signifier is perceptual (visual and auditory)”) (Metz 1985a: 783)), the combination of signs (notwithstanding the interpretation of them) produces a network of meaning, organized into compound systems – codes. Codes are highly referential: they are “systems governed by rules which are consented to by all members of the community using that code” (Fiske 1982: 68). It is because codes are ‘known’ and understood (they exist in the already acquired knowledge of spectators) that they can (and indeed must) be used in communication processes – codes are necessary both to structure narrative and to communicate meaning. Monaco conveys this concept effectively:

The structure of cinema is defined by the codes in which it operates and the codes that operate within it...A great variety of codes combine to form the medium in which film expresses meaning. There are culturally derived codes – those that exist outside film and that the filmmakers simply reproduce (the way people eat, for example). There are a number of codes that cinema shares with the other arts (for instance, gesture, which is a code of theater as well as film). And there are those codes that are unique to cinema. (Montage is the prime example) (1981: 146).

Codes, then, being comprised of signs (single unit signifiers), are the signifying essentials of films communication process (Guzzetti 1985: 178). Importantly, however, as Peirce points out, the signifying system does not simply involve the relation between sign and object: “the production of meaning...involves a triad of three entities”, the third being “the interpretant” (Stam *et al.* 1993: 5).

In technical terms the interpretant is “the ‘mental effect’ generated by the relation between sign and object”; more simply it is “the interpreter’s conception of the sign” (Stam *et al.* 1993: 5). To add a further dimension, a sign can also become a symbol, due to the object’s status in society. For example, “through convention”, a “Rolls Royce” has become a “symbol of wealth” (Fiske 1982: 95). More contemporary examples would be the inclusion of the game of golf in films, also signifying wealth, or the stereotype of policemen eating donuts, or perhaps most obviously, the universal symbol of a heart signalling love. Thus once again it must be noted just how essential the viewer’s role is in the film communication process – the film text relies on the viewer’s communicational

ability to constitute the signifying process. As Ellis phrases it: “meaning occurs only through the function of a subject, not through the fixed position of a sign” (1992: 190).

As previously noted, for the signifying process to develop into the signified (a meaning), there have to be codes in operation. These codes then, combine with two additional elements – a channel, and a context – in order to complete the communication process (Stam *et al.* 1993: 16).

To clarify: “The codes are the medium through which the ‘message’ of the scene is transmitted” (Monaco 1981: 148). It is through codes that the systems of signifying signs reach the viewer. For this to be successful “the sender [the film text] and receiver [the viewer] must share a code” (Stam *et al.* 1993: 16). Codes are learnt conventions continually at play in society; in fact, they are so commonly used that one might say they have been made culturally ‘invisible’ (an aspect which I will discuss in more depth in Chapter Three). Since society needs codes for all forms of communication, every person in society (under ‘normal’ circumstances) will make use of codes ‘unconsciously’ when communicating. As a result of this common nature of codes, we (as communicators in society) no longer register how communication operates; we simply concentrate on that which is being communicated. The parallel is evident in film viewing: viewers do not consciously focus on the method behind the structuring and creating (the sign systems) of the narrative; we (as viewers) simply ‘watch’.

It is in this watching (viewing process) that the second element in the production of meaning comes into being. The viewer and the text have now ‘met’ – a ‘channel’ exists for the film’s meaning to be communicated to the receiver.

After which comes the element of ‘context’: “the ambient systems of reference invoked in any communication to ensure that the message is understood” (Stam *et al.* 1993: 16). In short, there must be a certain sense of suitability between the types of signifying signs used and the overall meaning intended, for the receiver to be able to follow the message (through the codes at play within it).

Essential to this process of communication in film studies is the theory developed by Stuart Hall. Hall, conscious of the signifying systems at work behind the communication process, defined the creation of narrative as an *encoding* process, and its reception as a *decoding* practice. Hall thus contributed a great deal to film studies in a thorough account of the way in which “messages are produced and disseminated” (During 1993: 90).

Hall explains this process as a “four-stage theory of communication: production, circulation, use (...distribution or consumption), and reproduction” (During 1993: 90). He states firmly that “if no ‘meaning’ is taken, there can be no ‘consumption’”, that is, if there were nothing embedded in the film to communicate, no communication would occur, and as such there would be no reception – the “moments of ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’”, are then, “*determinate* moments” (Hall 1993: 91). Hall continues that these ‘moments’ may be viewed as “positions of the ‘personifications’, encoder-producer and decoder-receiver” (1993: 93). The filmmaker ‘encodes’ a message which the audience later ‘decodes’. Thus the possibility of meaning lies in the film text (formulated and organized by the filmmaker); the viewer must decipher it (a processing task, irrespective of this being apparently instinctive, and therefore rather automatic, for the viewer). In summary, the act of viewing (‘reading’ the text) depends on “the presence of one or more shared codes of communication between sender and receiver”, and “consists...of a process of decoding what has by various means been encoded in the text” (Suleiman 1980: 8).

Correspondingly, Hall notes that for the message to be understood it must be projected in a form in keeping with the already recognized codes of communication: it “must become a ‘story’ before it can become a communicative event” (1993: 92). It must, therefore, function through ‘language’ (the system through which we, as human beings, connect with one another). This is because language enables communication (of any sort), and more so, it is language that enables understanding. Thus, everything in existence, and therefore film also, “is constantly mediated by and through language... what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse” (Hall 1993: 95). It is through

discourse that language operates, and hence is that which makes communication possible. In film the discourse is that which *enunciates* the text. And, returning to the structure of the text, “there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code” (Hall 1993: 95). In explanation I begin with a definition of *discourse*.

The term ‘discourse’ has to do with the paradigms in which we think. Discourses condition the way we see the world, because we see through the ‘lens’ of the particular discourse(s) at work. In *Film as Social Practice*, Turner quotes Dyer’s useful definition of discourse:

Those ‘clusters of ideas, notions, feelings, images, attitudes and assumptions that, taken together, make up distinctive ways of thinking and feeling about things, of making a particular sense of the world’ (Turner 2003: 125).

Since discourse is the means through which we (as human beings) see everything in existence, discourse is also the way we (as viewers) ‘interact’ with film. By ‘interact’, I mean the process the viewer undergoes during the viewing in order to piece together the codes and thereby understand the narrative. Thus, discourse is what enables the viewer to relate to the text; it is (as mentioned above) the way texts are enunciated. Enunciation in film studies refers to the way in which the viewer is both “constituting and constituted through the process of ‘reading’ the film text”; in “constituting”, the spectator acts as “enunciator...making sense of the text”, and as “constituted”, the spectator is “enunciated”, that is, “situated by the text” (Haywood 2001: 100). This, then, is what is known as the theory of the spectator in an ‘active’ viewing role. It by no means denies the fact that the viewer is positioned/enunciated as spectator, but it rejects the notion that the viewer has no control over the reception, or rather, *how* and precisely *what* he/she receives.

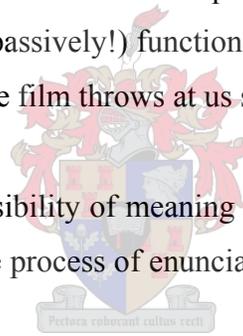
In an analysis of the ‘active’ spectator theory, it is of primary importance to be aware that a text (in this case a film text) is not simply ‘watched’ – it is *read*. The spectator is actively involved in the process of understanding the narrative – (on the most basic level) the spectator “*constitutes* the cinema signifier” in that he/she unites the signifying

elements and registers the codes, thus forming the narrative and thereby accessing the film's message (Metz 1985a: 778).

Thus, the 'active' spectator theory maintains that spectatorship is cognitive. The spectator fulfils the function of making sense of the film. As Phillips phrases, it "moment-by-moment, the brain works with the stimulus it is bombarded with... to recognize, process and 'place' the stimulus in such a way that it becomes possible to 'read' the film's meaning and manage its effects" (2003: 108).

The difference between the 'passive' and 'active' spectator is, then, that the former is thought not to play an active processing role in film reception, while the latter theory is grounded on the processing performed by the receiver of the communication channel, even if this act seems entirely mechanical. Phillips summarizes this point as follows: "Ours brains effortlessly (but not passively!) function to make meaning from and manage response to the kind of stimulus the film throws at us second by second" (2003: 108).

Thus, the text alone holds the possibility of meaning within its signifying systems, codes and discourses, but it is only in the process of enunciation that meaning actually emerges. Phillips clarifies this concisely:



A text only comes into existence in the act of 'reading' it. In this way the reader of the text is, in a way, simultaneously its creator (Phillips 2003: 109).

Moreover, since every spectator is a 'subjective individual' with the possession of schemata (personal histories resulting in personal perception; as discussed in the previous chapter), each spectator 'creates' the meaning of the same text in different ways. (This notion of polysemy of the text will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.) Due to each viewer's varying interpretations, it would be false to suggest that the viewer is only 'active' by way of piecing together the meaning already "secreted" in the text – rather, viewers "make films mean" (Turner 2003: 144). The viewer is then active in two ways: in the act of processing the text, and in the act of interpreting the text. I shall now clarify the

difference between these two roles performed by the viewer by way of a detailed examination of both.

The first is more straightforward: the viewer unites the signifying elements to form a narrative; he/she (akin to everyday communication reception) focuses on that which is being communicated rather than how it is being communicated. Accordingly, as Baudry states, “continuity is an attribute of the subject [viewer]” (1985: 538). In film viewing this ability is enhanced by that which we (as viewers) have learnt from viewing other films. The “schemas” we have registered from previous films help when “responding to a new film experience”: “when we [as viewers] are confronted by a new experience, we look for familiar patterns that allows us to orient ourselves and make sense of what is in front of us” (Phillips 2003: 108). A common example in horror films is the convention that the character who says something along the lines of “I’m just going to... I’ll be back soon”, will be the next in danger. For the viewer to be aware of this textual code, he/she needs to have learnt this convention by watching previous horror films.

The second activity of the viewer in the viewing process is that of interpretation, involving the previously mentioned notion of ‘interpretant’. The term ‘interpretant’ refers to the overall ‘meaning’ which the spectator obtains from the sign. This ‘meaning’ thus includes the associative connotations of this sign (determined by the viewer) and is, as such, subjective. Fiske provides an effective example: “the interpretant of the word (sign) SCHOOL in any one context will be the result of the user’s experience of that word” (1982: 45).

It is this theory of the viewer, adding to or adjusting the film’s meaning to suit his/her own interpretation, which brings us to the third theory of spectator response: the ‘*negotiating*’ spectator. This act of interpretation heightens the ‘activity’ of the spectator.

The ‘Negotiating’ Spectator Theory

In short, the ‘negotiating’ spectator is the critically active spectator. As ‘negotiating’ spectator, the viewer brings their personal experiences, feelings and beliefs to the film viewing, and using these, ‘negotiates’ between the filmmakers’ intention and their (the viewer’s) own individual viewpoint. The viewers’ final impression of the film narrative is, therefore, a collaborative combination between the way he/she ‘reads’ the signs and codes within the text, and the way he/she responds to the discourse presented by the filmmaker. This process of interpretation is thus a complex one, which involves two levels of interpretative response. The first level of response deals with the way meaning is created through the viewer’s interpretation of the textual signifiers. This process itself divides into two entities that function as instigators of meaning, enabling the text to communicate, and thus the viewer to extract meaning. These entities involve *denotation* and *connotation*. The second level of response has to do with the viewers’ interpretation of the overall message ‘presented’ by the text and, as such, centres on discourse. This second level then leads us on to the discussion of *viewer positioning*. I shall deal with both levels of interpretative response systematically.

Denotation refers to the “literal meaning of the sign [image]” (Hall 1993: 96). An image of a house denotes that house, a dog signifies that dog, and so on. Thus denotation implies the registering of the “commonsense, obvious meaning of the sign [image]” (Fiske 1982: 91). It is, as Metz phrases it, a simple “visual transfer” (1974a: 98). Denotative meanings are thus regarded as carrying the same meaning for each viewer – it is in the organization (composition) of these signs, and their resultant connotation (implication), that viewer discrepancies begin.

Connotation is the “second level of meaning linked to the affective or emotive associations” of each sign for each viewer (Stam *et al.* 1993: 195). Perhaps the image of a sun will lead the spectator to thoughts of the beach, or an airplane to memories of travel, for instance. Connotation therefore, involves the joining of the sign’s denotative meaning with the viewer’s personal thoughts, as well as society’s principles associated

with it. As such, it is the level on which “meanings move toward the subjective” (Fiske 1982: 91). The spectator does not simply see the sign for what the sign signifies directly (as on the denotative level), but sees the result of the combination of the sign and his/her associations with the sign. Thus, the “interpretant is influenced as much by the interpreter as by the object or the sign [image]” (Fiske 1982: 91). Accordingly, I find it hard to defend any classification opposed to the active (negotiating) spectator model, as the spectator clearly plays an important cognitive role in the film viewing process, regardless of being positioned by the text and subjected to it (irrespective of how willingly the spectator views the film).

Denotation and connotation do not only exist at the reception end of the communication channel, both are actively used by filmmakers in the creation of film texts. In this sense “denotation is what is photographed [or filmed], connotation is how it is photographed [or filmed]” (Fiske 1982: 91). Filmic connotation itself divides into two sub-practices in the making of meaning, namely “paradigmatic connotation” and “syntagmatic connotation” (Monaco 1981: 131-2). The paradigmatic refers to the way the image is presented. In *Citizen Kane* the low-angle shots of Kane denote his authority. This conscious choice on the part of the filmmaker affects the way the viewer sees the character. If Orson Welles had made use of high-angle shots (presenting Kane as less significant), a different meaning would be signified, and it would be inappropriate to the context (and the discourse) of Kane’s illustrated power throughout the film. Paradigmatic connotation is connotative by way of comparative contrast with the other film technique possibilities that could have been used to portray the image (for example, the low-angle shot is used rather than the high-angle shot). Syntagmatic connotation, on the other hand, is connotative through its comparison to the image preceding and following it (Monaco 1981: 132). Eisenstein’s montage is perhaps the best example of this type of connotation, where meaning lies in the combination of images. The syntagmatic therefore, also has to do with what is appropriate or fitting with the context, as the image must both link with, and make sense in conjunction with, the two images adjacent to it. Filmmakers can thus use the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic connotations to generate the overall meaning of the film, so that the viewer may easily follow the narrative. As Izod explains: “in any

given scene the demands of style will render appropriate only certain of the choices available to a film crew” (1987: 16).

These two connotative practices are, then, crucial to the viewers’ understanding of the film. They cover how the image is captured (paradigmatic) and how this image is then included in the film (syntagmatic). Paradigmatic connotation thus occurs in the filming process; syntagmatic connotation occurs in the editing process. Together they allow a particular, preferred meaning to emerge, and it is in this way that the filmmakers guide the viewer towards the particular response *preferred* by the film (or more correctly, suited to the filmmakers’ intention). (This concept of ‘preferred reading’ (in reception) is an important one, both in terms of the outcome of the message and with regard to the ideology present in the film. As such, this concept will be discussed in depth later in this chapter, as well as raised in Chapter Three.)

To recap briefly, early film theorists believed the spectator occupied a ‘passive’ position during the viewing process, where the viewer simply watched the screen images (Phillips 2003: 93). This idea was later criticized, and the concept of ‘reading’ was put forward in the place of merely ‘watching’. This new concept held that the spectator ‘read’ the images presented to him/her, and in this act of ‘reading’, pieced together and interpreted the screen images to form a perception of the narrative that pleased him/her. So, although the text itself contains signs and codes, and therefore the possibility of communicating a message, it is only in the act of being viewed that it can communicate. Furthermore, the spectator is not only needed to constitute this process of communication (that is, to function as the receiving end of the communication channel), he/she, a ‘subjective individual’ with personal history and experience, brings prior knowledge to the viewing process and these schemata affect the way the spectator ‘reads’ the images presented by the film. This collaboration of the signs illustrated by the film, and the connotations of these signs in the spectator’s mind, result in the film text having a different reading for each spectator. This returns us to the theory of the *negotiating spectator*.

The ‘negotiating’ spectator is thus active to a further degree than the ‘active’ spectator, who simply ‘reads’ the film text to make its narrative coherent. It may be said that the ‘active’ spectator, despite being active in the sense that he/she ‘creates’ the narrative by ‘reading’ it, is nonetheless only ‘active’ because he/she is “positioned to be so by the textual construct” (Mayne 1995: 159). The ‘negotiating’ spectator, however, figuratively speaking, takes the text into his/her own hands, even if this act of appropriating (by way of interpretation) is an unconscious one.

Since the ‘negotiating’ spectator brings his/her own experiences and beliefs to the film in terms of interpretation of the narrative, there arises another aspect of film reception – the second level of interpretation – that of the *‘reading’ position*. This concept emerges from the angle that the spectator takes on the text, as a result of his/her interpretative approach.

‘Reading’ Positions

As Pribram states, “the spectator has the potential to interpret, construct, or meaningfully produce the text from one of several positions in relation to it” (2005: 155). The positions commonly referred to are: the dominant or *preferred* reading, the *oppositional* reading, the *negotiated* reading, and the *aberrant* reading (Phillips 2003: 111).

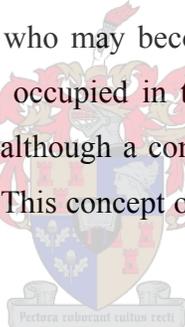
The preferred reading is often considered the dominant position as it is aligned with the ideological preference of the film text. All “images and films as a whole are encoded in such a way as they are given a preferred reading” – “they are meant to mean what they say” – that is the filmmaker’s intention (Haywood 2001: 285). More directly, the preferred reading is that which the filmmaker would like the viewer to see. Denotation and connotation (as previously discussed) are the ways the filmmaker goes about structuring the text in order to best attempt to position the spectator into the ‘preferred reading’. Stuart Hall (who first spoke of ‘preferred reading’, in a 1983 article, “‘The determination of news photographers’”), describes these techniques as methods to “‘close off the reader’ from independent interpretations” (Roberts & Wallis 2001: 147). The term is now widely used in the implication that texts “privilege or prefer a certain reading”

(Morley 1992: 167). It may be said then that since filmmakers have a specific 'reading' in mind (as the preferred one), and in the procedure of working this angle into the text (by way of structured encoding), filmmakers model an 'ideal' viewer. The 'preferred reading' is the viewing position closest to that of the intended response of the 'ideal' viewer.

However, sometimes the 'preferred reading' is controversial within the dominant ideology, or simply unfamiliar. Michael Moore's films provide clear examples of the first case. In Moore's films the 'preferred reading' is unmistakably anti-mainstream, and consequently many viewers would find this response position difficult to adopt. In the second case, the viewer might find it difficult to conform to the 'ideal' viewing position because this 'reading' seems strange, as in the case of some foreign films, for example. Sergei Parajanov's film, *Sayat Nova (The Colour of Pomegranates)*, illustrates this point. In these cases the text is opposed to, negotiated with, or misunderstood. It is in such cases that "the relationship between cinematic address and cinematic reception opens up a space between the ideal viewer and the real viewer" (Mayne 1995: 157). The concept 'spectator' can be likened to this notion of the 'ideal' viewer, and the concept 'subjective individual', to the accurate, 'real' viewer.

Turner describes the 'oppositional reading' position as one which "wholly rejected the preferred reading position" (2003: 145). Michael Moore's films again provide the most accessible examples. *Fahrenheit 9/11* 'prefers' the 'anti-Bush' response, but Bush supporters would not accept this as a viewing position, and would therefore 'oppose' the text's intention. An interesting assumption thus arises: "most often an oppositional response will be associated with dis-, or perhaps better, un-pleasure" and in reverse, the 'preferred reading' is "associated with pleasure, if only the pleasure of reassurance that comes from the comfortable and familiar" (Phillips 2003: 111). The 'preferred reading' is thus easier to side with, because it offers a sense of harmony through alignment with the intended meaning of the text, while the 'oppositional reading' confronts the text's 'preferred reading' (and hence the filmmakers' intention). The 'oppositional reading' may consequently not be a satisfying viewing experience for the spectator.

Phillips also draws attention to the “temptation to associate a ‘preferred’ reading with the ‘passive’ spectator and an ‘oppositional’ reading with an active spectator” (2003: 111). This connection is understandable – the viewer who simply watches and goes along with the text (the ‘passive’ spectator) would merely accept the filmmakers’ ‘preferred reading’ and so forth. However, such a connection misses the true meaning of these theoretical terms ‘passive’ and ‘active’. There is in fact no difference between the actual viewer positions in the ‘passive’ and ‘active’ states; the distinction lies merely in the way the viewer is thought to receive the text. The ‘active’ spectator must not be confused with the ‘negotiating’ spectator – as an ‘active’ viewer, he/she is simply thought to understand the narrative by way of processing the signs and codes suggestive of it, piecing these textual components together to form a story. Theories on the ‘passive’ spectator simply neglect the fact that mental processing occurs in any film reception. Thus, ‘active’ refers merely to the assembling of the text into narrative form, through the process of viewing. It is therefore, not the ‘active’ spectator who may become an ‘oppositional reader’, but the interpretative spectator – a position occupied in theory by the ‘negotiating’ spectator. (This assessment noted by Phillips, although a common misconception, draws attention to the ideologies at work in the text. This concept of ideology forms the focus of Chapter Three.)



Further complicating the issue (as mentioned above), one of the viewing positions available to the ‘negotiating’ spectator is that of the ‘negotiated reading’. The ‘negotiated’ reading position sides neither with the ‘preferred reading’, nor with the ‘oppositional reading’. Instead, this viewer examines the possibility of both options and, in doing so, positions him/herself collaboratively in relation to the text. This usually occurs when the viewer accepts “some, but not all, of the principles behind the preferred reading”, thus prompting the viewer to examine the oppositional possibilities (Turner 2003: 145).

It might therefore be said that the spectator in the ‘negotiated reading’ position takes on an objective viewing stance, allowing him/her to regard both the ‘preferred reading’ position and the ‘oppositional reading’ position, and yet choose neither. He/she may

therefore be said to have taken no position. It can, however, be well argued that taking no position is in fact conscious, and therefore, equally a position.

A further suggestion must also be noted:

It may well be more useful to designate all readings as negotiated ones, to the extent that it is highly unlikely that one will find any pure instances of dominant or oppositional readings. In other words, a purely dominant reading would presume no active intervention [in the interpretative, ‘negotiating’ spectator sense] at all on the part of the decoder, while a purely oppositional reading would assume no identification at all with the structures of interpellation of the text (Mayne 1994: 172).

The ‘negotiated reading’ position can therefore be claimed the most likely outcome of the interpretation process performed by the ‘negotiating’ spectator. There is, however, one last ‘reading’ position – that informed by ‘aberrant reading’.

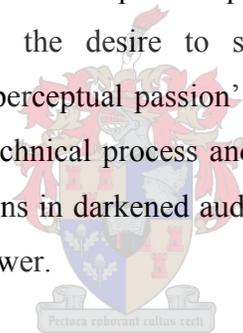
An ‘aberrant reading’ is one which is regarded as “simply ‘wrong’” (Phillips 2003: 111). A ‘reading’ is considered ‘wrong’ when the viewer does not even recognize the ‘preferred reading’ intended by the text. My placing of ‘wrong’ in inverted commas draws attention to the fact that no ‘reading’ can ever be deemed incorrect. ‘Wrong’ refers, therefore, to a ‘reading’ that merely overlooks the filmmakers’ intended ‘reading’ altogether. The spectator who forms an ‘aberrant reading’ fails to see the text in the context it was intended, causing a reading position that is ‘out-of-context’, or completely unaligned, with the text’s objective. Heck notes that ‘aberrant’ decoding occurs most frequently in instances where the text’s message is “organized and emitted in one code to a group which receives it and decodes it using a different code” (Heck 1992: 124). Consequently, the text’s ‘meaning’ will differ from its intended meaning. The example of foreign films (such as *The Colour of Pomegranates*) being misunderstood due to the unfamiliar cultural codes through which they communicate, again provides an effective illustration.

In summary: the spectator's interpretation of the film text places him/her in a specific 'reading' position relative to the text. Since interpretation is a quality of the 'subjective individual', 'readings' and hence 'reading' positions are rooted in subjectivity. Subjectivity is, therefore, an essential aspect of the decoding process.

The Factors Promoting the Process of Interpretation

Before introducing the problematic concepts of ideology and cultural complications in the viewing process (Chapter Three), it is necessary to explain how it is that the viewer is able to interpret film texts. By this I mean the way that the text 'draws' the viewer into it, or 'interpellates' the spectator so that he/she initiates a 'reading' position.

Metz addresses the means of spectatorship: "the practice of cinema is only possible through the perceptual passion: the desire to see (= scopic drive, scopophilia, voyeurism)" (1985a: 796). This 'perceptual passion' is enhanced by that which Phillips terms "cinema apparatus": "the technical process and the effects produced in the act of projecting images onto large screens in darkened auditoria" (2003: 107). This begins the process of *interpellation* of the viewer.



Interpellation in film theory refers to the way the spectator is 'brought' into the text, or, perhaps better put, it is the way the film (by means of the 'cinema apparatus' and textual strategies) sustains the spectator's interest. Central to this idea are two concepts: *suture* and *subject positioning*.

'Suture' literally means "to stitch up", and in film theory refers to the way the spectator is interpellated as 'active' spectator during the film viewing (Haywood 2001: 378). In the act of processing the textual codes ('reading' the text) the spectator 'creates' the narrative. Every shot included in the film assists in the creation of the film's message, and in the clarification of this message to the viewer. Turner describes this process of 'suture' as a system of "relationships":

Because the meaning of one shot is deferred until we see how it is ‘fixed’ (or stitched together – ‘sutured’) by its relation to the following shot, cinema is able to hide its method of constructing itself. This deferral of meaning, the closing of gaps by the viewers, means that they drive the narrative forward in order to understand what they have seen (2003: 130).

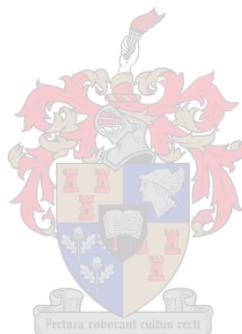
Thus, spectators’ attention is diverted from considering the constructed nature of the film, as it is focused on ‘creating’ the text’s meaning. In the act of processing the film’s signs and codes to create the narrative, the spectator is (on the most basic level) drawn into the text.

The second concept, ‘subject positioning’, has a psychological element to it, and refers to the interpellation of the viewer by the text through “identificatory participation” (Stam *et al.* 1993: 155). Unlike the concept of ‘reading positions’, ‘subject positioning’ brings the spectator into a relationship *with* the text (identification) rather than a relationship *to* the text (in judgment of it). ‘Subject positioning’ deals with the way viewers associate themselves with characters in the film (as one example), not the way they position themselves in the evaluation of the film’s dominant discourse (as in the case of ‘reading positions’).

Identification can occur because of the ‘cinema apparatus’ – the way the screen is positioned: large, in the dark and in front of us, as though “the camera (and by extension, the projector) becomes our eyes” (Turner 2003: 133). Metz extends this theory, stating that as such, the viewer is both a ‘peeping-tom’ and a part of the story – the screen images become, as it were, “extensions of ourselves” (Turner 2003: 133). Our eyes are then guided by the filmmaker, and by way of filmic techniques (‘invisible’ editing being one example), we are distracted by the story and lured away from realization of the characters as fictitious constructs into believing that they are, in fact, real. This is the first step in the identification process. The second step is the way we (also as a result of cinematic techniques) come to see the narrative (or at least parts of it) through the characters’ ‘eyes’. This then is directly connected to the third aspect of identification in film viewing – the associative viewing process – the way we see ourselves in the characters. (This concept involves the individual’s psyche, and as such will be discussed

further in Chapter Four.) Each of these identification practices is performed by the spectator as a ‘subjective individual’, yet again demonstrating how crucial a consideration of subjectivity is in a thorough analysis of film spectatorship.

In relation to the film text, then, the spectator (as a ‘subjective individual’) assumes numerous roles. These roles are both essential to the understanding of the narrative, and to the overall satisfaction of spectating. This latter point consists of a combination of ideological influences and psychological desires, the focal points of Chapters Three and Four respectively.



CHAPTER 3:

Complications in Spectatorship Studies

In the discussion of the structure of the film text in the previous chapter, particularly in view of the fact that films are encoded constructs, and moreover that filmmakers structure the chosen signs and codes very specifically in order to generate a ‘preferred’ response position which they hope the viewer will adopt, a number of concerns became evident. These involve the issue of ideology, the idea of polysemy, the dilemma of distinguishing between public and private spheres, and the unconscious desires of individual viewers. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these crucial aspects of reception theory, as these aspects affect the reception process and are consequently vital to spectatorship studies. In doing so it will become apparent that each of these concerns also involves subjectivity. I begin with a thorough exploration of ideology.

Ideology is involved in the film reception process in at least four ways. The first is the most broad and general, and addresses how all of society, and as a result, all societal expression (including film) is an expression of ‘reality’ through ideology. In the second instance, an ideological viewpoint is worked into the film (perhaps unknowingly) by the filmmaker through his/her choices (for example by the images and sounds he/she selects, and how he/she angles and edits these film components). Thirdly, the codes used in the film operate through discourse, and are as such embedded in ideology. The fourth instance occurs during the reception process, where the viewers’ ideological beliefs have a profound effect on the way he/she ‘reads’ the film text. All four have a significant influence on the reception process, and as such I shall examine each instance in detail.

Before discussing the first instance it must be noted that it is my objective to explore some of the numerous *ways* in which ideology *functions* in society, not to provide only one representative definition of ideology, as the concept ‘ideology’ “is itself continually being redefined, contested, and explored...there is no incontestable definition of ideology” (Turner 2003: 154).

Helpful to an understanding of the way in which ideology functions in film is the work of contemporary film theorist, Graeme Turner. Best known for his book *Film as Social Practice*, Turner's contribution to film reception studies lies predominantly in his remarkable *theory of 'reality'*.

In order to understand Turner's hypothesis, one must first be aware that there is a problem with labelling anything as 'real', for the way one regards any situation is a result of perception, and thus it cannot be said confidently that things appear as they truly are. Rather, it must be recognized that things are merely 'as they seem' (perceptually); and, since (as mentioned in Chapter Two) all knowledge and perception exist through language, what we call 'reality' must be acknowledged not as the truth in any absolute sense, but as the way that things *appear* through the 'lens' of a discourse. Thus, what one commonly refers to as 'reality' is actually *perception*. Filmic 'reality' is equally a matter of perception. In fact, filmic 'reality' is a perceived quasi-'reality', as the 'reality' is not only the result of perception (on the part of both filmmaker and spectator), but is also fictitious.

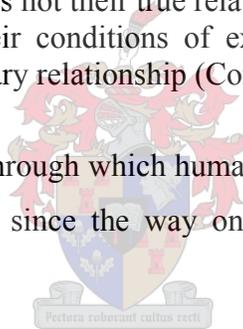
Ernest Lindgren defines *fiction* as the "representation of the behaviour of people regarded as individual persons" (1968: 46). Fiction, in its various forms (one being film) is thus the portrayal of 'reality' in a new way or new form. It is not 'reality', but rather, as Irving Singer entitles his book, *Reality Transformed*. This expression summarizes the fact that fiction involves "an art of transforming what is real instead of merely reproducing or recording it", thus emphasizing the "act of expression" in creating fiction (and therefore film also) (Singer 1998: 4-7). This is a vital point as it recognizes that all fiction is created by an individual(s) and, as such, the fictitious 'reality' created will be a product of the individuals' interpretation of 'reality'. In the case of film, the film product will be formed in direct accordance with the filmmaker(s) *view* of 'reality' (perceptually). Hence film, through its images and narrative, is a construction of the filmmakers' individual perceptions and viewpoints of 'reality'.

Since ‘reality’ is more precisely understood as *perception* (hence my placing of ‘reality’ in inverted commas), each element of every film has been manipulated to fit the filmmakers’ perception of ‘reality’. Then, given that perception occurs through discourse (which is grounded in certain ‘accepted’ ideals), the ‘reality’ created by filmmakers illustrates “the world as it is experienced when filtered through...ideology” (Comolli & Narboni 1976: 25). It can be stated, then, that ideology conditions the way we (as human beings) view ‘reality’, and as such, shapes our expression (in this case film), and our response (viewing).

Althusser attempts an explanation of the workings of ideology:

Ideologies are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects, which work fundamentally on men [sic] by a process they do not understand. What men [sic] express in their ideologies is not their true relation to their conditions of existence, but how they react to their conditions of existence which presupposes a real relationship and an imaginary relationship (Comolli and Narboni 1976: 25).

Ideology is therefore, the system through which human beings perceive, and also how we relate to everything in existence, since the way one sees things affects the way one responds to them.



Consequently, ideology is embedded within us – it is “impossible to stand outside ideology and talk about it in a language which is itself free of ideology” (Turner 2003: 171). Ideology is thus both influential and endless. It is a system in which we are immersed, and by which we live. Ideology exists purely because the beliefs and principles it encompasses are conformed to by many (and consequently upheld by many). These beliefs and principles are made the ‘norm’ and have come to be viewed as commonly accepted practices. They therefore form, as Turner puts it, a “theory of ‘reality’” (Turner 2003: 155).

Turner uses this expression to describe “the workings of language and representation within culture which enable...formations to be constructed as ‘natural’” (2003: 155). That which is considered ‘natural’ or the ‘norm’ is the basis, or neutral, against which

everything else is evaluated. For example, it is only in knowing what is moral or immoral, that one may distinguish what is compliant or not with the ethical code in operation in a particular society. This “theory of ‘reality’” is thus the prerequisite for grasping meaning, for the simple reason that our interpretation of everything relies on our “theory of ‘reality’” for assessment. Hence, all films (and their meanings) are ‘read’ and evaluated in accordance with our perception of this “theory of ‘reality’”.

Importantly, “for this ‘theory of reality’ actually to work as a structuring principle it needs to be unspoken, invisible, a property of the natural world rather than human interests”; which it is. (Turner 2003: 155). Moreover, not only is this “theory of ‘reality’” brought about by the ideological beliefs that have created ‘norms’, but ideology is also the term used to denote that which is the product of this “theory of ‘reality’” (that is, the viewpoints and subsequent behaviours we adopt in compliance with it). Therefore, we (as human beings in a society) cannot escape ideology. It conditions both *what* we think and act, and *how* we think and act.

Since we cannot escape ideology, films are thus ideological both in creation (using images which operate as communication symbols), and in their message (relying on individual interpretation of these symbols). Even seemingly ‘mindless’ teenage comedies, such as *Eurotrip*, “are a product of their ideological context”, as they either “indirectly endorse ideological beliefs or obscure more radical solutions to social problems” (Barsam c2004: 430-1). In *Eurotrip* an example would be the ideologically promoted American assumption that all brownies in Holland are ‘hash brownies’. In this instance, the ideology is playfully mocked. Thus, as with the films *Dances with Wolves*, *Unforgiven* and *The Searchers*, the film not only acknowledges the fact that ideologies operate within it (by consciously drawing on the ideologies), but recognizes the possibility of ‘breaking’ them (by deliberately adjusting the ideological paradigm). In *Eurotrip* this is done by revealing that the brownies they have eaten in fact contain no ‘hash’, while in *Dances with Wolves*, for example, the common code in westerns of the barbaric other (the Indian) is shattered by concentrating on the life of these people, and thereby drawing the viewers’ sympathies to them. Ideologies can, therefore, be changed or evolve.

There are various factors that condition ideology. These factors are in a state of constant flux – their changes resulting in shifts in ideological patterns and beliefs. Examples of these factors are time, culture, politics, economics, philosophy and sociology. And, since the ‘reality’ we perceive (termed by Turner as our “theory of ‘reality’”) is shaped by ideology, one must bear in mind that perception (and hence our “theory of ‘reality’”) is also dependent on the above-mentioned conditioning factors.

Differences in “theory of ‘reality’” from, for example, East to West, often result in vast discrepancies in the understanding of films. A Thai local might have no knowledge of Brad Pitt, causing this individual to register Pitt as a mere (perhaps, or perhaps not) good-looking guy in *Fight Club*, while the Westerner’s recognition of Pitt as one of *People Magazine*’s ‘Sexiest Men’ enhances the believability of his role as Edward Norton’s alter ego. Although this example deals with two opposite sides of the world in order to emphasize the effect of ideology on societies’ perceptions of the world, and hence too, on our perception of films and their meanings, it is a vital point. It is the point which recognizes that as everyone views ‘reality’ differently – everyone then, has their own “theory of ‘reality’” – hence, everyone views films differently.

Turner’s concept thus draws attention to the problems in attempting any analysis in film reception studies, for “films...are the unconscious instruments of the ideology which produces them”, and spectators (often unknowingly) view films through discourses; similarly immersed in, and conditioned by the ideology which produces and sustains them (Comolli & Narboni 1976: 25).

The second of the four interventions of ideology in the film reception process has to do with the ideologies at work within the film text as a result of the choices and perceptions worked into the text by the filmmaker.

Film is (as described in detail in the previous chapter) a complex system of signifying elements. Instigating the specific signifiers used in each particular film is the filmmaker who selects, organizes, angles, orders and formulates each representational image into story format. The filmmaker decides upon a narrative and ‘constructs’ it from the signs he/she considers most ‘appropriate’ for the chosen narrative. Filmmaking consists therefore, of selective choices on the part of the filmmaker – he/she settles on a narrative, chooses which images to use, decides how to shoot them, and then determines how to order the images in the editing process. This act of choice, selecting certain images and techniques above others, evokes a further manifestation of ideology as it is an act performed by an individual(s) immersed in ideology (Roberts & Wallis 2001: 140). The filmmaker creates his/her filmic ‘reality’ by way of his/her choices and perceptions and, as such, the filmic product will be an expression of his/her (subjective) ideological preference.

Film does not reflect or even record reality; like any other medium of representation it constructs and ‘re-presents’ its pictures of reality by way of the codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies of its culture as well as by the way of the specific signifying practices of the medium. Just as film works *on* the meaning systems of culture – to renew, reproduce, or review them – it is also produced *by* those meaning systems (Turner 2003: 152).



Since ideology shapes the way society thinks and behaves, which in turn conditions the way we (as part of that society) perceive ‘reality’ (by way of our “theory of ‘reality’”), ideology is present in the film text in the filmmaker’s choices, which are governed by his/her perceptions (his/her “theory of ‘reality’”).

To summarize this second instance of ideology influencing film reception: in choosing the signs and codes he/she wishes to incorporate into the narrative, and in arranging these elements in the editing phase, the filmmaker promotes these particular signs and codes, as he/she uses these specific choices over other possibilities. The filmmaker is, then, endorsing his/her perception of ‘reality’ in, and of, the narrative. This act, therefore, involves subjectivity on the part of the filmmaker.

However, the filmmakers' subjective choices which structure the narrative are not aimed at 'subjective individual' spectators, but at the 'ideal' spectator. This is because there are simply too many 'readings' available and, as such, an 'ideal' spectator aligned with the 'preferred reading' must be modelled.

The 'preferred reading', as discussed in Chapter Two, is the 'reading' which agrees with the ideological perception endorsed by the filmmaker. Ideology is hence present in the film text and is exemplified by the concept of the 'ideal' viewer. This concept of the 'ideal' viewer, which is directly related to the chosen signs and codes and the way they have been arranged in the film by the filmmaker, returns us to the encoding practice in film creation, and brings us to the third instance of the ideological operations in the film reception process.

As described in Chapter Two, codes function because they are systems of widely known, commonly 'accepted' signifiers. Bearing this in mind, every sign incorporated into a film (even at a denotative level, referring simply to what it represents) "*cannot* be identified with a 'neutral state of language': there can be no 'neutral state' because denotations also *must be produced by the operation of a code*" (Heck 1992: 126). Thus, both the signs used and the codes into which they are organized by the filmmaker are themselves ideological.

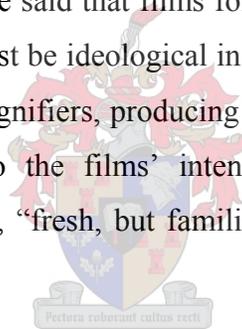
In short, a sign cannot function (that is, stand for something) unless this representation has already been established in society. Returning to the symbol of a golf game (Chapter Two) as an effective example, this sport registers as a hobby of the wealthy only because it has come to be regarded as such by society.

The significance of 'ordinary' practices, such as a man giving flowers to a woman in order to impress her, are similarly *learnt* codes, effective only because they are acknowledged by society. Such practices have become coded conventions by way of their endorsement by society's (dominant) ideology and have, therefore, become 'accepted'. Thus, if one looks closely into the ideological processing of codes, it becomes clear that

the more ‘accepted’ the code is the more immersed it is in ideology. Hall explains this concept:

Certain codes may...be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at such an early age, that they appear not to be constructed – the effect of an articulation between sign and referent – but to be ‘naturally’ given...However, this does not mean that no codes have intervened; rather, that the codes have been profoundly *naturalized*...This has the (ideological) effect of concealing the practices of coding which are present. But...[a]ctually, what naturalized codes demonstrate is the degree of habituation produced...between the encoding and decoding sides of an exchange of meanings (Hall 1993: 94).

Hence, not only does the filmmakers’ choices in the encoding process (the film’s creation) position the film in a certain ideological framework (because the choices are governed by the filmmakers’ beliefs and perceptions), but the codes themselves operate within ideology. It can therefore be said that films follow a very distinct pattern in order to be understood. In fact, films must be ideological in order to exist, because ideology (in the form of images operating as signifiers, producing sign systems) is necessary to guide spectators along the narrative to the films’ intended meaning. Consequently, film products are, as Turner phrases it, “fresh, but familiar, new but generic, individual but representative” (2003: 153).



However, despite codes having predefined meanings in society, I shall demonstrate how, in dealing with the fourth instance of ideology in film reception, the viewers’ “theory of ‘reality’” shapes the ‘reading’ process and, therefore, influences the ‘reading’ position that the spectator adopts, regardless of being prompted by the film’s codes and ideology to adopt the ‘ideal’ ‘reading’ position. The viewer as a ‘subjective individual’ is, thus, yet again an important concept.

In Stuart Hall’s ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ theory, he points out that the meaning produced by the text is both encoded in a discourse and decoded through discourses. Thus, as During summarizes in his introduction to Hall’s article, although the four stages of the communication process (“production, circulation, use... and reproduction”) form a progressive chain – “the coding of a message *does* control its reception” – the outcome is

never clear since at each point in the chain there are numerous other influential factors affecting these various stages, which in turn affect the overall process (1993: 90). To clarify: the encoding systems “are themselves framed by structures of understanding, as well as being produced by social and economic relations, which shape their ‘realization’ at the reception end of the chain” (Hall 1993: 93). Then, at the reception end, each viewer brings with him/her previously conceived ideas of the way things ‘ought to be’ – a result of the ideologies at work in society. These ideas or discourses play a role in the way the viewer ‘reads’ the text, or will at least condition (to some extent) the way the film text is received and assessed by the viewer. As such, the text message is, one might say, at the ‘mercy’ of oppositional discourses – hence, no text contains one single concrete meaning, but instead, holds the possibility of a range of meanings. (This introduces the concept of polysemy – the second aspect under discussion in this chapter. I shall return to it shortly once I have concluded my discussion of ideology.)

The ‘preferred reading’ correlates with the ‘preferred’ meaning of the film text – that is, the filmmakers’ intended message. However, as mentioned previously, there is a discrepancy between the ‘ideal’ viewer (who ‘reads’ the text in the ‘preferred’ way), and the ‘real’ viewer (who has his/her own ideas of what the text means). For, despite the filmmakers’ specific encoding, in order to best position the spectator to attain the ‘preferred reading’, “the actual audience, no matter how willingly it follows such clues, remains irreducibly itself, appropriating the text for its own tastes and purposes” (Suleiman & Crosman 1980: vii).

In effect, returning to Hall’s ‘encoding, decoding’ theory, the ‘encoding’ part of the communication chain is by no means in a position of final authority, despite its function of producing. The communication system is not a linear one, but a cyclical continuum. The production phase and the reception phase are then, merely two points within a larger system of works – a system governed by ideology, in which the viewers’ perceptions and preferences (our “theory of ‘reality’”) generate our ‘reading’ of the film.

Cinema knowledge emerges from the spectator...[it] cannot be seen as something contained solely within the film...it cannot be seen as a formula or list of details. It must be in a combination of elements, textual and extra-textual, not the least being the formation of the spectator as he/she creates the film in the viewing (Fuery 2004: 148).

Ideology is therefore apparent in this fourth instance in the way in which the viewer perceives the film. That is, the way he/she 'reads' the codes based on his/her ideological beliefs, and the way he/she positions him/herself (in relation to these beliefs) accordingly.

The meanings I find in a sign derive from the ideology within which the sign and I exist: by finding these meanings I define myself in relation to the ideology and in relation to my society (Fiske 1982: 151).

Thus, the viewer 'reads' the film by way of learnt cultural codes, operating through discourses, which have been produced by the prevailing ideology of the particular society and, at the same time, evaluates these in terms of his/her own (subjective) "theory of 'reality'". As discussed in Chapter Two, based on his/her personal interpretation, the viewer 'reads' the film in a particular way and adopts a 'reading' position which is either aligned with that of the text's intention ('preferred reading'), opposed to the text's 'ideal' meaning ('oppositional reading'), an objective consideration of it ('negotiated reading'), or the result of misreading (as in the case of the 'aberrant reading'). Influencing the viewers' 'reading' of the film text therefore, are ideological factors both textual and extra-textual.

In order to better explain this concept, I shall draw on two interesting examples of films that have been 'read' to mean different things because of their viewers' ideological beliefs. These films are Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*). Both films demonstrate how "unconsciously ideology can work and how it can live in the formal properties of the individual film text" (Turner 2003: 172). However, for the ideology to manifest itself as a way of seeing ('reading') it needs the viewer to either accept the discourse it is embedded in, oppose it, or negotiate with it.

Fritz Lang was a Jew living in Germany at the time of the Nazis' rise to power. Being Jewish, he was most certainly not in support of the Nazi party, nor their doctrine. However, Lang's film *Metropolis*, which "tells the story of a workers' revolution in a futuristic dictatorship...[and] guides the co-operation between the 'head' (ruler) and the 'hands' (the workers)", was appropriated (by Hitler himself) and thought of as endorsing Nazi ideology, as "although the film establishes the oppression of the workers, its final frames show them surrendering their power to a newly humanized ruler" (Turner 2003: 173). In fact, even smaller details, such as the pentangle on the scientist in the film, as Turner goes on to point out, can be associated with the Star of David. And, since the scientist is a malicious character, a pro-Nazi perspective ('reading') of the film can result in anti-Semitism being 'read' into the film's message. Thus, Lang's film, although created 'outside' the Nazi ideological framework, could indeed be 'read' by others as Nazi propaganda. Here lies the discrepancy between the 'ideal' viewer and the 'real' viewer whom brings his/her personal beliefs and schemata with him/her to the film viewing. As Turner puts it, "Fritz Lang was not the 'author' of the discourses of *Metropolis*; his culture was" (2003: 173).

A very similar appropriation of the film text (to suit the ideology of the viewer) occurred (and in fact still occurs) in the 'reading' of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Although a non-Jewish German closely associated with the Nazi leaders (including Hitler himself), Riefenstahl adamantly claims that she was not a Nazi supporter, and that her films were just exercises in artistry, and by no means meant as Nazi propaganda. Her claims were supported by film viewers around the globe in the mid-1930s, who saw *Triumph of the Will* as a beautifully filmed masterpiece, not as Nazi propaganda. In fact, the United States, Italy, France and Sweden honoured Riefenstahl with awards for her brilliant cinematography. In Germany, however, this film was seen in a different light, due to the dominant ideology at work in German society. Nazi supporters (and Hitler himself) 'read' the film as a support of their ideals and rise to power. The anti-Nazi population would have held a different perspective on the film, most likely 'reading' it as an indoctrination of Nazi ideals. To clarify this reasoning I shall provide a number of examples from within the film.

The shot of Hitler descending ‘from the clouds’ could be viewed as artistry, adding to the aesthetic beauty of the film, as Riefenstahl claimed adamantly in Ray Müller’s Emmy award-winning documentary entitled *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*. Pro-Nazi viewers could, however, ‘read’ this image as an enforcement of the godlike quality of their leader, and accordingly, anti-Nazi viewers could ‘read’ this same image as Nazi propaganda. Similar examples may be seen in the parade of the German groups in traditional dress, and the games played by the soldiers during their seemingly ‘daily’ dressing routines. Riefenstahl and her supporters in the United States, France, Sweden and other countries viewed these scenes as aesthetic attributes of the film; Pro-Nazis would perhaps have ‘read’ these images as enhancing national pride and encouraging the joining of the Nazi army; while anti-Nazi viewers could again ‘read’ these inclusions in the film as enforcements of Nazi ideology. Even the triumphant musical accompaniment, combined with the organized structure of the ceremonial processions in the film, could be ‘read’ in different ways by different viewers depending on their personal perspective and their “theory of ‘reality’”. These elements could be recognized as merely adding to the spectacular effect of the scene, but they could also be viewed as enforcing the passion of the Nazi Party as well as the Party’s orderliness, creating a powerful symbolic illusion of peace, pride and power through following the regime, or they could be ‘read’ by the anti-Nazi viewer as enhancing the film’s propaganda.

Fiske clarifies this concept in stating that “a discourse, a register of languages with its attendant ways of conceptualizing the world” causes “reading” [in this case interpretant viewing] to be “a negotiation between the numerous discourses of the reader and the discourse in the text” (1982: 115).

In summary: each viewers’ position in relation to the dominant “theory of ‘reality’” in his/her society affects the way he/she ‘reads’ films. One could say then that there are as many ‘readings’ of a film as there are perspectives – and hence – as there are viewers.

Since each viewer has his/her own “theory of ‘reality’” which conditions the way he/she perceives, it can be stated that meaning is never inherent, even in a simple sign; it is the outcome of interpretation. There is consequently no such thing as *the* meaning of something. As such, in film studies one must more correctly talk of “‘meanings’ than of Meaning”; “[m]eanings are seen as the products of an audience’s reading rather than as an essential property of the film text itself” (Turner 2003: 144). This is where the poststructuralist theory of polysemy finds its origin.

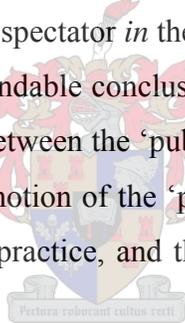
Metz believed that the “plurality of readings is associated with the plurality of codes which give form to the film” (1974b: 118). However, it is perhaps more accurate to state that the range of ‘readings’ result from the range of interpretations available (due to individual perception) for each code.

The film *Rashomon* dramatizes the fact that personal interpretation can cause vast discrepancies in the ‘reading’ of narratives. *Rashomon*’s narrative is a murder investigation. This investigative concept allows for questioning, which focuses on the ‘knowledge’ (interpretation) of people. The film explores the interpretations of the murder from the points of view of those connected with the case. In doing so, it illustrates just how many different viewpoints there can be, subsequently revealing that it is actually impossible to know *the* truth, as all ‘truths’ are merely ‘readings’ and are hence subjective.

However, despite each viewer having the potential to interpret the film text solely to his/her likes, the prevailing ideology in the society is usually the ideology in which the text is formed, and as such, the majority of viewers are likely to be satisfied in taking this dominant position. It is for this reason that film (as part of a vast industry, seen by millions of people) is considered by many to play a part in societal indoctrination, through the enforcement of dominant ideologies at work in the film text. As Phillips phrased it, “popular cinema could be seen as playing a part in ‘naturalizing’ particular ways of seeing and understanding the world” (2003: 105). Yet it is logical (without even considering that it is profitable) for filmmakers to produce works in keeping with the

dominant modes of discourse – that is, aligned with the ‘accepted’ ways of thinking and behaving – to better ensure their film’s success. As such, the ‘preferred reading’ of the film text is most often aligned with the “status quo” (Mulvey 1989: 15). Mulvey goes on to state that included in this framework is patriarchal order, which both influences the way film is encoded, and the way it is received. (This notion coincides with the concept of ‘*the gaze*’, which has a psychological dimension, and as such will be discussed further in Chapter Four.)

Thus, although polysemy is a concept which must be acknowledged in film reception, the range of positions available to the viewer are, one could say, limited by the ideology dominant in society. This is due to the fact that the dominant ideological mindset defines that which we (as members of the society) view as normal and acceptable, and that which we do not. Nevertheless, polysemy is an important notion in film reception studies as it emphasizes the individuality of each spectator *in* the audience, consequently revealing the hopelessness of arriving at any dependable conclusions in this field, and leading directly into the dilemma of distinguishing between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ cultural divisions in film reception. I shall examine this notion of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ cultural divisions on two levels: the level of cultural practice, and that of the more concrete reception of film in the cinema auditorium.



Turner refers to Bennet and Woollacott’s statement that “both films and their audiences are, as it were, culturally operated” (2003: 148). Films as well as their audiences are, then, both products of society and individual entities. This creates a problem when discussing film and spectatorship. The film product is both fashioned by cultural systems, and by its filmmaker(s). Similarly, the spectator is both constituted by the cultural system of his/her society, and by his/her experiences as a ‘subjective individual’.

Thus, in dealing with films and their audiences one must bear in mind that often the viewpoint that the film projects (via the filmmakers perspective), and the ‘reading’ that the viewer takes, coincide with the dominant (ideological) viewpoint of society. Then, although ideology is clearly at play (as it has become the ‘accepted’ viewpoint), I am

nevertheless hesitant to label such films as ‘ideological’, since the viewer would most likely have adopted the dominant ‘reading’ position without any guidance from the filmmaker, simply because the dominant ideology is the ‘naturalized’ way of seeing. I return, then, to the issue raised earlier, namely that what seems most ‘natural’ is in fact the most ideological. Such is the predicament in which one finds oneself in any discussion of ideology.

The cultural divisions – ‘public’ and ‘private’ – are also further integrated into the culture systems as ‘dividers’. For example, generalizations tend to be associated with the notion of ‘public’, while subjectivity is a quality of the ‘private’. This concept will be discussed further in Chapter Five where I address the interrelations of ‘individualism’ and popular culture.

In the reception of film (in the auditorium setting) the cultural divisions ‘public’ and ‘private’ raise further problems: as discussed in Chapter One, film has an audience, but this audience is comprised of ‘subjective individuals’.

To add yet another dimension to this already complex notion: “the cinema is, in a peculiar way, both more public and more private than our own homes” (Phillips 2003: 92). This is because in attending a film viewing, we (as spectators) are part of an audience, in a public place, and yet, at the same time, the act of going to watch a film, and the cinema setup, ensures that our individual attention is more focused on the screen than it would be in the privacy of our own homes.

The cultural divisions ‘public’ and ‘private’ are thus, on both levels, tricky, overlapping notions, which must be kept in mind in spectatorship studies, because, like ideology, they play a role in the way viewers experience film, and the way reception studies addresses the film viewing process. Moreover, the term ‘private’ is based on the ‘subjective individual’s’ relation to society. Subjectivity is thus again evident as a vital component of the reception process.

The last problematic aspect in the film reception process is profoundly subjective and is the most complex issue, as it originates in a realm which is ultimately unknowable.

Film spectatorship, being a voluntary (and vastly popular) pastime, is clearly the ‘answer’ (satisfaction) to some inner desire(s) of the spectators. The problem is that when dealing with desire (as I go on to demonstrate in detail in the Fourth Chapter) one can only proceed with approximations. Not only is the personal desire of each viewer grounded in his/her psyche, and thus an element of psychology, but as Lapsley and Westlake phrase it, “the most fundamental problem of all” is that “psychoanalysis is founded on the discovery of the unconscious” (1990: 104).

The unconscious is not accessible for analysis, except (as Sigmund Freud would argue) through dreams. Yet dreams themselves are highly personalized, individual experiences, and are furthermore presented in a ‘disguised’ form (which I will also discuss in Chapter Four). All we (as human beings) know about dreams is that which has been theorized about them. And, since dreams are thought to come from the unconscious, all theories on dreams are speculative. As such, each viewer’s personal desires, being “the symbolic circulation of unconscious wishes through signs bound to our earliest forms of infantile satisfaction”, are even to the viewer themselves, unknowable (Stam *et al.* 1993: 124).

Thus, in view of the fact that films are not only ‘read’ through the viewers’ ideological perception, but also in accordance with his/her desires, an insoluble gap forms preventing the possibility of ever understanding the entire film reception process. This issue is caused, in each instance, by the role subjectivity plays in film spectatorship. To clarify this point I provide an example.

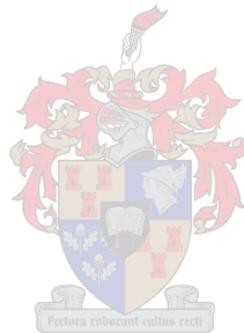
The film *Tomb Raider* is an effective illustration of Mulvey’s point on patriarchal compliance. Although the character Lara Croft is a female heroine, and thus fulfils a role usually associated with a strong, gallant male, Croft is nonetheless positioned for the male gaze. The most obvious example is her skin-tight outfits, which satisfy the ‘male’ desire to view the female as a sex object. This illustrates but one instance of the film’s

alignment with society's dominant ideology – in this case that of patriarchal order – in turn allowing the viewer to 'read' the film through this same dominant discourse – that of the male gaze. Then, taking the viewers' personal desires into consideration, this generalized example becomes problematic, as, even though viewers may share ideological beliefs, they possess different schemata and, hence, different needs for satisfaction. Accordingly, the viewers will 'read' the film from a slightly different approach to one another (in an attempt to satisfy their personal desires) and thus, their final 'readings' of the film will differ. Perhaps an adventure-loving spectator will watch the film from a more action-orientated angle, while the spectator desperate for romantic attachment might approach the film from this angle. Even two males (and indeed females), although both positioned by the film to view Croft as a sex object, will experience this gaze differently in accordance with their attitudes towards women, their experiences, and their individual preferences. A young spectator may not even register Croft's 'sexiness' and instead relate to the Croft character as an idol – someone he/she wishes they could be. An elderly spectator may be reminded of his/her youth and consequently 'read' the film from a perspective that best corresponds with their own memories. And, even such examples are stereotyped – actual spectator responses and 'readings' are far more specialized as a result of their highly personal life experiences, and therefore their very specific desires. In summary then, since desire is psychological and thus connected to the unconscious, a definitive analysis of spectator response is ultimately unachievable.

I have included this aspect of the unconscious in this chapter as it is one of the major dilemmas which arise in the discussion of film reception. However, because the notion of the unconscious is a key aspect of psychology, I shall not delve further into this subject here, as I will return to it in the next chapter.

Chapter Two intended to demonstrate that “the text is produced only at the moment of interaction with the audience member, bringing the spectator/reader/viewer to the forefront of the mediated event” and, in light of this, the Third Chapter examined how “the viewing subject is composed of the interaction between the effects of discourses

invoked by the text/representation *and* the effects of social and material discourses beyond” (Pribram 2005: 160). Subjectivity was a crucial component of both these discussions. The following chapter, Chapter Four, examines the reasons why we (as human beings and potential spectators) choose to view films – hence investigating further the concept of *desire* and its counterpart, *satisfaction* – a discussion equally centred on the spectator as a ‘subjective individual’.



CHAPTER 4:

‘Satisfactions’ of Spectatorship: Why we choose to Watch

Now that I have examined the various types of spectatorship, the roles spectators may adopt in the viewing process, and the problems with categorizing these positions, I must of course look at why it is that we (as potential viewers), choose to attend films, placing ourselves in the role of spectator. The answer is by no means a simple one, for the question prompts psychoanalytic investigation which, as noted at the end of the previous chapter, involves the (ultimately) unknowable phenomenon – the unconscious mind.

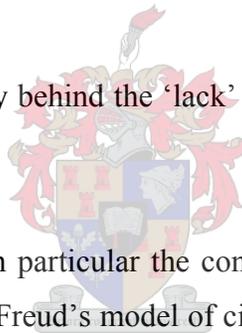
It is clear that film’s prominent position in contemporary society denotes its importance. Film relies on constant support through attendance, sanction, the purchasing of merchandise and word of mouth in order to survive as a high expense industry. Society therefore maintains the film industry – because we (society) want the film experience. Films must therefore, *satisfy* some sort of human *desire(s)*. The terms ‘satisfaction’ and ‘desire’ are central to the issue of spectatorship. Since both ‘desire’ and ‘satisfaction’ are qualities of the psyche, the question of why spectators have chosen to spectate involves psychoanalysis, and therefore involves subjectivity.

The topic of psychoanalysis in film is vast, complicated and controversial. Since this thesis deals with spectatorship, I shall discuss aspects of psychoanalytic theories which will help explain the reasons for spectatorship. In doing so, however, I shall merely touch on a few points. This chapter cannot be viewed as an in-depth psychological study of film or the related psychological theories; rather, it is a necessary section of the central topic – spectatorship. I begin with a closer look at the two key terms: ‘desire’ and ‘satisfaction’.

Desire is, as Phillips phrases it, “an expression of ‘lack’” (2003: 114). Desire is therefore coupled with ‘satisfaction’, as it is out of this ‘lack’ that a longing for fulfilment is born. Any ‘satisfaction’ achieved is, however, only temporary; our ‘lack’ is unending and therefore our desire returns and the cycle continues; hence my placing of the term ‘satisfaction’ in inverted commas.

In the film viewing process this ‘lack’-desire-‘satisfaction’ cycle is unmistakable. In choosing to attend films and in fulfilling the role of spectator, the viewer desires (if nothing else consciously) to watch. This voyeuristic role involves first and foremost the notion of ‘lack’ – we do not assume the role of voyeur if there is not something we desire in the object we look at. The two-dimensional quality of film presents us with images at which we look, but which are not present, ‘objects’ which we desire (celebrities, lifestyles, and so forth), but which are not ‘reachable’. Film provides us with a fantasy. Fantasy denotes that which we desire, but do not have. The popularity of the film medium, therefore, accentuates the human ‘lack’ and our resulting desires. Consequently, the film industry owes its survival to this ‘lack’ – desire drives film attendance. The constant potential for ‘satisfaction’ that films provide viewers, ensures that film-going is a regular practice.

I shall now explore the psychology behind the ‘lack’ which drives human desire and our need for ‘satisfaction’.



Freudian psychoanalytic theory, in particular the concepts of ‘wish-fulfilment’, dreams, the ‘ego’ and ‘identification’, and Freud’s model of civilization as a whole, have initiated psychological analyses of film. Such analyses then tend to be informed by Lacanian theory, specifically the premise of the ‘Mirror Stage’, which divides human experience into two realms: the ‘imaginary’ and the ‘symbolic’. As mentioned in Chapter Three, psychoanalytic theory, being based to some extent on the unconscious, is speculative. There exist therefore, a range of theories – Freud’s being the first, Lacan’s being widely adopted. Thus in using Freud’s model and Lacan’s premise I do not suggest these are *the* correct ones, nor do I condemn other theories. Freud’s model, being the first exploration of psychoanalysis, the unconscious and of dreams, merely seemed the appropriate choice to use as groundwork, since all other theories refer, in one way or another, back to his, either in the development of Freud’s hypotheses, in revision of them, or in opposition to them. Lacan’s premise, which suggests by way of the “Mirror Stage” our entry into ‘language’ (communication systems), seemed equally necessary to my discussion.

The Psychology of Desire

Anderson expresses the paradox of film aptly in his description of cinema as both an “illusion” and a “surrogate reality” (1996: 19). Film functions both as a form of escapism (into fantasy) and, at the same time, as a desired ‘reality’ (hope). Freud’s ‘wish-fulfilment’ theory thus provides a probable explanatory rationale for film’s importance in society.

Freud explains the premise underlying ‘wish-fulfilment’ in his work *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as follows: “The dream represents a certain state of affairs as being as I would wish it to be: *its content is thus a wish-fulfilment, its motive a wish*” (1999: 95). Such wishes may therefore be termed *desires*. As defined above, desire denotes *want(s)* and consequently signifies ‘lack’. In Freudian terms desire (the expression of lack) is a natural human response stemming from the Oedipus Complex.

This complex is thought to emerge soon after a baby recognizes him/herself as an individual. According to Lacan’s theory, this recognition occurs between the ages of approximately six and eighteen months, and may be termed the process of “*identification*” (c 1977a: 4). This ‘process’ is commonly referred to as the ‘Mirror Stage’ and involves the baby recognizing him/herself as an “*I*” (Lacan c 1977a: 4). This means that the baby becomes aware of him/herself as an individual (and therefore separate from others). The importance of this identification ‘process’ is, as maintained by Lacan’s theory, that it “situates the agency known as the ego” (c 1977a: 4). Thus, as the theory contends, in identifying oneself as an “*I*” the process of judgment begins, as the “*I*” is immediately separate from the “*Other*” (every other individual), thereby calling the ego into existence (Lacan c 1977a: 4). The baby is now seen not just as a being amongst beings, but as an individual in relation to all other individuals. As soon as the ego is in operation, desire for ‘Objects’ is thought to be brought about. Since the baby is closest to the mother at this age, it is the mother who is thought to become the baby’s first ‘object’ of desire. This is the point at which the Freudian theory of the Oedipus Complex

emerges. However, certain dynamics and obstacles come into play in this alleged Oedipal situation. (These factors are, equally, debatable theories.)

First, the mother is also the ‘object’ of the father’s affection, and her love split between the father and the baby. (Obviously this theory applies only to the conventional situation, and does not take into account other possible situations like the baby being orphaned, the father being a rapist and so forth.) Second, Lacan claims that due to the human ego there exists a natural desire to be not only the sole winner of your ‘object’s’ love, but to also, “hold the place of the cause of desire” (c 1977b: 277). In simpler terms, this theory maintains that the baby desires to be wholly desired, and to possess the power behind this drive of desire. This is, however, supposedly never achieved, firstly due to the competition with the father for the mother’s love, and secondly because of the theory that *all* humans desire to drive the desire, as a result of the ego and its need for ‘*I*’ satisfaction (resulting from the ‘Mirror Stage’). As such, babies are regarded as never able to achieve their want of having their mother all to themselves, leaving them forever unsatisfied.

This ‘human predicament’ of eternal dissatisfaction is claimed to cause the need for constant ‘wish-fulfilment’ (desire) from the ‘Mirror Stage’ onwards, throughout the baby’s life into adulthood. According to psychoanalytic theory, this dilemma manifests itself at an early age by way of self-‘satisfaction’ – pleasing the self – by means of mastering the ‘*pleasure principle*’ (to borrow yet another term from Freud). The first stage of attempted self-‘satisfaction’ is said to occur in the form of childhood games. Freud’s famous example is the “fort [‘gone’]” – “da [‘there’]” game, in which the child hides an object and then ‘finds’ it (“disappearance and return”), thereby creating (in the recovery of the object) an experience of pleasure (1989a: 14). However, this theory maintains that as the child grows up and becomes more conscious of the behavioural codes and conventions of the civilization in which he/she lives, “the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*”; “under the influence of the ego’s instincts of self-preservation” (Freud 1989a: 7). Adult desire is consequently viewed as a more conservative practise, in which the likes of daydreams take the place of childhood games. Huss clarifies this premise, explaining that it is:

...the [human adults'] necessity to both suppress the socially frowned-upon acting out of childish wish-fulfilments known as play and to hold onto the pleasure formerly afforded by the contrivance of such ego-aggrandizing images. Thus the overt activity in children's games, which is a concrete exercise of imagination, becomes for the adult a purely mental phenomenon (1986: 26).

'Imagination' is then considered a key notion in the human being's attempt at achieving self-'satisfaction' ('wish-fulfilment') in the adult stage. As such, the concept of 'imagination' has become central to the psychological study of film. Importantly, 'imagination' also involves the 'subjective individual'. On one level, the film is likened to the dream, as a 'wish-fulfilment' of the psyche. On the second level, and in connection to the original desire for 'wish-fulfilment', the viewing process of film is likened, by film theorists such as Metz, to the 'Mirror-Stage' itself. I shall deal with both levels of comparison.

The Film–Dream Analogy

In dream theory (which also originated with Freud) the dream (including the daydream) is thought to be an 'unconscious' attempt at 'self-satisfaction'. Indeed, the daydream is 'dreamt' up or imagined consciously by the individual, and as such is easier to be recognized as a fantasy/self-'satisfaction'. The daydream also occurs due to underlying want(s) for 'wish-fulfilment' that originate in the psyche, and as such, one can say that the daydream is also an 'unconscious' manifestation of attempted 'self-satisfaction', resulting, as Freud claims, from the Oedipus Complex. Importantly, although every individual is thought to experience the Oedipus Complex, this by no means suggests that every individual experiences it in the same way. Circumstances and schemata affect our experience and, accordingly, our experiences are personal. Our experience of the Oedipus Complex is then, unique to us, and consequently (following this premise), results in us having different desires to other people. Thus, although I discuss society's desire in general in order to demonstrate why it is that spectators have chosen to become such, it must be noted that desire is in fact subjective.

Akin to the dream or daydream, the cinema provides an already created fantasy ('wish-fulfilment') and hence, is an easy means of attaining 'satisfaction'. And significantly, films, like dreams, operate in the present tense, as "the present is the tense in which the dream is represented as fulfilled" (Freud 1999: 348). However, in drawing an analogy between films and dreams, the concept of the created fantasy is merely the tip of the iceberg. There are three complex concepts that lie beneath this analogy and which must be addressed in order to provide a fuller explanation of the consequent theory of why spectators may have chosen to view films.

The first concept suggests that film viewing is comparable to dreaming in that it is an experience of 'wish-fulfilment', a result of unconscious narcissism. Secondly, the narrative form of film has been likened to the form of dreams due to its structure (however, it must be noted that films' structure is created in very different ways and for divergent reasons). Thirdly, film viewing is thought, like the dream, to cause temporary transference from the 'symbolic' to the 'imaginary' realm, the conscious to the 'unconscious', and back. I shall deal with each analogy separately for the sake of clarity, but it is important to note that all three concepts overlap and have a causal relationship with one another.



The notion of unconscious narcissism relates directly back to the discussion of the 'Mirror-Stage' and its birth of ego-awareness, leading to the Oedipus Complex. The "impossibility of the Oedipal situation", and the subsequent dis-pleasure it causes, is thought to have been 'screened' by the psyche in an attempt "to repress any memory of the [unsuccessful Oedipal] event" (Jung in Hockley 2001: 38). Thus, according to this theory, the unconscious prohibits these memories from surfacing into the conscious mind due to the dis-pleasure that these memories bring, and because the desires underlying these memories are inappropriate to the behavioural codes of 'civilized' society (it is not accepted for a child to desire his/her mother, for example).

However, since the Oedipal situation represents, in this theory, the symbolic experience of human desire in general, it is believed to remain a constant struggle in the

unconscious. The only solution for this constant struggle is for the unconscious to release its desires into consciousness as a disguised form, so as to be able to pass through the ‘filter’ of the mind preventing dis-pleasure, when the ego’s desire to repress is lessened – most obviously during sleep. Accordingly, dreams are considered ‘wish-fulfilments’ resulting from narcissistic longing. Similarly, films have been claimed as fantasies (‘wish-fulfilments’) created by society in order to ‘satisfy’ the audience’s (society’s) want for alternate fulfilment, as a result of the frustration caused by the unsuccessful narcissistic desire (the Oedipal situation).

This brings me to the discussion of the second comparison: the analogy of the film form with the dream form. A dream’s disguise (the narrative) appears as a story. However, since dreams are believed to form in the psyche, they are thought to consist of psychological constituents. These constituents are said to underlie the narrative, in this case the dream, but in other cases the neurosis, and so forth. The narrative is considered therefore, a compartmentalized structure. Films, akin to dreams, go through a process of ‘work’ before the finished product emerges. In the case of the dream this ‘work’ is allegedly a function to alleviate the struggle in the unconscious. With film, its very existence as an industry denotes that society enjoys the experience of watching films, and enjoyment is thought to come from ‘lack’, thereby revealing a similar want for ‘wish-fulfilment’, in the form of imaginary scenarios. (In the case of unpleasant film scenarios, the ‘satisfaction’ gained is considered equally a result of desire, but in this case the pleasure is thought to be predominantly in the act of looking itself.) I go on to describe this film form-dream form analogy in greater depth.

Lebovici states that film “is a means of expression very close to oneiric thought” (Margolis 1988: 242). The dream product (the outcome of the ‘dream work’ in Freudian terms) appears to the individual in the form of a narrative. Narratives consists of numerous images, which themselves contain endless symbols (as revealed in the discussion of film narrative structure in the second chapter of this thesis). It is this outside structure – “the aesthetic beauty or formal arrangement of the work” – that Freud describes as the “forepleasure”, “a bribe to the onlooker” (Huss 1986: 37-8). By this

Freud means it is a way of attraction, a luring towards the underlying meaning of the dream. Seemingly, beneath the constructed narrative lie unconscious (and in the case of the dream, repressed) memories which, according to Freud, are usually infantile anxieties. In accordance with dream theory, these memories require the appearance of the dream as a disguise in order to pass through the “criticizing agency” (which guards against dis-pleasure by means of “censorship”) into the consciousness of the dreamer (Freud 1999: 344-5).

Consequently, in Freudian discourse, dreams are viewed as the outcome of the “process” which transforms the “dream thoughts into the dream content” (Freud 1989c: 50). Freud claimed that this process involves the ‘condensation’ and ‘displacement’ of unconscious memories, thoughts and desires, into “overdetermined” elements forming the dream (narrative) (1989c: 32-4). ‘Condensation’ refers to the “transformation of thoughts into situations (‘dramatization’)” (Freud 1989c: 32). ‘Displacement’ refers to the “transference...of the psychological intensity” onto a different “centre” (Freud 1989c: 232-5).

In simpler terms, the dream thoughts (the unconscious repressions) are considered to be hidden by means of the construction of a narrative (via ‘condensation’), and still further disguised by making something unrelated to the central concern underlying the dream seem most important (via ‘displacement’). For example, a dream might concentrate on an activity or thought the dreamer had during waking hours, such as walking along a pier with a friend. This narrative may seem important, and the pier, for instance, might seem to be the focal point of the dream, but in actual fact such inclusions are thought to be used to ‘coat’ the dreams’ main intention in order for it to be allowed into the dreamer’s consciousness. Accordingly, the dream’s intended message is most likely far removed from these obvious images. Then, if, as this theory maintains, the façade of the dream is merely a mask for the repressed memories, dreams might be said to be symbolic.

When something is symbolic it signifies that the importance does not lie in the appearance, but in the underlying content. This allows for some freedom in the narrative structure. First, the concept of time need not be chronological. Second, the perception of

space need not be relative to that of the real world. After discussing these notions in dreams I shall show how they apply equally in film.

The concept of time in dreams has four major divisions: (1) the actual time the dream takes, (2) the time length the dream seems to take, (3) the way that time operates within the dream, and (4) objectivity. The first (the actual ('real') time) refers to the duration of the dream in the 'real' world, and is often only a matter of seconds. The second (the experienced duration) is subjective, belonging only to the dreamer; this length most commonly feels far longer than the actual ('real') time of the dream. Third, the layout of time in the dream refers to the structure of the dream. In some cases a narrative progresses in seemingly chronological time, in other cases fragments seem to be pieced together (resulting in a disjointed 'narrative') creating a feeling of dislocated jumps in time (which are not necessarily chronological). And lastly, the subject (the dreamer) concurrently experiences the time as objective in the sense that he/she seems to simply 'view' or be placed in the dream, without any ability to stop it (with the exception of the dreamer waking him/herself).

With regard to space in dreams, there also exists a distinct dislocation. Very often (in dreams of my own experience) various settings known to my consciousness, but which are in different physical situations in 'reality', seem to appear together or follow on in an ostensibly uninterrupted narrative form, as though it is a natural progression to move from place *x* to place *y* (regardless of their distance from each other in 'real' life). Also, even in cases of narratives following chronological progression, the jump from setting *a* to setting *b* is often not possible in realistic terms. For example, a person in the dream may be ordering a cappuccino, and then the image following it could be of that person seated at a coffee table. The dreamer does not question the fact that this person has taken the cappuccino and is now seated – it is a logical progression – but it is not spatially accurate as the image of this person walking to the table is not included.

Thus dreams are not limited by accuracy in terms of time or space. Narratives can progress without ‘realism’ but rather by means of correlation on the subject’s part (in this case the dreamer), a process commonly known as *association*.

I shall now examine, in further detail, the appearance and content of the product of the “film *work*” (“an analogy with Freud’s dream *work*”) (Douglas 1988: 253).

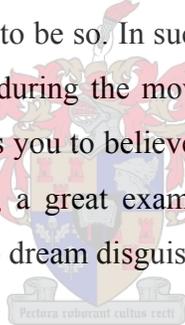
As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, films appear in a narrative form, which is comprised of various ‘shots’ of images containing signs, codes and symbols. This narrative is the film’s façade which, as indicated in Chapter Two, enables continuity. Take *American Beauty* as an example. Sam Mendes, the director, uses symbols and images of lust, and coded icons and imagery of material success throughout the film. Examples of such symbols and images of lust are the red roses and Mina Suvari’s character. The lavish furniture and ‘The King’s’ sales board are icons of material success. The character, ‘The King’, is a type of symbol himself, equally signalling a materialist lifestyle. Accordingly, Jung claims that since “films contain symbols...like dreams, they also operate as carriers of psychological information” (Hockley 2001: 39). Then, akin to dreams, films may be labelled ‘symbolic’.



Although films do not have to disguise themselves in ‘pleasing’ narrative form to pass through into the individual’s consciousness, as dreams are maintained to do, a parallel process occurs within the film. This parallel is perhaps only evident in commercial films aimed at profit. Not only do film scripts (the earliest form of the narrative) have to be approved for the producer to take on the film production, the audiences’ support is crucial to the film’s success. As such, narratives are formulated (by filmmakers) to provide the audience with their desires (or rather, with what filmmakers think the public desire). Screenplays for such commercial films are therefore designed to attract a wide viewing audience. They incorporate desirables and emotions which ‘sell’ well. This results in love scenes, car chases, action skits, suspense and so forth, being standard inclusions in most commercial film narratives. It is not difficult to see how this can be compared to the dreams’ disguise (narrative), as “a bribe to the onlooker” (Freud in Huss 1986: 37-8).

Correspondingly, just as the premise of ‘condensation’ is claimed to function in a dream, forming a dramatic exterior out of a variety of constituents (thereby disguising the dream’s essence and enabling it to appear to the conscious mind during sleep), so commercial films are manipulated to sell. Emotions are included and heightened, famous actors/actresses are brought in, the latest car is used and so on, all focusing on human desire rather than the original idea/message underlying the film.

With regards to ‘displacement’, one might find examples in terms of alienating the viewer from the narrative, and in devices of narrative diversion. The first refers to such films as *Brokedown Palace*, which distance the viewer from the action by presenting the film content in a foreign setting or culture. The second refers to a deliberate diversion from the actual outcome of the film, as with Ricky’s dad in *American Beauty* who ‘detests’ homosexuals, but turns out to be so. In such cases a psychological motivation is revealed within the character itself during the movie. More obvious examples occur in horror films when the narrative leads you to believe the killer is someone other than who it really is (for suspense purposes), a great example being Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. Such narrative devices can be compared to dream disguise.



Continuing the film-dream analogy, I move on to examine time and space in film. In films, as in dreams, the actual duration is usually entirely ‘different’ to the experienced duration of the viewing. Viewers often become so immersed in a film work that it feels as though time has been transcended, or the contrary when the subject is bored, causing the concrete length of the film to seem longer than it really is. The way time operates within films also bears resemblance to time within dreams. Most films follow ‘chronological time’, though the chronology is not naturalistic – ‘unimportant’ parts are omitted. Editing, together with the combination of shots in sequential structure, fulfils the function of creating a comprehensible narrative for the viewer to process in ‘reading’ it. In avant-garde film, time is sometimes deliberately disorientating. *Run Lola Run* plays effectively with the notion of time, making time its primary subject. *Memento* mixes time zones and orders, progressing forwards in time in one of its narratives, and backward in the other.

Thus, time in film (as in dreams) is not restricted by a need for realism – we (the viewers) follow and understand because the focus is not on each individual image, but on the message that the total image alludes to. Furthermore, films, like dreams are ‘unstoppable’ – unless the spectator walks out the cinema – the film lasts until it ends.

In terms of space, films like dreams possess a “unique” “spatial relationship” (Sparshott in Douglas 1988: 237). Separate spaces (even different parts of the world) may, and often are, pieced together without the viewer even realizing. Half of the contemporary version of the film *Alfie*, which is ‘set’ in New York, is filmed in England, for example, and *From Hell*, the commercialization of the Jack the Ripper tale, has but one shot of London’s East end – the White Chapel façade in the film’s opening. Spatial accuracy and naturalism is, just as with time, not necessary. In this sense, the film form again resembles the dream form.

A further example of films’ (and dreams’) use of ‘logical progression’, as opposed to realistic/naturalistic progression, in the narrative, is the role of sound. Sound in dreams is often arbitrary and disjointed. Likewise, although for very different reasons, sound in film is also not concurrent with reality. In comparing film sound with sound in dreams, one is actually referring more specifically to the non-diegetic sounds in film (the added sound effects, narration and so forth). These sounds are ‘external’, and by that I mean not a part of the on-location filming, but rather an addition to it (the on-location sound being the ‘naturalistic’ in this sense). Thus films are also constructed and pieced together to form a narrative, in which lies a message.

Before I move on to evaluate the actual process of film viewing in psychological terms, in order to further demonstrate the psychological aspect of cinema, and hence the credible reason film viewers attend films, I must return to the third premise of the film-dream analogy.

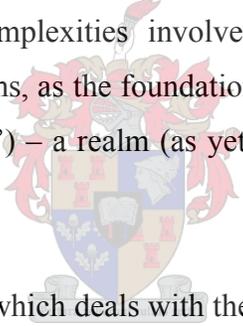
This third concept is a little more complex than the previous notions which addressed film as a narcissistic expression and as a ‘symbolic’ narrative. Combining these two

notions, the third premise suggests that a transference occurs between the 'imaginary' (the state of being before one enters into language by way of the 'Mirror Stage') and the 'symbolic' (the state of being from the 'Mirror Stage' onwards) in film viewing, as is thought to occur in dreaming. For purposes of clarity, the 'imaginary' may be associated with the ideal and with naivety, while the 'symbolic' may be paired with the 'realistic' and with awareness. (As such, the 'imaginary' is likened to the unconscious and the 'symbolic' to consciousness – a state of awareness.) The state of being in the 'imaginary' realm is, according to psychological theory, one of 'bliss', because the baby is 'unaware' of him/herself as an individual and therefore has no knowledge of his/her ego, and consequently cannot judge. He/she therefore does not feel the pressure to establish him/herself as a competitor and conform to society's conventions. Then, as the theory goes, as soon as the baby realizes he/she is an individual separate from others (in the theorized 'Mirror Stage'), the ignorance of the competitive world is replaced by the 'reality' of the 'symbolic' world of language in which we live, and by which we function as human beings. This is considered a natural and necessary development for the baby to be able to function as a part of civilization. However, despite being claimed necessary, this process nevertheless moves away from 'bliss' to a realm in which one must fight for oneself in order to survive as an individual. As such, psychological theory infers that the ease of the 'imaginary' realm is eternally yearned for. It is this human desire to return to this relaxed ('perfect') state which is thought to result in the human fantasy and daydream. Such temporary 'contact' with the 'imaginary' realm is a normal practise of human beings. However, the disavowal of the 'symbolic' altogether in a frantic attempt to re-obtain the state of 'bliss' (allegedly experienced) prior to the 'Mirror Stage' (as in the case of some psychologically unstable persons) is not constructive, as "mental health is premised on a development away from the imaginary into the symbolic, the world of social relations and human interaction" (Margolis 1988: 235).

It is easy to see how (commercial) film offers an already constructed 'imaginary' condition that allows one to escape into the 'perfect' world *temporarily*; without being mentally unhealthy. Film is consequently thought to offer "temporary regression" in the sense that it reawakens the viewers' unconscious narcissistic desires in the form of

projected ‘wish-fulfilments’, and then, “at the end of the film”, “returns” the spectators to the “external world” (Margolis 1988: 235). Thus, during the viewing process, the spectator experiences a fantastical narrative which is thought to satisfy a desire for ‘object’-relation (brought about by the Oedipus Complex and its subsequent dis-pleasure) and to provide a temporary state of ‘bliss’ akin to the ‘imaginary’ realm. According to this theory, there exists a transference from the ‘symbolic’ ‘real’ world in which we function, to the ‘imaginary’ (whilst viewing), followed by a return to the symbolic (with the possession of new-found pleasure). On these grounds, film is maintained to offer temporary catharsis, one possible explanation of the spectators’ desire to attend films.

A similar process occurs in dreaming: the dream purportedly provides the dreamer with temporary ‘wish-fulfilment’ and ‘access’ to the unconscious realm, followed by a return to consciousness (awareness) in the waking state. This third premise in the film-dream analogy thus emphasizes the complexities involved in determining why it is that spectators have chosen to view films, as the foundation of this reasoning is maintained to lie in the unconscious (‘imaginary’) – a realm (as yet) inaccessible to human beings for study purposes.



Before beginning the next section which deals with the theory of the viewing process as a ‘re-enactment’ of the ‘Mirror Stage’ itself, I add one last comparable quality between films and dreams, worthy of consideration.

Films are received as are dreams: “in darkness, solitude, involuntariness of action, etc.” (Douglas 1988: 237). ‘Darkness’ relates to film viewing in the cinema, ‘solitude’ compares to the ‘reading’ of films by ‘subjective individuals’ (rather than the audience), and ‘involuntariness of action’ correlates with the viewers’ inability to stop the film (in the cinema). Thus, although the “spectator, unlike the dreamer, does not (usually) sleep through the film...nor does the spectator produce the film from his/her unconscious, as does the dreamer”, the reception process is nevertheless comparable on some levels (Margolis 1988: 242).

Film Viewing as a ‘Re-enactment’ of the ‘Mirror Stage’

Film theory has, by way of psychoanalysis, compared the act of spectatorship to this ‘mirror phase’ in order to explain both the pleasure and the ideological effect of surrendering to the film image (Phillips 2003: 106).

As mentioned above, it has been claimed that the watching of film offers a temporary transference into the ‘blissful’ realm of the ‘imaginary’. However, it must be noted that although this seems an accurate theory – film is usually seen as an exercise in escapism – the means of providing this enchantment (the narrative), is an expression of the ‘symbolic’ realm, for film is like a language, or at least has an organized structure. Nevertheless, the overall filmic product, despite being a work of the ‘symbolic’ realm, provides an ‘imaginary’ utopia, and is claimed by Baudry (and his many followers) to echo the “Ideal-Imago, set in play during the mirror phase” (Kaplan 1990: 10).

The cinema signifier is like the Imaginary Other of the mirror stage, the cinematic apparatus recalls that of dreams, the cinema-viewing situation makes each of us a voyeur witnessing the primal scene (Altman 1985: 530).

I explore this theory of the film viewing process.

As a film begins, the audience becomes quiet and its members focus on the screen image as individuals and hence become (‘subjective individual’) spectators. Excited and anxious to know the narrative, the spectators concentrate on ‘reading’ the film and, in doing so, figuratively lose themselves in this process (this act of ‘piecing’ together the images was discussed in more detail in Chapter Two under the term *suture*). (This of course refers to the first viewing of a film and specifically to mainstream commercial films which practise ‘invisible editing’ to hide their constructed nature. When a spectator has viewed the film previously, or when the film deliberately draws attention to its structure, an example being the rewinding sequence in *Funny Games*, the spectators’ concentration is focused on the fantasy alone.) The spectators are enchanted by the film, and preoccupied with it. Lapsley and Westlake maintain that this preoccupation is “not unlike that of the

child [in first recognition of him/herself] in front of the mirror” (1990: 87). However, following this premise, this enchanting fascination is itself only temporary, as the baby, akin to the spectator, soon awakens to the fact that the ‘imaginary’ precedes the ‘symbolic’. For the baby, this refers to the fact that with self-recognition comes the development of the ego, and the entry into the ‘symbolic’ realm. For the spectator, who, according to Lacanian theory has already experienced the ‘Mirror Stage’, the “imaginary of the cinema presupposes the symbolic”; a fact which the spectator on some level acknowledges throughout the film (this brings us to the notion of the willing suspension of disbelief which I will discuss in brief shortly), and is destined to ‘return’ to when the film’s illusion ends (Lapsley & Westlake 1990: 82).

The spectator thus, in the “discovery of the frame [film’s constructed nature]” as Lapsley and Westlake put it, is claimed to be jolted back into the ‘reality’ that he/she is not actually returned to the ‘imaginary’ realm, but is temporarily escaping into it (1990: 87). This process of escape is voluntary. It involves the ‘forgetting’ of the constructed nature of the film medium, so as to enable the ‘bliss’ that the film provides to seem ‘real’ and plausible. It is practised because it offers ‘satisfaction’, even if this ‘satisfaction’ is only evident at the level of narrative continuity. It is this process (that enables film to seem ‘real’) which Samuel Taylor Coleridge originally called the *willing* suspension of disbelief.

Thus, akin to the baby, who is claimed to experience awe in the ‘Ideal-Imago’ before being brought into awareness in the ‘symbolic’ realm, the spectator, in the temporary state of ‘bliss’ during the film viewing, enjoys ‘satisfaction’ (regarded as equivalent to the ‘imaginary’) and then ‘returns’ to awareness in the ‘symbolic’ realm after the film viewing (or indeed during it if he/she deliberately prevents the willing suspension of disbelief process, separating him/herself from the film and viewing it as a ‘meta reality’, rather than a ‘surrogate reality’).

Furthermore, in film viewing there exists a conflict of desires that can be compared to the ‘Mirror stage’ experience: the desire for continued bliss, and a desire for closure. In the

‘Mirror Stage’ theory, the baby’s recognition of him/herself is naturally coupled with awe, amazement and pleasure. Consistent with this premise, the baby wishes this bliss to continue, yet at the same time desires further identity. The baby is thus seen to be enticed by knowledge – by the ‘symbolic’ realm.

Identity appears to be offered by the way language orders and names things. Different discourses – such as discourses of gender – seem to offer the possibility of greater self-recognition, greater wholeness. In fact these are mechanisms of control and containment, likely to increase misrecognition (Phillips 2003: 106).

Therefore, according to this theory, in the baby’s desire for knowledge, he/she enters the ‘symbolic’ realm and puts a closure on the ‘bliss’ of the previous ‘imaginary’ state. In the same vein, the spectator desires the film to continue, so as to extend the pleasurable ‘imaginary’ escape, but simultaneously desires narrative closure, so as to possess all the knowledge the film has to offer. (This latter desire for the film to end reveals an instance in which film viewing is very different to dreaming, except of course in the ‘nightmare’, a type of dream which has been overlooked in film-dream analogies, but which, in any case, is desired to end for different reasons.)

This leads directly to the discussion of the psychology behind the concept ‘to spectate’ – that is, the desire driving the aspiration (the keenness) to watch.

Film Spectatorship and the Desire to Watch

Film is a medium which communicates by being watched. The fact that the medium attracts so many spectators attests that human beings have a “desire to see” (Haywood 2001: 318). The academic term for this desire is *scopophilia*. It denotes pleasure in the act of looking. Haywood goes on to claim that this pleasure in viewing is also associated with psychology, as it was referred to by Freud in his explanation of the process of ‘object’ desire that comes about with the child’s development of libido. In Freudian terms, this desire is known as the “scopic drive” (Haywood 2001: 318). Since this ‘drive’

is libidinal, it involves pleasure in the sexual sense, and may therefore be compared to the implication behind the term *voyeurism*.

Due to the unspoken ‘rules’ that our society enforces, the act of viewing for sexual pleasure is still somewhat of a taboo. The viewing of pornography, as a clear example, is frowned upon – it is not accepted as an appropriate activity. Since such films quite possibly provide the closest analogy with dreams, I go on to discuss film viewing as voyeurism.

In the act of voyeurism, films enable spectators to satisfy a desire which they may not attain (as easily perhaps) elsewhere. Although the spectator is not alone, nor secretive in the film viewing process, the reception of film – in the dark, focused on the screen images and unseen by the characters – can be seen to re-enact the ‘peeping-tom’ notion “associated with a hidden vantage point, such as a keyhole” (Stam *et al.* 1993: 160). It is because this look cannot be returned by the characters on screen (and as such is in a sense secretive), that the spectator is thought to possess an additional ego-‘satisfying’ element in viewing – the power of this viewing act – he/she holds the *gaze*.

The gaze – the spectator’s looking – is then, pleasurable in two ways: the first is a result of the power associated with it, the second is located in what is seen. Both are understood by theorists on the subject to originate from the ‘Mirror Stage’, as the first coincides with the desire to be the driving force of the desire (ego ‘satisfaction’), and the second correlates with the awareness of ‘others’ (which later develops, with the rise of libido, into a desire to have the ‘other’). This leads us on to the notion of *identification* (itself an already established Lacanian psychoanalytic term). Although this notion denotes similarity and not the assumed ‘otherness’ to the ‘other’, it is the consequence of the gaze, and the reason why films employ ‘objects’ – characters (especially celebrities) – as their main subjects.

Identification is the term used to describe the means by which the viewer places him/herself in relation to the film. In viewing films, we (the spectators) are claimed to do

two things: (1) project our experiences into the objects (characters) on screen, and (2) as Currie notes, we “take on the beliefs and desires we imagine they (the characters - our objects) must have” (Plantinga & Smith 1999: 6). In doing so, we form an ‘identification’ with the characters. In Freudian terms, ‘identification’ denotes: “an early, primitive kind of attachment to an *object* which results in incorporating some of its aspects into oneself... *Ego* and *superego* make use of identification to attract libido away from objects and toward themselves, thereby building up the personality” (Chalquist 2006: online).

Accordingly, in Freud’s theories on narcissism, he introduces the concept that ‘objects’ come about for the subject, that is, ‘objects’ are not really outside the self psychologically, rather, they are subjective – they are a ‘part’ of the individual who has chosen them as their ‘object’. Thus, the desire of ‘objects’ is also viewed as an attempt at self-‘satisfaction’. ‘Objects’, as maintained by this premise, are chosen according to our personal desires (as a result of our Oedipus Complex experience), in order to best attempt ‘satisfying’ ourselves. Freud concludes that “a person may love...according to the narcissistic type” the following four qualities:

- (a) What he [sic] is himself (actually himself);
- (b) What he [sic] once was;
- (c) What he [sic] would like to be;
- (d) Someone who was once part of himself [sic] (Jacoby 1990: 79).

And similarly in film viewing the process of identification with the characters comes about from type (b), (c), or (d) (since the spectator is not in the film him/herself, thus ruling out type (a)) or a combination of these three narcissistic forms of desire for the ‘other’ (actually the self). Examples of each three follow.

A middle-aged spectator may be reminded of his/her youth in the know-it-all attitude of Matt Damon’s character in *Good Will Hunting*, or in the viewing of something he/she used to participate in, such as horse riding whilst watching *Seabiscuit*, as two of the many possible identifications available in these film examples. The spectator therefore does not

really love the ‘object’ but a quality of the ‘object’ that was once a part of himself, as in the second narcissistic type. Twenty-somethings at the point of beginning their own careers might wish they were like the character James Bond in the film *Die Another Day* (as one Bond film example), never having to work too hard without plenty of fun between, thus gaining pleasure from the third narcissistic type – how one would like to be. And films such as *Legally Blonde* and *Princess Diaries* are usually adored by teenage girls, as they identify with the fourth narcissistic type – they wish they were the beautiful, eye-catching blonde, or the princess. (These examples are suggestions of possible identifications, and by no means insinuate that a viewer who has not ridden a horse would not identify with *Seabiscuit*, or that men would not enjoy the *Legally Blonde* and *Princess Diaries* films, for instance.) The most important point here is that identification, which is considered a fundamental part of spectatorship, is highly subjective. Association in film viewing is a process in which the spectator cannot be overlooked as a ‘subjective individual’.

The viewing process is hence considered desirable in that it provides the opportunity to look, and in looking spectators are presented with the opportunity to experience narcissistic love – a love that is comforting – returning each spectator to the infant love of him/herself and thereby ‘satisfying’ the ego. Identification in film viewing is then, an associative practice: we are maintained to draw connections (albeit unconsciously) to a form of narcissistic love of ourselves and, in doing so, we experience a satisfaction in the comfort of reliving ‘bliss’. Correspondingly, film viewing is compared to the first experience of loving ourselves in the ‘Mirror Stage’. Although unlike the ‘Mirror Stage’ we do not view ourselves in the film, we experience a part of ourselves in the ‘objects’ we watch.

In the recent Hollywood entertainment film *The Island*, an interesting moment occurs which draws similarities to this associative viewing process. The character Jordan Two Delta (Scarlet Johansson) views an image of her ‘real’ self on a billboard. She is immediately drawn to the image, realizing it is a part of herself, though she really knows nothing about that person. She also views kissing on the television screen, and stares,

wistfully. These two images encapsulate the viewing experience theory of spectators according to the identification premise. In the first she recognizes a part of herself in the image (in this case more literally than in film viewing – since she is a clone – but nevertheless equally distanced from knowing the person). In the second instance she desires something of that image. Both identifications are pleasurable. The self-recognition can be seen to resemble the ‘Mirror Stage’ and consequently relive narcissistic love, in this case for the self (the ego). The wishing for something that the image embraces can also be seen to reflect back to narcissistic desire (the Oedipus Complex), returning us to the human need for ‘wish-fulfilment’.

It must be noted, however, that not all viewing is pleasurable in this sense. Many films involve death, as one example that would in normal circumstances not be seen as a ‘wish-fulfilment’. Although most studies overlook this point (presenting an opening for future studies), the act of voyeurism is one way of acknowledging even dis-pleasure in film as ‘satisfaction’. The role of the ‘peeping-tom’, which voyeurism provides, also returns one to the Oedipal situation, and hence to desire.

Thus in associating ourselves with the film ‘objects’ (via the process of identification), we (as spectators) may be said to ‘place’ ourselves within the film *psychologically* by way of the gaze. The gaze therefore appeals to the ego’s enjoyment of power (in the act of voyeurism), and sets in motion the process of identification whereby film viewers may relate to the film on a more intimate, and consequently, on a more ‘satisfying’ level. The associative process is thus one which involves personal (psychological) participation. (A point which supports the notion of polysemy that was raised in the previous chapter, as personal participation will result in a personal ‘reading’ of the film.) Subjectivity is then, again evident in spectatorship.

Finally, since the desire to watch takes place through (and is enhanced by) the gaze, it needs to be noted that much controversy surrounds the issue of how this look is constructed by the filmmaker (and ultimately, according to the ideologies at work in society) in order to best align the viewer’s ‘reading’ of the narrative with the ‘ideal’ or

‘preferred’ one. As mentioned briefly in Chapter Three, Laura Mulvey hypothesized that the gaze is in direct accord with the patriarchal order of society, and is therefore essentially male. Consequently, the ‘objects’ within the film with which one can most easily identify are usually compliant with this order. For example, the hero is most often male, while the desirable ‘object’ is usually female. Mulvey has indeed since modified this viewpoint to a degree, but it still remains a viable consideration in film analysis. “Cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (Mulvey 1989: 25).

The psychology behind the gaze cannot, therefore, be viewed merely as the result of personal dissatisfaction from the disagreeable outcome of the Oedipal situation, but must also be seen to be affected and conditioned by the dominant order. This is an extremely involved notion and for the purpose of this thesis it would be superfluous to go into further detail, as I am interested solely in the viewpoint of the spectator and do not wish to stray from the topic. However, it is a noteworthy point, and must be considered as contributing, by way of ideology, to the very form that our desires take.

Returning to the purpose of this chapter, desire, be it in personal or ideological form, is the driving force behind film spectatorship. Since desire, although experienced by all human beings, is unique to each person, the spectator as a ‘subjective individual’ is again essential to spectatorship, and hence to spectatorship studies. Film, as a created fantasy, is an accessible escape. As psychologically inclined theories on spectatorship (and more specifically, on the ‘subjective individual’) maintain, film viewing offers a temporary transference into ‘bliss’ – a ‘satisfaction’ which provisionally pleases our desires, intrinsic to the ‘symbolic’ realm of ‘lack’ in which we exist.

As Ellis puts it, “what happens on the screen does not happen directly to the spectator” and film, therefore, “represents the fulfilment of phantasies without extinguishing the desires that support them” (Ellis 1988: 86). This explains why spectators’ choose to watch films, returning again and again to the cinema.

CHAPTER 5:

The Phenomenon of Celebrity and the Interrelations of Individualism and Popular Culture: An Explanatory Paradigm of Spectatorship

In this fifth chapter I have chosen to discuss the notion *celebrity*, for it involves the concepts ‘audience’, ‘spectator’ and ‘subjective individual’, reveals the structured nature of the film text, exemplifies the dilemmas of ideology and the cultural divisions ‘public’ versus the ‘private’ and returns one to the psychological appeal of films. A discussion of the phenomenon of celebrity thus engages all the previously mentioned aspects in this thesis and as such, is an appropriate penultimate chapter.

As I examine the phenomenon of celebrity, I shall draw attention to aspects of the previous chapters. This chapter then, functions both as a demonstration of that which spectators can produce (the celebrity), and as a bringing together of all the aspects of spectatorship to form a paradigmatic whole.

To begin with, it is necessary to differentiate between the terms ‘star’ and ‘celebrity’ for there is, it seems from extensive reading, a great deal of confusion regarding the exact classification of these two terms. According to my understanding, the definition ‘star’ has a direct, principal connection to the individuals’ (stars’) professional involvement as actor/sportsman/artist/director and so forth, while the notion ‘celebrity’ encompasses the popularized/idolized version of this being. Oprah is a ‘star’ – she hosts her own television program, she plays a role in millions of peoples’ lives, yet she is also a celebrity – she can be viewed on front covers of magazines, she is referred to constantly and she is known throughout the world. Similarly, David Beckham is a ‘star’, in his case a famous soccer player who has led his team to countless victories, yet he has become a celebrity – he has his own style of clothing, sets the ‘standard’ for ‘cool’ haircuts, appears daily in magazines and has come to represent an ‘ideal’ look for a man. There are numerous film stars too, who, although they began as actors and actresses, have now reached celebrity

status. Obvious examples of film star celebrities are Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Cameron Diaz, Jude Law, Heath Ledger and Gwyneth Paltrow.

Thus the ‘star’, although also in the limelight and also conditioned by the media, is primarily famous for his/her field of specialization; the ‘celebrity’ on the other hand is a product of multiple media frenzies, and is, or becomes, better known for his/her ‘individualism’ than for his/her professional status. (I place the term individualism in inverted commas because, as I will demonstrate in the section *Appearance Versus Reality*, there can exist a vast difference between who the celebrity is thought to be, and who he/she really is.) Indeed, ‘stars’ are also gossiped about and obsessed about, but they are most often associated with their profession; their fame is supported by their achievements. ‘Celebrities’ are so famous that their importance is sustained without any foundation other than their audience’s support. The ‘celebrity’ does not necessarily need to accomplish anything once this status is reached – the trivial then becomes the substance. Many ‘stars’ become ‘celebrities’ – that is the most logical progression – yet there are ‘celebrities’ who cannot really be considered to have been ‘stars’, such as Paris (Hilton). She is not a ‘star’ in herself; she is a by-product of her father’s successful hotel chain; she is famous simply for being famous. As Paul Watson explains, “celebrity is a mode of stardom relatively unconnected to the sphere of professional work” (2003: 173).

The celebrity is therefore a product of culture, maintained by society. Consequently, before discussing the historical rise of the film celebrity by way of the star system, it is necessary to revisit the subjects of culture and ideology (as discussed in Chapter Three, but this time in a broader, sociological sense), as both are intrinsically involved in the celebrity system’s development and continued existence.

The Celebrity as (Popular) Cultural Product

The human need for fulfilment makes use of expression (for psychological release): our inner confusions and fantasies are expressed in physical terms – through images of representation – such as dance, painting, literature and filmmaking. This is cultural

expression. Since this form of personal expression is in the form of physical images, it is accessible for comprehension by other individuals. This practice of culture is therefore, universal – we all participate in culture, regardless of whether we intimately relate or utterly reject the conditions presented in the specific physical representations that have been created by others. These physical representations are ultimately an expression of humanity – a signification of likeness of experience in the world. However, this likeness does not suggest agreement. Although physical representation is universal, this does not suggest that it is universally accepted – differences in opinion will and do arise – because society is comprised of people who are ‘subjective individuals’. Some people will appreciate or accept a particular physical representation, others will deprecate it or object to it. The result: a mainstream tendency and a marginal other, where the common belief, being the most popular, becomes the ‘accepted’ (returning us to Turner’s hypothesis, discussed in Chapter Three).

Popular culture begins with the ‘acceptance’ either consciously or unconsciously of the mainstream. This mainstream also consists of the ‘accepted’ cultural notions in society. The celebrity is one such notion and is hence part of popular culture. Since the popular is the ‘accepted’, popular culture, and consequently the celebrity, is intimately bound up within the web of ideologies in existence in our contemporary society.

Yet it is important to note that despite this ‘acceptance’ resulting in a certain sense of sameness, society still consists of ‘subjective individuals’. Even though we are led (and misled) daily by the attitudes of the mass public, we still have our own personal situations (based on our schemata) creating needs (and desires) of slight variation to others in the web of popular culture. However, this statement does not suggest that we (as individuals) can exist, think and be outside of ideology as we choose; we can merely play with the information we receive and construct an image from the given images that best addresses our needs. And it is only human to do so. The role of the ‘subjective individual’ in viewing images (and hence film also) is thus, further pronounced.

Similarly, we as 'subjective individuals' can, and do, extract fragments of information about celebrities recorded in the various media, which we then use to construct our own image – the image we desire that celebrity to represent. This personal perception is a result both of how we register these images (based on our schemata), and of our specific personal desires (based, according to Freudian theory, on our narcissistic wishes as configured by the Oedipus Complex). Accordingly, akin to dominant ideology, that which is projected in the media is physically there; individuals cannot erase these images of representation. However, they may and do appropriate them: “audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions, that work for them” (Dyer 1986: 5).

Furthermore, popular culture is by no means a clear-cut, linear category. It is ever changing, both influenced and influencing, interrelated to all else in existence, and continually reconstructed to suit the socio-political ambience of the time of its existence. It is thus wholly dependent on the mass public for its subsistence and endurance and yet, equally entirely open to constant manipulation and appropriation. Hence, popular culture in existence now, in our postmodernist world, is as incoherent, as inter-reflective and as random as postmodern thought and other expressions of postmodern culture. The copies of copies that impede any sense of originality in the world today demonstrate the result of our continually expanding technological society.

A further result of these technological advancements is the reduction of human function. The individuals' functional role in society has devalued, and is now secondary to that of the machine. Dyer clarifies this point:

The development of mass communications, and especially the concomitant notion of mass society, sees the individual swallowed up in the sameness produced by the centralized, manipulative media which reduce everything to the lowest common denominator (1986: 10).

Yet due to this constant reduction, we (as a part of society) are presented with a ‘neutralized’ base from which we are free to re-construct. Moreover, since the importance of the ‘individual’ is reduced in our machine age, the human desire for a reconstructed state of identity and ultimately of the concept of and belief in individualism, provides a great stimulus for this re-construction. This is especially so since this reconstruction utilizes the individual’s preference for its creation and thus, does not merely function as a symbol of the survival of individualism in its product form, but emphasizes the continuation of individualism in the process as well. Thus, by elevating and illuminating icons – creating celebrities – the human, as an image of power, continues its existence.

Popular culture today is, accordingly, the mass public’s attempt at survival in a machine age. Although this quest for individualism seems contradictory to the concept of the conformity of audiences in general (human desire), such is the complex, ambiguous interrelationship between individualism and mass society. This returns us to the very opening discussion of this thesis which dealt with the slight discrepancies between the ‘audience’, the ‘spectator’ and the ‘subjective individual’, and how, within each of these academic categories numerous problematic elements arise and intersect both the ‘public’ and ‘private’ cultural divisions, the generalized and the personalized.



The phenomenon of celebrity is then, a result of human desire, specifically the desire for individualism. Since this phenomenon involves both ideology and psychology, it is by no means isolated or clear-cut. It is indeed overwhelmingly difficult to characterize and is exceptionally vast. For the purposes of this chapter I will draw on some of the components, influences, tensions and multiplicities involved in this phenomenon in order to demonstrate how spectatorship functions and what it produces, ultimately prompting further spectatorship, and so on.

Thus, to employ a filmic example, just as Victor creates a digital character in *SImθne* (Andrew Niccol’s contemporary filmic depiction of the advancing technologies of our 20th Century world), so the audience creates (and continues to fashion) the celebrity. Similarly, as *SImθne* closes with a long-shot of Victor seated on the couch, behind which

is a ‘green screen’ waiting to be filled with whatever image its creator decides to portray, we (the audience) compensate for our desires with impressions of ‘importance’ we ourselves have created. Thus, in line with the psychological theories discussed in Chapter Four, the celebrity is a construct developed for self-‘satisfaction’.

The Rise of the Film Celebrity by way of the Studio (Star) System

Beneath the surface of the film product, which we (the audience) take pleasure in viewing, is a capitalist business equally reliant on our desire for spectatorship. I refer here, of course, to mainstream commercial film. I shall begin an analysis of this competitive industry with a discussion of how the film celebrity came into being (by way of film stardom).

The actors and actresses who starred in early films were simply regarded (by the studio system that had employed them, cast them and managed them) as part of the text – an object or raw material – equal to any other part of the complete film product. It was the audiences who regarded the stars as special, because, as Roger Manvell points out, “people are curious about other people” (Manvell 1961: 87). In more advanced psychoanalytical terms, this curiosity can be viewed as a narcissistic love of oneself (and hence a ‘return’ to the ‘Ideal-Imago’) by way of the process of identification, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is the ‘satisfaction’ that associative viewing (identification) provides that led to the rise of film stardom, and to the celebrity (as a self-sustaining entity).

It is for the reason that associative viewing provides ‘satisfaction’ that spectators in the early days of film began showing such interest in actors and actresses. Audience members began writing to the studios asking for information about their favourite actors and actresses. It was only then that the producers of the studio systems realized the huge business-enhancing potential of exploiting their stars’ ‘true’ life stories (Powdermaker 1950: 228). These producers did not, however, fully comprehend the effect this would have on their studios’ power status. Stars soon began demanding enormous (and

continually increasing) salaries, and eventually possessed more authority than the systems to which they belonged. This is the position in which stars and producers are today – they are separate entities, brought together by the filmmaking process.

However, the relationship between producers and stars does not end there. Nothing is quite so simple and clear-cut in our postmodern, materialist world. Indeed, as with any business, the relationship is a predominantly capitalist one, whereby stars are most often used by producers “as a kind of insurance against failure” (Manvell 1961: 89). This returns us to the structure and iconography strategically worked into the film text, a topic examined in Chapter Two in my exploration of film semiotics, and in Chapter Four in my discussion of ‘sugar-coating’ the film (an analogy with dream works). Yet importantly, although the producer appears to be in control in this instance, the star’s power is being reinforced and ultimately the authority lies with him/her (despite the reality that stars require film roles in order to continue their careers, for which they must rely on the producers). As such, the rapport between producers and stars is in a constant state of tension because of economic incentive. This tension, along with society’s support, is the key to the continued existence of the actor/actress as celebrity.

Some other interesting concepts in this inter-relationship are: the notion of actors/actresses as objects, the premise of the star as a genre itself, the theory of stars as monopolies and the productive principle of iconography (Rosten 1941: 329). All of these notions are vital in spectatorship studies. Brief explanations follow.

“Films can show us *only* objects, *only* things, *only*, indeed, people as things” (McConnell 1979: 5). Although the notion of the star as “object among objects” on the screen, or as “raw material” for the plot, seems a rather shallow one, this simplistic viewpoint has many underlying psycho-theoretical implications (Kracauer 1960: 97). The celebrity as an ‘object’ is a postmodern concept. Celebrities had been produced and moulded out of multiple images and cannot therefore be perceived as isolated, or ‘raw’. By this I mean that despite the stars’ roles as particular characters in specific films, their popularized identity is carried to each viewing by the audience. The image can thus never be

perceived as 'raw' or unprocessed (natural), as it is in a state of constant manipulation and interrogation by the other images in existence, as well as by each spectator's personal appropriation of such images.

Thus, through spectatorship, the classification of the film star as merely one of the elements of the *mise-en-scene*, has been shattered. In its place a highly recognized acting elite has formed. Yet, despite this recognition resulting in the stereotyping of the celebrities (for example, Angelina Jolie is known to be a tough-girl while Sarah-Jessica Parker is known as fashion goddess), spectators still view celebrities in their own way to some extent (being 'subjective individuals'). For example, Jolie's 'hardcore' image may appeal to some viewers, but others may dislike it and consequently dislike her. The same applies to judgments of Parker, in this instance, often in accordance with her style of clothing. Thus, spectatorship fashions the celebrity (into a stereotyped mould), and then spectators appropriate the celebrity image to satisfy their own desires (another aspect of the overlap of the 'public' and 'private' cultural divisions).

From this stereotyped celebrity image, the premise of the star as a genre itself developed. Mass media representations of the star, as well as the roles the star commonly played, led to the creation of a kind of 'prototype' for the star, one obvious example being "Wayne in Westerns" (Dyer 1982: 70). This resulted in films being "conceived and made in a particular way because a star exists to be showcased" (Jameson 1994: 189). Such typified characterization secures constant support from those audience members to whom that image appeals, and as such, stars are commonly used by producers in the hope of greater profits.

Yet, interestingly, most stars do their utmost to avoid being typecast, as they feel it reflects badly on their acting ability. However, yet again there is a tension within the system, as stars only wish to show their talent by breaking out of the mould that has been created for them by their audiences (and exploited by the producers for their own means), to ensure their continued authority over the masses (and ultimately their ongoing fame). Ironically, the 'reduction' of the star to a particular image type is usually the greatest

appeal of the star, as it satisfies a social code and enables the spectators' identifying with him/her to continue this associative process. Many stars who have attempted to break out of the mould have experienced failure and caused their audiences "disappointment" (Roberts & Wallis 2001: 117). Such dis-pleasure is also subjective. Some viewers may have been disappointed by Elijah Wood's role as a violent murderer in the recent film, *Sin City*, after having come accustomed to his gentle 'hobbit' role in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Other viewers may have been satisfied with seeing Wood in this role, viewing it as proof of his diverse acting ability.

The next theory, which regards the star as a monopoly, is to be expected in our capitalist, materialist world. Profit motive led to the very existence of the celebrity, and business rivalry and economic ambition is the celebrity system's staple diet. Dyer summarizes this premise:

Stars are made for profit. In terms of market, stars are part of the way films are sold...Equally, stars sell newspapers and magazines, and are used to sell toiletries, fashions, cars and almost anything else (1986: 5).

This is only possible because spectators welcome the concept of the celebrity. Not only do celebrities offer psychological 'satisfaction' by way of identification and 'wish-fulfilment', they function as people to look up to, as model examples. Moreover, since celebrities are intimately involved in the web of capitalist industry and extremely popular (worthy of exceptional notice) they may be seen as "examples of the way people live their relation to production in capitalist society" (Dyer 1986: 6).

This exemplary role is one of the reasons why iconography exists. As the title of Betsky's book, *Icons: Magnets of Meaning*, suggests (and as the psychological analysis of film reveals), we are drawn to icons because they perform a meaningful role for us (and they were created for that very reason). "Icons are privileged nodal points in the endless semiosis of modern culture which provide the illusion of stability" (Betsky 1997: 94).

The role of identification practised by the spectator during the film viewing is kept alive in daily life through the use of celebrities as marketing tools. In using celebrities in marketing, they are made to seem ‘more like us’ because they supposedly use (as we do) the shampoo, edibles and so on, that they are advertising (thereby assisting the identification process). Also, the more the celebrity is viewed, the more embedded he/she becomes in popular culture, and the more these images may be used in films, as agents of genre and to attract audiences. Consequently this continues the practice of spectatorship through the appeal of identification with these icons (celebrities). Thus film, spectatorship and its by-product, the celebrity, are motivated by psychological appeal.

The Appeal of the Celebrity

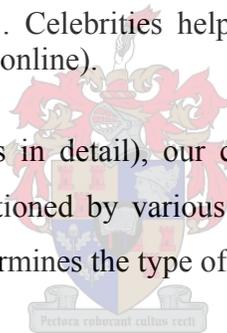
An interesting addition to the psychological theories on why spectators have chosen to spectate (as discussed in Chapter Four), is the aspect of individualism evident in film viewing, via the celebrity. The phenomenon of celebrity, which is maintained by spectatorship, reveals (as with the popularity of film) that viewing satisfies certain desires which the spectators have. One possible explanation is that the celebrity functions as an icon of individualism, which satisfies a desire for personal recognition in our technological age. This premise also returns us to the psychology motivating film spectatorship. Whilst adding further clarity to the reasons behind attending films, a discussion of individualism leads to an examination of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ cultural divisions and hence, again illuminates the kinds of issues one has in discussing any aspect of culture (a point made in Chapter Three). I begin by examining why it is that celebrities in films function so well as icons of individualism.

The term individualism implies personal freedom and independence, and therefore involves self-expression. Film celebrities, being actors and actresses, are as Ponce de Leon notes, ideal choices as icons of individualism, as they are by profession “intimately bound up with self-expression” (2002: Chap.7 n.p.). Celebrities then, as with Freud’s hypothesis on the dream, can be said to function as ‘wish-fulfilments’. In the case of the celebrity, the underlying desire is, as previously mentioned, individualism.

The celebrity then, functions as an ‘ideal’, a myth. Mythology is a manifestation of our ‘lack’ which drives our desires to create something to ‘satisfy’ these longings. Thus myth (and its common contemporary expression, the celebrity) is manufactured by the people, for the people themselves. What makes humankind unique is that we are driven by hope – such is the “quest of man [sic] for his [sic] own salvation” (McConnell 1979: 8). The extremity of celebrity hysteria and the scope of media coverage today bear witness to the extent of the human need for mythology (particularly concerning individualism) in our contemporary age. Howley identifies the reason for this:

For much of human history, individual and group identity were predicated on family and religious order, and a local community...this traditional lifestyle provided the foundation for one’s sense of self. The forces and conditions associated with modern life created an identity crisis of sorts for individuals and an emerging ‘mass public’. Celebrities helped fill the vacuum created by this identity crisis (Owen 2005: online).

In addition (as Dyer demonstrates in detail), our contemporary world, and hence the contemporary individual, is conditioned by various cultural divisions. The balance we create between these divisions determines the type of person we become.



These cultural divisions, as Dyer states in *Heavenly Bodies*, may effectively be categorized under the following two terms – “public” and “private” (1986: 11). Under the group ‘public’ belong “society”, “insincere”, “mass”, “artifice” and so forth, while ‘private’ signifies such notions as “individual”, “sincere”, “community” and “naturalness” (Dyer 1986: 11-12). However, whilst ‘public’ deals with the global mass at large, for these purposes Dyer is concerned with the way an individual relates to this mass. Similarly, the ‘private’, although primarily addressing each person as an entity, includes such notions as “community”, because a human is equally defined as an individual through his/her interaction with a group (society).

Celebrities, then, are a means of viewing how other people have structured their personal balance between these two realms. As Dyer suggests, our fascination with celebrities is

“because they enact ways of making sense of the experience of being a person in a particular kind of social production (capitalism), with its particular organization of life into public and private spheres” (1986: 17). Celebrities represent examples of coping in our technological age and what is more, they appear to be coping well. Thus, not only do their audiences admire their seemingly achieved balance, the audience is relieved to see it is possible. Their example is “heartening, even utopian, reaffirming the belief that individualism remain[s] viable in a ‘mass society’ dominated by powerful institutions and the pressures of conformity” (Ponce de Leon 2002: Chap. 7 n.p.).

What complicates the issue further is that, whilst this admiration promotes fantasy and idolization, the relief it brings is a result of association, and hence, similarity. The phenomenon of celebrity therefore, involves both fantasy and ‘reality’. These two cultural divisions subdivide as follows: the ideal vs. the ordinary, utopia vs. everyday life, ‘knowledge’ about the star vs. the star as true self, and appearance vs. reality.

Accordingly, whilst the mass population promotes the ‘star as idol’ phenomenon, they (we) by no means separate the ‘ordinary’ person from the celebrity entirely, because, for the appeal of the celebrity to exist, the possibility of achieving that same stature must remain within psychological reach.

It is our human desire that drives celebrity worship. As Rose puts it, “somebody must be allowed to win for us all; somebody must be seen to come out on top” (Rose n.d.: online). What she means by this of course, is not that we are satisfied fully if somebody else ‘wins’, but that by viewing someone ‘win’, we observe the prospect of winning and it is such prospects that all humans live for. Prospects lighten the load, provide a purpose and encourage aspirations. As such, prospects may be compared to the Freudian theory of ‘wish-fulfilments’, providing temporary illusions of the ‘blissful’ ‘imaginary’ realm, which, akin to the dream, are not ‘real’, but fantastical.

Abbas Kiarostami’s film *Close-Up* (Arabic title: *Nema-ye Nazdik*) examines human aspirations and is, as such, a good illustration of human desire. The lead character

becomes so obsessed with his fantasies of celebrity lifestyle that he pretends to be a celebrity, not only in his relations with others, but to himself as well. Of course what is even more fascinating is that, being a film, the character is acting himself and thus the film, through its multiple portrayals of ‘realities’ comments on the unstable concept of ‘reality’ itself. The character’s strong desires ultimately result in his arrest and trial, after which the character is released without charge – a comment on the fact that any ‘reality’ is true for the believer (returning us to the concept of the spectator as a ‘subjective individual’, and consequently to polysemy). Moreover, as the film ends, we view this character gazing through the shattered glass window of a motorbike. As the motorbike drives away, the sounds and the passing traffic blurs the character’s image and ours as spectators. Equal to that in ‘reality’ – the full story can never be known – we can only rely on perceptions taken from the fragments of images that we absorb, and more significantly, that we choose to accentuate. All viewing, and thus all film viewing too, is a personal experience based on subjective perception. Spectatorship is, then, an activity driven by human desire in general. Spectators appropriate the narrative images (including celebrities) according to their individual desires.

Appearance versus ‘Reality’



Since the phenomenon of the celebrity is a product of society (motivated by human desire), the comment in Woody Allen’s film, *Celebrity*, “you can learn a lot about society by whom it chooses to celebrate”, is most insightful.

Our human need for psychological satisfaction is indeed a desperate one, and results in mostly unconscious manipulation of information supplied by the media to suit that which we desire to see and hear. It is hence not only true that we create our celebrities (in the sense of popularizing and elevating them to great psychological heights), but that we also fashion them into an existence of probable conflict with their actual selves – that is, we make them appear as that which we desire them to represent (regardless of who they actually are as individuals). Thus, ironically, although celebrities function as icons of individualism for the spectator, they are at the same time deprived of their individuality.

(This also again raises the issue of ‘public’ and ‘private’ cultural divisions and how they so frequently overlap.) What we choose to believe is the ‘reality’ about our celebrities and the actual ‘reality’, are usually two different conditions. Of course, we will never know this for certain, not simply because we cannot ever truly know another human being, but because we *will* not tolerate the facts. The appeal of the celebrity exists in their ‘being’ what we want them to be.

A celebrity portrays an image, rather than her [sic] true self, with all its flaws and inconsistencies...what we see is not a true person, but the product of a brilliant marketing strategy (Foubister 2004: online).

However, the celebrity, as a product of economy in a postmodern world of images, can be considered as ‘real’ as everything else. But, since it is my aim in this chapter is to expose the ‘natural’ as artificial, in order to demonstrate spectatorship as both an outcome of culture and an instigator of culture, I explore this notion further.

On the most basic level, many celebrities go by a name other than their own – “an example of their inauthentic existence” (Foubister 2004: online). Jennifer Aniston, ‘Symbol’ (formerly known as Prince) and Madonna are all examples of this. Next, we may divide the product of the image into three appearance sectors: “the real person”, the “‘reel’ person” and the “‘star persona’”, as defined by Gledhill in her book, *Stardom: The Industry of Desire* (Roberts & Wallis 2001: 116).

The ‘real’ person is the one we do not know, but whom we think we know from what the tabloids portray, things the star ‘says’, ideas the industry presents, and above all, what we choose to believe. The ‘real’ person is consequently determined by our personal desires as ‘subjective individuals’. This fantastical relationship of “mass delusion” is what Schickel terms the “illusion of intimacy” (in Turner 2004: 23).

The ‘reel’ person is the character on screen. This persona, despite often repeated from film to film (as in ‘the star as a genre itself’ premise), is miles apart from the real person, but is often confused with that person, particularly by younger viewers. An interesting

aspect of this confusion (or association) is the fact that “in re-telling film plots they [the viewers] are likely to use the names of the actors rather than the names of the characters they portray” (Wolfenstein & Leites 1950: 289).

Finally, the ‘star persona’ is the overall image of the film celebrity, comprised of all other images projected of this being. This is the most complex of the images, and the most unstable (due to its reliance on the continued manufacture of this certain image, both on screen and in the mass media). Ironically, it is the most ‘real’ image we can achieve. As Dyer states, “how we appear is no less real than how we have manufactured that appearance...Appearances are a kind of reality, just as manufacture and individual persons are” (1986: 2).

As with the disappointment usually coupled by the change in ‘reel’ image of the actor/actress, so the coupling of a celebrity with an image counter to their usual make-up, is disorientating and usually leads to unpopularity. “The ‘star image’ is powerful enough to be moved from context to context and yet unstable enough to be used in different ways”, despite the fact that this divergent image is likely to be closer to that of the real person (Roberts & Wallis 2001: 116).

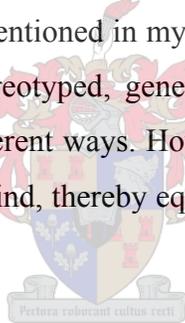


All the above examples illustrate how tentative the spectatorship process is: not only have spectators prompted the development of the film industry through their keenness to watch and consequently contributed to the creation of the phenomenon of celebrity, we (as spectators) have fashioned and continue to fashion the images presented to us in accordance with the desires we have. Psychology then, lies behind spectatorship (in terms of our desire to spectate) and also operates within spectatorship (in terms of the way we choose to perceive the images we watch in accordance with our personal desires).

The appearance which the ‘object’/image (in this case the celebrity), has come to acquire by way of spectatorship leads us to the discussion of the closely connected (but more theoretical) concept of the celebrity as text. It is important to note that just as each ‘object’/image is one amongst millions of ‘objects’/images (all of which interrelate with

one another, having the effect of ‘sharpened’ appearances and blurred ‘reality’), so the text is a text amongst endless texts, and equally intertextual.

It is perhaps easiest to understand the celebrity as text by way of comparison to the previous notion of the ‘star as object’. The ‘star as object’ premise suggests that the role is everything and the person associated with the role is irrelevant. On the completely opposite end of the scale, the celebrity as text theory (most commonly attributed to the studies by Richard Dyer (1982)), suggests the star is never a mere object, but a text/story/complexity in itself, affecting the casting, the role, the outcome of the film and the way the audience perceives it. This theory is thus closely linked to the premise of the ‘star as a genre itself’, as it advocates that each celebrity brings with him/her an already structured ‘image’ identity, which cannot be dismissed. (Of course this refers to the stereotyped image of the celebrity and not to the subjective perception of this image held by each individual spectator. As I mentioned in my discussion of Jolie, the association of her as a ‘tough’ woman is the stereotyped, generalized image of her, the ‘subjective individual’ may perceive her in different ways. However, this subjective opinion is most likely also fixed in the spectator’s mind, thereby equally affecting his/her ‘reading’ of the film.)



Thus, as Turner points out, the theories of the celebrity as text and genre construct are intimately involved with the way the public views the film star’s celebrity status. The audience brings with them “a set of meanings already encoded into that star’s [celebrity’s] representation” (Turner 2003: 121). Celebrities then, function as “signs” or signifiers of meaning, “not necessarily or entirely subsumed within the character they are asked to play” (Turner 2003: 120). The spectator’s knowledge of the stereotyped image of the celebrities in a particular film, as well as his/her personal perceptions of the celebrities, consequently affects his/her ‘reading’ of the film text. Watson clarifies this point (and the range of intertextuality):

In short, it is not simply that the star image of the celebrity exceeds the film text, but instead that, potentially at least, it is dislocated from it altogether and dispersed across a range of extra-filmic texts (2003: 174).

It is perhaps easiest to see at this juncture just how powerful popular culture is: although we as spectators have contributed to the creation of the celebrity, the celebrity (now a powerful entity) affects the way we spectate. This brings us to the notion of celebrity as a cult phenomenon.

The Cult of Celebrity

“Movie Crazy” (from the title of Barbas’s book, *Movie Crazy – Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity*) is a description relevant to a large percentage of contemporary society (Barbas 2002). ‘Fans’ and ‘fandom’ as these ‘innocent’ individuals/groups were once commonly termed, have now become ‘cults’, riddled with obsessions and imitations.

Barbas discusses in her book how, originally, the fan base of stars was a means of standing up for them against the studio system and big name producers who ‘controlled’ and, as the fans felt, ‘limited’ the stars for their own profits. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous section, what the stars actually were, and what the fans had decided they were, were usually two different concepts entirely. Fans not only admired their favourite star’s “dramatic ability” and desired their “face” or their “physique”, but fans maintained that these celebrity idols possessed “inner qualities of warmth, sincerity, and compassion” (Barbas 2002: 114). As such, fans felt their ‘idols’ deserved success and freedom from the ‘enslaving’ studio systems. The idea that resulted was termed “boosting”: “doing everything in one’s power to publicize a star” (Barbas 2002: 116).

Once the media realized the consumer potential for information on their ‘idols’, the mass communication systems began publicizing stars. With the extended publicity of the stars, came the inflated obsession of their fans and, as Carl Cotter states, not only did fans “pattern their hairstyles, their clothes, their cookery, and their behaviour after those of their favourite actors” they “also base[d] their most profound thinking on the words of those same authorities” (Barbas 2002: 173). Such imitation of celebrities, although nowadays common practice, particularly among teenagers (who, interestingly, are at the

stage of searching for and moulding their adult identity), is exceptionally problematic and worrying. What parent would want their child defining themselves with reference to Eminem, as one example of many ‘unstable’ celebrity personae? However, although (ironically) contrary to the intended promotion of individualism, filmic representations do provide suggestions (in the form of illustrated examples) on how to live, behave and adapt in various contemporary situations. As some fans argued in defence of their film/celebrity obsession, films teach “a good deal about reality...news, manners, and contemporary culture” (Barbas 2002: 176). One woman living in a rural area “thanked the movies for keeping her ‘in touch with the right fashions’” (Barbas 2002: 176). Indeed, the very use of the word ‘right’ in her statement is problematic (again illuminating the connection between ideology and popular culture), and reveals the extent to which society idolize stars. In fact, celebrity worship, a strong ideological belief system in itself, has become increasingly closely related to religious practice.

Not only do fans “religiously” attend “their favourite stars’ films”, they believe in these stars, idolize them, worship them, try to live like them and accept their ways as the ‘right’ ones (Barbas 2002: 187). If these factors do not yet resemble the practice of religion, then the eminence of mythology involved in celebrity worship should. And indeed, as with religion, celebrity reverence provides an example of how to live and offers an approach to coping with the world. The celebrity, like a religious deity (for the religious), is the ‘unknown presence’ against which we measure our lives and practice our ways.

Perhaps the only significant difference between religious devotion and celebrity worship is the feeling associated with them. Religion (for those who are religious) shows the righteous path. The religious are proud of their chosen direction and often attempt to encourage others to practice their beliefs. Celebrity worship, on the other hand, although a popular, mainstream and ‘cool’ ideology in practice, is by no means believed to lead one to spiritualism and goodness. Celebrity imitation leads to an overtly capitalist and materialist lifestyle. Although many people desire this, and it is certainly common practise, it is still unaccepted as a moral code. Consequently, those who embody this lifestyle abundantly are often regarded as ‘shallow’, ‘greedy’ and ‘selfish’. Such people

are often thought of as trying to compensate for something missing in their lives. As Rose notes: “admitting to a passion for celebrity... is like flaunting a shameful secret” (Rose n.d.: online).

The voyeuristic quality of spectatorship must be kept in mind here, as the ‘peeping-tom’ act is similarly associated with secretiveness, or the ‘forbidden’. Accordingly, the appeal of film spectatorship may be summed up as, the ability to witness and ‘live’ (by way of the associative, identification process) that which we may not access. This again resembles the psychological premise which suggests that, once in the ‘symbolic’ realm, we perpetually yearn for the ‘bliss’ of the ‘imaginary’ realm.

Shifting the Focus

In the last section on the celebrity I draw on two popular articles to complete the discussion on the economical and ideological aspects attributed to this manifestation of popular culture.

The article in *Femina Magazine*, entitled ‘Confessions of a showbiz reporter’, adopts a different viewpoint on celebrity limelight and mass media ‘exploitation’. Quite the contrary to the usual expression of paparazzi abuse, and equally conflicting with the recent Hollywood entertainment film *Paparazzi*, the celebrities themselves are claimed to initiate and use the mass media networks and gross publicity for their own benefit. This reporter, who remains anonymous, states that “if a celebrity doesn’t want to be in the papers, they don’t have to” (Anon. 2005: 41). Although this opinion contradicts most viewpoints on the unyielding nature of the paparazzi, and therefore seems rather unlikely, the article makes a point worthy of consideration:

So, the next time you feel sorry for the star who got caught out by a scummy paparazzo, stop and think. Ask yourself if they’ve got an album, TV show, movie, divorce or new product to promote. Ask yourself if that actual shot might be paying for their five-star holiday (Anon. 2005: 41).

Are celebrities as involved in sustaining their status as their audiences are? I find this idea most interesting and quite possible. After all, celebrities are exceptional examples of business people in a capitalist world – why would they not ‘play the game’? Despite being created by spectators, in the sense that their fame relies on their being watched, film star celebrities quite possibly manipulate their status in an attempt to attract further spectatorship.

The article by Lucy Broadbent, entitled ‘Star Stalkers’, is a satirical depiction of our progressively growing celebrity culture, and featured in *Fairlady* magazine. “It’s official”, she begins, “...I’m being stalked by celebrities – lots of them... I see them everywhere I go” (Broadbent 2005: 24). Yet, despite the comical role reversal exposing the triviality of it all, the point that comes up most significantly is still one of psychological satisfaction:

You never know where they are going to pop up, and it’s somehow reassuring to know that even with all that money and fame, they still do the same old boring things I do each week (Broadbent 2005: 24).

That is why, Youngblood claims, we are drawn to the cinema medium and to the pursuit of celebrities – not simply because we love to escape ‘reality’ and dream a little, but more cynically – “because it offers security, a crutch, in the knowledge that the miseries we suffer are shared by others” (1970: 67). Moreover, celebrities are seen as important others. Hence, celebrities function as a psychological aid for society. They are icons of ‘individualism’ and, at the same time, stand for society, as they set standards by which to live, thereby endorsing mainstream cultural codes and providing examples of ‘accepted’ lifestyles and behaviour. Since I have already discussed the celebrity as an icon of ‘individualism’, I go on to discuss the way celebrities assist in the establishment and naturalizing of how things ‘ought to be’ in society.

Since celebrities are constituents of popular culture, they play a part in maintaining the dominant ideology as the prevailing “theory of ‘reality’” in society. Accordingly, business strategies incorporate celebrities into their marketing/advertising schemes. In

many cases, the image associated with the celebrity alone is enough to sell the product. Elizabeth Hurley's 'timeless beauty' has carried the name of numerous beauty and perfume products through the years – the association here is one of everlasting fantasy, grace and idyllic perfection. These products are clearly selling, otherwise these companies would not continue to use her as their icon.

Using celebrity to sell things is often exploited to even greater extremes. Foubister recalls that “during the selection of the Democratic candidate for president, we were told that Madonna supported Wesley Clark, Jamie Lee Curtis supported John Kerry, and Ashton Kutcher was for John Edwards” (2004: online). She continues with the crux of the matter: “the fact is that celebrity endorsements *do* carry weight in our culture” (my emphasis) (Foubister 2004: online).

Since popular culture has elevated the celebrity to great heights, the social standard of living has advanced enormously. “‘Luxuries’ came to be seen as mere ‘decencies’ and ‘decencies’ came to be seen as ‘necessities’” (Betsky 1997: 102). So immense is our attempt to live the lifestyles of our idols.

Moreover (as mentioned above) celebrities, in their state of power and exemplary position, contribute to and support the dominant ideology. Since “work, sexuality, ethnicity and sexual identity themselves depend on more general ideas of what a person is”, our idols, as models of ‘individualism’ and also as broad representations of cultural conduct today, “are major definers of these ideas” (Dyer 1986: 8).

Thus ideology, society and celebrities interrelate and affect one another in a circular system, with no beginning, no middle and no end. Since all three are a result of social construction, this popular culture system is a product of the human psyche. It is an ongoing product because our desires remain (according to Lacanian theory as a result of our ‘lack’, inherent to the ‘symbolic’ realm of our existence), thereby continually driving our need for illusion.

Woody Allen's film *Celebrity* is a brilliant representation of this psychological game, both in its content and in its structure. Equally disjointed and yet interlinked, the filming techniques and fragmented plot portray our popular culture effectively.

Popular culture is, then, both a product of a multiplicity of influences, and a dispeller of equivalently manifold ideologies. The psychologically manufactured concept of celebrity, in its divergent forms is, as a direct product of popular culture, equally unstable, inter-relational and complex. Any attempt at understanding this system of ideologies, involves a discussion of two notions, both initiated by human desire – individualism and mass association. In the first case, the yearning is for uniqueness, in the second for acceptance. But these notions are not at all clear-cut and, in their formulation and continued existence, they embody, absorb, and transmit an array of complexities, all at play with one another – some joining one another, some negating one another, some altering one another – but in every case, affecting one another.

Since we cannot escape our popular culture, with its web of entangling ideologies, the best we can do is to recognize the confines of our own construction, not natural, but cultural – contrived. With awareness of this construction comes awareness of spectatorship. Although the spectator is equally a cultural construction, spectators also function (in combined mass form) as constructors. Their motive, as with all cultural expression, is located in the human psyche (as an attempt to 'satisfy' desires). This chapter, dealing with the largest cultural construction that the spectator has assisted in creating – the celebrity – reveals just how important spectatorship is, not only in film viewing, but as a contributor to ideology. Hence, spectatorship plays a part in determining the mainstream social codes and therefore returns to society some form of contribution out of what it extracted from the cultural expression (in this case film), that it desired to watch.

This complex topic of the celebrity involves all the aspects of spectatorship discussed in this thesis and accordingly, functions as a suitable fifth chapter, leading to my conclusion.

CHAPTER 6:

Film Spectatorship and Subjectivity

The study of spectatorship is essential to an understanding of the film reception process. Spectatorship functions at the films' receiving end; this is a role necessary in enabling the films' communication to be channelled. As such, spectators are indispensable to the film industry. Furthermore, spectators assist in the creation of filmic by-products, such as the phenomenon of celebrity. Film and its by-products, having been popularized and kept alive by society, are central to popular culture. That which is central to popular culture influences our beliefs and hence our "theories of 'reality'", and consequently the way we live our lives. Although our "theory of 'reality'" is conditioned, to a large extent, by the mainstream (ideological) beliefs of society, it includes another aspect – our personal attitudes. I refer to this aspect as 'subjectivity'. Subjectivity, then, as a key component of our individuality, affects the way we view 'reality' and hence film as well. It is, therefore, a vital element of the study of spectatorship, which is, I believe, incomplete without addressing the notion of subjectivity.

The aspects involved in this complex subject centre on the film text and the reception process, the cultural and ideological factors in operation both in the encoding and decoding procedures, and the motivations driving the desire to watch films.

The theory of spectatorship assigns three definitive roles to film viewers: 'audience', 'spectator', and 'subjective individual'. The notions 'audience' and 'spectator' are widely studied, as the research results can assist filmmakers in accommodating mainstream consumer 'tastes' (in an attempt to achieve the greatest possible profits). Consequently, these notions are generalized representational 'images' of consumer preferences, based upon what 'most' viewers are assumed to desire to spectate. The difference between the terms 'audience' and 'spectator' is that 'audience' refers to the collective of people attending the film, while 'spectator' refers to *a* person watching. In film spectatorship studies, therefore, the 'spectator' is primarily of interest during film viewing, as an

'ideal' spectator model, and the 'audience' is primarily of interest before and after the film viewing, as a model of generalized preference.

These two notions ignore the fact that each audience member – each spectator – has personal experiences, schemata and beliefs, which condition the way he/she views everything (including film). Thus, the theory of the 'subjective individual', which acknowledges the viewer as a personal entity, is the most accurate of the film viewer theories, but is on the whole ignored by film theorists (except in psychologically inclined studies) as it is too vast and complex (and results in indeterminate conclusions). Such results are, therefore, of no use to the industry for the purposes of accommodating consumer preferences. However, in providing an 'accurate' account of spectatorship, the notion of the 'subjective individual' is crucial, and consequently underlies my entire discussion. Subjectivity is evident in the filmmakers' choices (in the encoding of the text) and in the viewers' 'reading' (in the decoding of the text). It is equally significant in the aspects of ideology, polysemy, the 'public' and 'private' cultural dimensions, and in the discussion of the unconscious desires of the viewers. Subjectivity is therefore vital in understanding the desires motivating film attendance, and similarly, to the creation of filmic by-products, such as the celebrity, as the construction of such by-products is equally driven by spectators' desire for satisfaction. My attention is accordingly focused on the aspect of subjectivity in film spectatorship. In each chapter of my thesis I attempt to demonstrate how crucial subjectivity is in film analysis. I do this by revealing how each aspect under discussion involves the notion of the 'subjective individual'.

In dealing with the communicative aspect of film, semiotics and the reception process must be examined. The notions of encoding and decoding are central to this discussion. In the encoding process the filmmakers construct a narrative by compiling signs and their established meanings (codes), into specific compositional arrangements in order to make sense. The chosen codes' denotative representations, as well as the connotative paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of filmmaking, assist the filmmakers in the creation of the film narrative (message). All the filmmakers' choices must be appropriate to the context, and must employ 'language' and discourse in order to communicate. In

addition, for the message to be relayed to the viewer, he/she needs not only to be present in the cinema, as the receiving end of the communication chain, but, to ensure that the decoding process occurs, the text works to interpellate the spectator as a particular kind of 'reader' (a function performed by 'suture' and 'subject positioning').

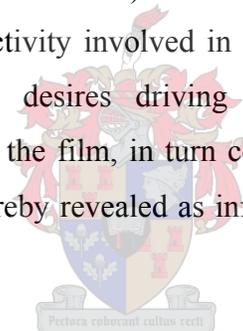
The viewer is then positioned to decode the film's message. This involves the viewer recognizing the already established meanings of the codes used in the text. In concentrating on uniting these elements in order to comprehend the whole narrative, (together with the practice of the willing suspension of disbelief), the viewer 'creates' continuity. The film, then, appears as a narrative, enabling the viewer to access meaning. Thus, in processing the signs and codes of the text to form the narrative, the viewer does not merely 'watch' (as the early theory of the 'passive' spectator proposes), he/she 'reads'. The spectator therefore, plays a part in decoding the text's message (the spectator is 'active').

This activity is heightened when we regard the viewer as a 'subjective individual', acknowledging the personal experiences and beliefs of each viewer, and consequently, recognizing that the process of 'reading' is subjective, and hence interpretative. By way of connotation, the viewer conceives each image as an 'interpretant' – a combination of the filmmakers' denotative image, and the viewers' personal associations with it. The viewer then 'negotiates' between the filmmakers' meaning, and his/her own viewpoint. This theory of the 'negotiating' spectator involves various 'reading' positions. The positions available are the 'preferred reading', the 'oppositional reading', the 'negotiated reading' and the 'aberrant reading'. Each 'reading' type situates the spectator (a 'subjective individual') in a different position relative to the film text, as well as to the dominant ideology at work within it.

The complicating aspects involved in spectatorship studies centre on this notion of ideology at work within the film text, as well as within society, and hence on viewers' beliefs. Other problematic notions are: the issue of polysemy, the predicament of overlapping 'public' and 'private' spheres, and the dilemma of the unconscious

component of the spectator's mind. It is imperative to consider all these aspects in the study of spectatorship as they have a significant influence on the reception process. And each of these aspects involves the notion of the spectator as a 'subjective individual'.

Ideology influences the way the text is produced, the way the textual codes function, and the way the spectator 'reads' the text. The theory of polysemy informs spectatorship studies in that it eliminates the idea of any constant, stable, autonomous, 'meaning' inherent in a text. This draws attention to the fact that every viewer 'reads' the text in a different way. The notions 'public' and 'private' affect the way one views the spectators' position in relation to the text, ideology and society. These three aspects cause numerous problems when researching and analyzing spectator response, as they draw attention to the fact that spectatorship is both cultural (a product of popular culture), and personal (participated in by 'subjective individuals'). The issue of unconscious desire further demonstrates the degree of subjectivity involved in film reception by emphasizing that each viewer also has personal desires driving his/her attendance of film, and consequently, his/her approach to the film, in turn conditioning his/her 'reading' of the film. The reception process is thereby revealed as infinitely variable and thus ultimately indefinable.



The satisfaction of spectatorship begins with the desire to spectate. It is clear from films' prominent position in society that film spectatorship provides some sort of satisfaction for our desires. Desire derives from 'lack'. This 'lack' has been hypothesized as originating from the individual's realization that he/she is unique and thus, different from 'others' (Lacan's theory of the 'Mirror Stage'). Here the 'Ego' is said to be born, in conjunction with the individual's transference into the 'symbolic' realm of consciousness. The 'blissful' state of existence prior to this recognition is, consequently, thought to be eternally longed for. Following this premise, in an attempt to alleviate this dis-pleasure, replacement 'satisfactions' are incessantly desired. Film is correspondingly considered to offer one such replacement satisfaction, because film viewing is thought to enable the spectator to experience a temporary transference into the 'imaginary' realm. Films, then, provide satisfaction in a way that closely resembles the function of dreams. Dreams are

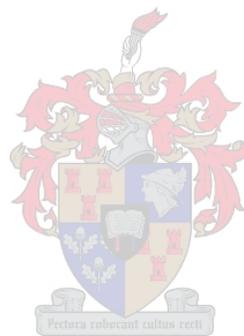
regarded as the release mechanisms through which the unconscious attempts to alleviate dis-pleasure by way of ‘wish-fulfilments’. This theory of dreams, based on the work of Sigmund Freud, examines how the repression of infantile desires (in particular the Oedipus Complex) results in the need for psychological release. Such desires for catharsis are thought to be satisfied to some extent by the voyeuristic position film spectatorship provides. The corresponding notions of the ‘gaze’ and of ‘identification’, which are also reminiscent of infantile desires, are held to offer ‘satisfaction’ by way of escapism into the ‘bliss’ of the ‘imaginary’ realm, as well as in the form of narcissistic recollections. Following this premise, it is argued that, because this transference is temporary, our desires are never wholly satisfied. Consequently our ‘lack’ lives on and we (as desiring ‘subjective individuals’) continue attending film screenings.

Thus, this theory offers an explanation for why film has become, and lives on as, a widespread and highly popular industry. As ‘objects’ of curiosity, the film stars too have become popularized, in many cases to the extent of achieving celebrity status. Celebrities function as icons of individualism, surviving in our inhumane, technological society and are, accordingly, fantasies of hope. However, since celebrities are equally ‘objects’ of popular culture, the cultural divisions ‘public’ and ‘private’ again overlap. Similarly, there is a division between the ‘appearance’ and the ‘reality’ of these celebrities. This division is, however, blurred and results in numerous problems. One example is the subsequent way spectators ‘read’ celebrity-related images into film texts. Thus, the powerful entity that the celebrity has become (by way of spectatorship) now affects the spectating process. As such, spectatorship, popular culture and ideology (which have all contributed to the phenomenon of celebrity) form a continuous, interrelated, cyclical system with no beginning, no middle and no end.

Although spectatorship is a culturally constructed position necessary to the film industry, it also functions as a constructor. Spectatorship, together with the film industry, has co-created the film celebrity. In turn, this creation moulds our popular culture and affects ideology. Accordingly, the “theory of ‘reality’” by which we, as individuals in society,

live is equally affected. Spectatorship then, although a corollary of film production, is equally a product of society, and hence, involves people – ‘subjective individuals’.

Subjectivity is thus not merely evident in the encoding and decoding processes of film, but is fundamental to the cultural aspects surrounding film, as well as to the psychological motivations driving the film industry, by way of the spectators’ desire to watch. Subjectivity in film spectatorship studies therefore encompasses three primary notions – semiotics, cultural complications and psychological satisfaction. As such, although the results of studies that incorporate subjectivity will be indefinite, and hence the role of subjectivity in spectatorship studies tends to be ignored, subjectivity is nonetheless necessary to a complete understanding of film spectatorship, and has therefore formed the focal point of my work.



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