

# FM4: Varieties Of Film Experience – Issues and Debates

Section B: Spectatorship Topics  
Popular Film and Emotional  
Response

- Three considerations:
- Consider the relationship between the film on the screen and the audience in terms of the communication process
- Consider the idea that spectators will find that particular films and particular sequences within films draw out from them certain, often strong, emotional responses
- Consider the possibility that film may 'shock' in a variety of ways and intensities, and that it may as a result be both disturbing and challenging to spectators.

# Within the study of *Spectatorship*:

The relationship between the text and the viewer is **complex**.

There exists a **plurality** of readings and **subjectivity** of response.

The viewer enters into a **discourse** with the text they are viewing.

The viewer's 'reading' of a text could be ***preferred***, ***negotiated*** or ***oppositional*** (Stuart Hall).

# Film as a communication process

- **One perspective:** Film is a form of communication, transmission of messages (single intended meaning)
- **Second perspective:** Film is a form of communication – meaning making is an interactive process (a variety of possible meanings)

# Spectator and Audience?

- **Spectator** – individual, personal connection
- **Audience** – a group, group experience, shared meaning

- **Film 'Language'**: Film operates as a language; it communicates with the spectator through the use of images and sound
- **Films as 'constructs'**: Films are built by filmmakers from a series of component parts that we can identify, and since they have been constructed we can take them apart and see how they have been put together.

# Case Study Films

- *Audition* ( Takashi Miike, 2000)
- *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino 1992)
- *The Lion King* (Roger Allers, 1994)
- *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980)
- *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931)

# Sample Exam Questions

- Would you agree that strong emotional effects are achieved in some films by the careful use of film construction techniques and in others by the subject matter itself?

- **How far is the emotional response to popular films influenced by different viewing contexts? Refer to the films you have studied for this topic.**

# Emotional Response to film



# What is emotion?

- What exactly is emotion, or emotional response?
- To what extent should emotions be seen to be linked to thought?
- As we watch films we can each experience fear, and pleasure, and desire, and surprise, and shock and a whole array of possible emotions, but we will not all experience these emotions equally at the same moments in a film
- What is that determines our individual predisposition to respond in particular emotional ways at certain points in certain films?

# Film and the creation of 'shock'

- One emotional response that could be on your list of emotional responses to film would be 'shock'. Films have always been seen to have the ability to shock an audience.
- The nature of this shock can cover a wide range of possibilities. The early audiences for films in Paris in 1895 were apparently 'shocked' simply by the sense of realism created by the filmed image of a train moving towards them.



- It might 'shock' some people to be shown experimental, avant-garde or alternative film simply because they had never thought of the possibility of there being forms of film other than realist narratives.
- BUT this unit focuses on **POPULAR FILM**
- However, most people's initial response when considering this issue is to see 'shock' in terms of scenes of a graphic sexual or violent content in more popular mainstream films. These are certainly the areas that receive most media coverage in relation to 'shocking' film.

# What's shocking to you?

- What exactly is at work in the clips you've just seen that brings about the emotional response of shock?



# Content and Form

- In carrying out the activity above you should have become *aware of* the way in which 'shock' in film can be talked about in terms of either the content (or subject matter) and the form (or style) of the film under discussion.
- Clearly the opening eye-slitting subject matter of *Un Chien Andalou* is itself shocking, but so too is the film construction in terms of the way in which use is made of close-ups and an editing cut from the blank face of the woman with her eye being held open to the actual eyeball-cutting shot.

However, *Un Chien Andalou* is not a 'popular film',  
so refer to it as an influence, rather than as a key  
study film



# Content and Form

- Compare the way in which the scene from *Un Chien Andalou* is constructed with the slicing off of the policeman's ear in *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino, 1991) which is handled in an altogether different way. Both scenes will draw a sense of shock from most spectators on a first viewing but perhaps the nature of the shock is different in both instances.
- Consider the use of mise-en-scene, performance, cinematography, editing and sound in both cases.



- For both scenes consider whether the nature of the shock changes on a second viewing, and if so in what ways.
- Are there other emotional responses that you or other spectators have had to either of these scenes? Could you imagine the possibility of further emotional responses which might be possible?

- As you discuss or think about films and scenes from films that create an emotional 'shock', always make sure you are considering both content and film form.
- Try to decide on the nature of the shock experienced and the intensity of that shock. Is it a physical shock that affects your bodily response in some way?

What use of cinematic techniques prompts us to respond to these images?



# Other emotions

- Consider the use of the medium of animation and its target audience. Are children a more easily manipulated audience when it comes to emotional effect?
- Is there a cultural or emotional context that are important in influencing our engagement with these films?



# Film Medium

- Consider the use of the medium of animation and its target audience. Are children a more easily manipulated audience when it comes to emotional effect?
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# Narrative structure

- Can a film's structure influence an emotional response?



# Consider character identification



Can cinema affect us without 'central imagining'  
(Richard Wollheim)?





Richard Wollheim made a well-known distinction between two kinds of imagining: central imagining, in which we take the point of view of a character in the story; and acentral imagining, in which we take up the perspective of an onlooker

**Which is used in the opening to The Shining?**

# Looking away/looking through

**Julian Hanich** attempts to answer the paradox of why we enjoy films that thrill us, that scare us, that threaten us, that shock us – affects that we otherwise desperately wish to avoid.

He claims that at moments of extreme emotional stimulus, audiences look away from or ‘look through’ (i.e. recognise the artificiality) what they are watching.



Danny hides his eyes from the unreal visions in *The Shining*

Both responses suggest that audiences are fully aware of the **artificiality** of cinematic emotional triggers. What does this imply about how we use film as a stimulus?



- In the ear-cutting scene from Reservoir Dogs, we are not given a choice: the camera looks away for us. What does this suggest?

# 'Shock' as sudden and unexpected, or long-drawn out

- 'Shock' in film usually occurs as something sudden and unexpected so that the viewer is as it were caught unawares. But it is worth bearing in mind that this is not always the case; sometimes the shock effect is achieved in a rather more long-drawn-out fashion.
- For example Gaspar Noé makes the inescapability of the rape scene in *Irreversible* (2002) unbearably painful as he gives us an experience of shock not as something sudden but as something of prolonged intensity.
- Sorry, I'm NOT showing you that!
- What is Miike doing in the torture scene in *Audition*?

# Questions you need to ask yourself for a case study

1. What types of emotion did I experience?
2. How did these emotions shape my responses? (what did you do or feel in response to these emotions?)
3. What are the reasons for my emotions? (How do the film work to bring about these responses?)
4. How did these emotions shape my experience with the film? (Consider these emotions within the context of the whole film)

The Hungarian critic **Bela Balazs** considered the close-up to be the most **emotive** shot in cinema.

- “Facing an isolated face takes us out of space, our consciousness of space is cut out.”
- “Many profound emotional experiences can never be expressed in words at all”
- “ ‘Microphysiognomy’ (shows) a deeply moving human tragedy with the greatest economy of expression.”
- Do you agree with Balazs?
- Do you have your own perspective?
- Can you explain using an example from Malena or another film of your choice?