

[Ideology]

PART 2 – FILM THEORIES

Marx, hegemony and apparatus theory	Cinema and counter-cinema	Structuralism, Todorov, formalism, ideological effects of narrative transformation	Stereotypes and ideology Stereotype transcoding	Absent representation	Feminist ideological approaches	Challenging ideological approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideology refers to the unwritten rules that inform our culture. Karl Marx initially argued that the ruled class – the mine owners and industrial capitalists of the late nineteenth century were able to exploit the working poor, not only through physical coercion, but also more subtle ideological means. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apparatus theorists argue that film is an effective ideological persuader as it demands our undivided attention – film presents us with role models and ideas that can easily take root in the darkness of cinema auditoriums. The fledgling 1934 Nazi government made a concerted move to control the German film industry – propaganda films to convince audience of far-right racial ideals. Britain established the Ministry of Information in 1939 to openly make and distribute propaganda films that sought to sustain Homefront morale during WWII. Apparatus theorists also suggest mainstream films inadvertently reflect the dominant ideologies of their social and historical contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Levi-Strauss' structuralism and ideology – structuralists suggest that themes, narratives and characters are composed using oppositional states – they not only highlight conflict, drama and excitement into film stories, but also produce ideological messaging through the privileged presentation of one oppositional state over another. Levi-Strauss' theory suggests that binary oppositions also serve to outline behavioural taboos that audiences are positioned to reject and those attitudinal ideals that we ought to embrace. Structuralist critics would suggest that privileged characters foreground the attitudes, values, norms and behaviours that audiences ought to embrace, while the attitudes and outlooks of those characters defeated are outlined as taboo and non-ideal. Todorov argues that stories are conventionally structured using three identifiable movements or pulses of action – equilibrium, disequilibrium, new equilibrium – each narrative stage can convey ideological effects. Ideologies constructed by equilibrium stage – represents a set of ideals that the central character often tries to recover during their narrative journey – harmony at the start of narrative is often flawed or defective – propels central character(s) to seek change – audience may be aligned to those desires and effect similar changes in their own lives. Ideological effects constructed through narrative disequilibrium – use of transgression also conveys powerful ideological presence – when rules or social norms are broken prompting lead characters to seek repair, embarking on narrative journey – outlines taboo attitudes and undesirable behaviours that audiences are invited to reject. Ideological effects constructed through new equilibrium – most ideologically potent stage, largely driven by character-based transformations that occur in this stage – restores harmony – central characters must change in some way – transformations outline beliefs, attitudes that audiences are positioned to internalise as ideals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Character-based analysis provides another powerful tool to explore ideological film effects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stuart Hall is particularly interested in the way that film and media products construct representations of powerless social groups. Hall argues that real world social hierarchies are reflected by the characters of film products and that the ready-made character traits of stereotypes reinforce entrenched negative perceptions of marginalised racial groups and other-disempowered members of society. Stereotyped characters are widely used in film, usually to produce audience-based character recognition or to provide ready-made story frames for scriptwriters and directors to work within. Hall suggests that films tends to author stereotypes of powerless groups because filmmaking is likely to be financed and produced by elite social groups who use their cultural influence to maintain their status in society. Stereotype transcoding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hall reminds us that films are places where ideologies can be contested, and by using transcoding, that cultural products construct representations that challenge racial, gender or ability-based stereotypes. Character counteretypes – characters who invert racial, gender or ability-based stereotypical traits – Black leads who reject violent action in favour of care, Disabled characters who play a lead role in rescuing others rather than in a victim-based narrative. Appropriated stereotypes – when films actively embrace negative behaviours associated with a stereotype but in a manner that creates character appeal rather than 'otherness' – stylised renditions construct character alignment. Deconstructed stereotypes – when filmmakers effect simplistic representations of characters at the start but use the remaining narrative to explore the effects of stereotyping on the character – in effort to explain why such behaviours exist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Films can also construct ideological effects as a result of absence of social groups within narratives – the lack of visibility of key social groups within mainstream films can help to marginalise such groups in the real world. Despite recent improvements, Black representation in mainstream film continues to be problematic. The UCLA 2019 Hollywood Diversity Report identifies that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just 27.6% of lead roles were played by Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) actors in 2019. Significantly up from 13.9% return of 2016, but much lower than 72.4% of lead roles played by White actors. Just 15.1% of Hollywood films directed by BAME filmmakers in 2019. Females accounted for 44.1% of lead roles in 2019. 15% of films made by a female director in 2019. 16.6% of Hollywood films featured LGBT+ characters. 59% of gay characters featured in major film output receiving no more than 3 minutes screen time in films that they appeared in. No major Hollywood releases in 2019 featured a transgender character. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laura Mulvey draws upon Althusser's approach and Freudian Psychoanalytic theory to explore the ideological effects of film in terms of gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential 1973 essay, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, outlines a feminist analysis methodology that can still be applied to today's contemporary film output. Film based representations of gender are largely constructed by men <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mulvey points to the practical impact of masculine domination of the film industry, reminding us that film producers, scriptwriters and directors are mostly male and that cinematic worlds, characters and stories offered to audiences reflect a masculine perspective. Cinema viewers are aligned to masculine viewpoints via the male gaze <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mulvey further argues that cinema experience principally offers audiences what Freud called scopophilic pleasures – that the dark world of cinema auditoriums constructs voyeuristic or sexual viewing pleasures – and because filmmaking is dominated largely by males, film narratives predominantly work to satisfy male-oriented fantasies. That the male gaze objectifies femininity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females in film are constructed as passive and objectified Objects that male characters pursue with sexual intent or who might be offered up to the gaze of a film's male lead without a female character's objection Mulvey discusses the way that women are routinely filmed in films and points to the ubiquitous use of soft-focus tit-down compositions in classical Hollywood output to frame female actors Mulvey argues that this widely used shot composition constructs a passive representation of femininity. The male gaze is internalised by audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mulvey further tells us that the male gaze aligns both male and female spectators with passive female ideals – female objectification is internalised as a social norm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many theorists now believe that audiences read films as active rather than passive spectators – Key criticisms of post-Marxian, formalist, structuralist and feminist approaches might include the following objections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audiences don't decode films in the same way – most ideological approaches outlined assume that spectators decode films using universally applicable processes – individual audience members interpret films using their own perspectives/outlooks in a way that might lead them to accept or reject the ideological effects of a film narrative. Audiences don't readily align with male characters of the same gender – female viewers can just as easily align with male protagonists and internalise the male gaze as an active rather than passive participant – audiences might also align themselves with secondary characters or even antagonists and internalise values that aren't obviously privileged or foregrounded by narratives. Counter cinema effects limited viewership – the ideological effect that counter cinema might produce is constructed due to limited distribution to independent cinemas – counter cinema is watched almost exclusively by educated middle-class audiences who are probably already predisposed to the political messaging that such films might offer. Contemporary character-construction is complex – the notion films give simplified binaries is questionable – lead characters can be contradictory, contemporary films often use constructed irony to modify seemingly simplistic binaries.