

# THE PLACE OF CRITICAL THEORIES IN FILM ANALYSIS: MAKING A CASE FOR READING FILMS AS TEXT

Vincent Uche Nnamele

&

Anthony Nnalue

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## Abstract

*Film, movie, or video often used as a general term to describe series of images presented rapidly through a screen for audience pleasure has come under different scrutiny, modifications and interpretations. The earliest forms of film were created using still images spun rapidly through a wheel, but today, moving objects can now be recorded for film purposes due to technological breakthroughs. These inventions have not only increased the pleasure of the film experience, but have also increased critical questions, interpretations, concept, analyses, and judgments. Every aspect of a film, from pre-production to post-production are now been analysed critically. Each of the elements of a film can now be interpreted and read as a text. While such readings help in better understanding of the films, they also enable one to rate and categorise films. This paper seeks to interrogate the relationship between reading film as a text and the employment of critical theories. It looks at aspects of film as a text comprising words and symbols with meanings and also interrogates how it influences film theories and critical theories. The paper concludes that subjecting film to critical theory has become imperative in order to liberate the audience from the shackles of conventionalities to enthrone individual pleasure and experience.*

## **Introduction**

The series of captured images projected onto a screen in order to create an illusion of movement are what is known as film today. Films, also called movies, cinema, and motion pictures have become one of the most popular art forms in recent times. Film has not only served the entertainment demands of the world, it has become a cultural product and a means of cultural exchange and learning. Historically, what is known as film or motion pictures today started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some scientist in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century set out to carry out an experiment on what they described as the “persistence of vision”. According to the scientist, the eye has the ability to retain visual image for some fractions of seconds, even after the said image had been removed from sight. This experiment now known as the “positive after image” is regarded as the tenet behind the foundation of what is now called and enjoyed as motion pictures. According to Robert Sklar, “the persistence of vision concept stimulated experimentation with motion-picture devices throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (np). Such earliest experimentation was the placement of sequence of drawings around the perimeter of a perforated disk. Looking through the slit on the disk when spun by a person, the sequence of drawings on the perimeter give the impression of moving objects. The experiment led to the development of what was known as the zoetrope in the 1830s which substituted the use of perforated disk with a hollow drum. A more notable advancement of this experiment was carried out in the 1870s by French inventor named Emile Reynaud. Reynaud’s first contribution was placing the mirror at the centre of the drum, then few years later he used a reflector and lens to enlarge the moving images thereby creating a projected version of images. Emile Reynaud is described by some scholars as the father of modern cinema due to his public screening of a 15-minute moving image at his 'Theatre Optique' in Paris in 1892. He achieved this feat by attaching hundreds of drawing on a real wound

through his device to produce moving objects that lasted for 15 minutes.

The invention of still photography in the 1830s also prompted more inventors to experiment with captured shots and actual movements. The most notable of the experiments is attributed to Leland Stanford in the 1870s. Stanford hired a British photographer Eadweard Muybridge to capture a galloping horse in order to settle a bet on if all the four feet of the horse ever left the ground together at any point. 12 cameras were set up by Muybridge along the racetrack to capture the movements of the horse with a thread connecting each other to achieve a synchronized shot. After the end of the experiment, Eadweard Muybridge devised a moving-image apparatus he called zoopraxiscope, which he used to showcase the photographs during the course of a lecture tour. This inspired French Scientist Etienne-Jules Marey to develop a more advanced equipment called 'chronophotographic' cameras, able to take multiple images superimposed on each other. Marey used this camera to record and analyse human and animal movements. By 1885 George Eastman, an American inventor developed sensitized paper roll known as film to replace the separate glass plates earlier used on cameras. He later advanced his invention by replacing "film" with a synthetic plastic material coated with a gelatine emulsion called celluloid. Another American Thomas Alva Edison capitalized on the advancements by George Eastman, Marey, and earlier inventors. Edison commissioned a British employee, William K. L. Dickson to construct apparatus for recording movements on "film" and another device that would be used to view the recorded images. Dickson successfully produced a motion-picture camera called "kinetograph", and a viewing device known as 'kinetoscope' in 1891. The individual still images captured was later to be known as frames and by late 1920s 24 frames per second became the standard in film making.

Thomas Edison had his staff construct a motion picture studio he called "Black Maria" early 1893, and on May 9, 1893

held the first public viewing of camera shots with the use of kinetograph in the studio. The viewing was restricted to a person at a time. Other viewing centres were later established at different cities while other investors such as Auguste Lumiere and Louis Lumiere, later referred to as 'The Lumiere brothers' also invented other types of motion-pictures viewing machines. After Emile Reynaud was able to project moving images in his 'Theatre Optique' for a large audience viewing at the same time, the Lumiere Brothers went back to study their light-weighted hand-held camera known as Cinematograph. They later discovered that their invention could also project images on screen with the use of projecting equipment. Auguste and Louis Lumiere in 1895, started shooting films and projecting them for different groups. This enhanced the globalisation of film, and also led to other innovations, theories and Criticism. Mark Lorenzen in his article *On the Globalization of the Film Industry* points out that “Not only have media scholars and anthropologist probed into films, film making, and film makers for at least a century, economists, sociologist, geographers, and management scholars have also taken to study this, the biggest of the commercial cultural industries, with gusto” (3).

By the end of the Second World War (WWII) new critical thinking/thinkers and other struggles emerged. These struggles which include the feminist movements, Anarchist movements, and other critical thoughts gained entrance into movie-making and shaped critical thoughts and examinations of films. Most of the critics and theoreticians borrowed excessively from languages and concepts from other art forms especially literature. Thus, Daniel Yacavone in *Towards a Theory of Film World* avers that:

Like the world of a novel or painting, the world of a film in this prevalent use of the term denotes its represented content or setting, or whatever formal and thematic aspects distinguish it from other films in a pronounced and often immediately recognized way... including the relation(sic) between cinematic

representation and expression, reflexivity, the nature of film style and authorship, and cinema's relation to, and direct interaction with, other art forms (83).

These aspects of a film and other components such as narratives, content, ideology, roles etc., are what constitute the reading of film as a text.

### **Film as Text**

From the introduction of this study, it is believed that an insight in the meaning of film as much as the nature of film is established. What then is "Text"? One of the definitions of the online *Oxford Dictionary* defines text as "written or printed words typically forming a connected piece of work" (Oxford). *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* in a similar voice defines 'text' as "the words that make up the main part of a book magazine newspaper etc." (Merriam-Webster). From both definitions we understand that 'text' involves the combination of 'fragments' to achieve meaning or create an impression. It consists of several parts which can also be broken into small units. A text comprises alphabets that combine to form words, words that combine to form phrases and clauses, and phrases and clauses that form a complete sentence before meanings can be implied or deduced. The fields of English Language and Linguistics could even have more fragmented parts of a text that forms a language, just as atoms form the 'molecules' and the "compound elements." When we therefore talk of "reading films as text," by implication we are referring to those single units that add up to make a complete movie and gives certain meaning to the film. It is the single units that actually translate into the categorization of movies and the aesthetic appreciations. Media Literacy Clearinghouse (MLC) in an online discussion of "Movie Trailers As Persuasive Text" asks, "Are your students aware that film is a text that has a language all its own?" The answer to the

question is that “certain camera angles will be used for certain purposes; specific music will convey an emotion; lighting can be manipulated for effect. Everything is created for a reason and has a meaning” (Media Literacy Clearinghouse). The reading of a film as text thus entails the examination of all these minute but complex components such as type of shots, lighting and lighting effects, sound and music camera angles e.t.c. to achieve a unified and common meaning.

The idea of adapting novels into film is a good example of how film can be read as text. Though they appeal to the audience through different forms or medium, the message, ideology and feelings are often similar. While the film director may decide to explore a particular theme from the novel, the fact remains that the audience would experience similar feelings from exploring such theme directly from the novel. Film therefore can be the exhibition of language in a “more” entertaining way where the audience likely feel less stress with greater pleasure in reading. In this vein, Gloria Luge Agullo in *'Reading' Films and 'Watching' Texts: 5 Lesson Plans for Advancd TEFL Students* explains that:

Both films and books are very good sources of comprehensible input, which in turn is essential. Specifically movies are highly recommended input sources for teaching, listening and speaking skills outside an English speaking environment (np).

There is also the issue of collateral text in movies. The film which is dominated by moving images also consists of images with alphabetical inscriptions or written language which also creates meaning in the mind of the audience. Such texts are often referred to as the collateral text. For example, the title of the movie and most of the copyright signatures come in form of texts which creates similar or exact meaning in books. The spoken languages in films can also sound to the audience as if they are listening to a

reader. It can create the same impression from listening to a reader or a stage dramatist performing 'line rehearsals.' The images in this case are therefore “emphasis” or “explanations” of the real text (spoken language in film). A cultural perspective of images in films also brings the images under textual interpretations. For example, the image of a snake on a stake can conjure the biblical textual explanation of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. It could also imply “hospital” or relate the mind of viewer or interpreter to medicine. These images in movies serve as cues to textual interpretations and meanings. Andrew Salway and Eleftheria Tomadaki in *Temporal Information in Collateral Texts for Indexing Movies* note that “A review of video retrieval system shows that the use of collateral text is important (np) and crucial in video indexing.

Narrative consideration is another form of reading film as a text. Bordwell and Thompson define narrative as “a chain of events in cause-effect relationships occurring in time and space” (90). Film follow a certain sequence as the textual counterpart. Going by Bordwell and Kristin’s definition, one could consider “cause-effect relationships” as the 'rising action-climax-falling action denouement' in textual analyses. Irrespective of the language or mode of presentation, a viewer/reader ends up with some understanding and interpretation. A film is something we can read just as carefully and consciously as a book or poem. Thus the first step to being a good film reader is to watch with pen and notebook (or writing journal) in hand jotting down notes as you watch the film (Handout). A look at the history of film theories and criticism reveal that the analyses of films originated from the linguistics. A linguistic approach to film studies considers the semiotics of meaning-making film language. Justine Kemlo asserts that Christian metz enquiries into film as language are developed at the:

level of 'Saussure’s langue' rather than exemplified through instances of parole. However, his writings

frequently hint at the possibility not only of regarding films as textual objects but also of deconstructing, albeit temporarily these texts into different strata and observing these separately (16).

Also, Dudley Andrew points out that "Cinema is a seductive, but ultimately conventional language like painting, poetry, stained glass, or Morse code. It can be used to communicate known truths or it can serve the aesthetic function of questioning and expanding itself" (21). Film therefore, can be described as a medium of communication that represents language, outpouring and evoking emotions with complex signs and symbols. Like the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs and the nsibidi writings of the people of Southern Nigeria, film are symbols representing experiences and messages.

Semiotics generally is the study of signs and symbols in communication process. It is defined by Ferdinand Saussure as the study of "the life of signs within the society." Though John Locke takes the credit for the conception of the meaning in this sense early 17th century, it was the works of Saussure and an American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce that gave semiotics impetus as an interdisciplinary approach for the examination of phenomena in the late 19th and 20th century. Peirce defines it as "something which stands to somebody as something" (Britannica). Saussure conceives language as a 'sign-system' which is comprised of two inextricable modules; the signifier and the signified. The signifiers in communication are sets of "speech sounds or marks on a page" which the signified refers to the "concept or idea behind the sign." He also breaks 'language' into two components. Saussure explains that 'parole' is that actual individual 'utterances' or sounds. 'Langue' as a second component is the system of convention that gives the sound meaning, which is the concentration of most scholars of semiotics. Charles Peirce on his part, identifies three types of signs; 'icon' such as road signs; 'index' such as a cross suggesting a church;



and 'symbol', the most frequently used, referring to conventional signs such as the images representing the male and female genders.

A film critic or viewer is confronted with the complex structure of film language and communication. This requires decoding of meaning as enhanced by the works of Ferdinand Saussure, Charles Peirce and other scholars of semiotics. Andrew Salway and Khurshid Ahmad presenting a paper at a London conference in 1999 observe that "Multimedia content can be described at different levels of abstraction such as measures of video colour, texture and motion, and comparatively high-level "semantic" descriptions in textual form. The textual description of moving images at different levels of abstraction can be explored in the content of moving images from a special domain..." (1). From the contributions of Saussure and Peirce, "reading film as text" could be grouped or categorised under three different headings namely; semantics, sound, and image.

### **Semantics**

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus defines semiotics as "the language used (as in advertising or political propaganda) to achieve a desired effect on an audience esp. through the use of words with novel or dual meaning" (3b). Encarta Dictionaries in identical terms defines semiotics as "the study of how meaning in language is created by the use and interrelationships of words, phrases, and sentences... the study of ways of interpreting and analysing theories of logic" (nos.1, 3). The choice of these definitions is to limit semantics to Saussure's 'parole' and 'langue' as components of language. The purpose is to further break semiotics into smaller units for easier analyses. 'Word' is the emphasis from both definitions. The use of 'words' as an aspect of language could be ambiguous at times. The tone and other nuances of different speakers could produce two different meanings from the same word for audience. Therefore reading 'words' in film can be connotative and denotative. For example, in a "Black movie," the

word "nigger" often sound offensive when it comes from a White, but can easily go unnoticed when used in a Black-Black conversation. As such, choice of words in 'racial' or 'gender' films are often deliberate to achieve deeper meanings or emphasis in the mind of the audience (the reader).

## **Sound**

This refers to "the sensation produced by stimulation of the organs of hearing by vibrations transmitted through the air or other medium" (Dictionary.com). it is the vibrations that travel through air or other medium which can be detected by any functioning ear. Sound in films is categorised into the diegetic and non-diegetic. It refers to everything audible from natural sounds produced by actors' speeches to the varieties of studio-generated foley sounds. Bordwell and Thompson note that "in the process of production, the sound track is constructed separately from the images, and it can be manipulated independently. This makes sound as flexible and wide-ranging as other film techniques" (269). Sound in films can function as a narrative accompaniment or individually as a narrative of its own, and even as the narrator's voice. Through the diegetic sounds e.g a song from a character, an audience could read the mood of that particular character or the scene in general. The non-diegetic sounds can also act as a prologue to usher the viewer into an anticipated scene. Songs or music are sometimes used to delineate locales. Cross-cultural films for instance could have different theme songs that guide the transition from a particular setting to another, which a viewer could likely read ahead of the projection of images for that scene.

## **Image**

A film would hardly be film without images. Image in this sense refers to all the visual elements of a film ranging from actors, scenery, movements, costumes, colours, lighting etc. It may not be wrong to conclude that a greater percentage of what an average

audience regards as film lie in the visual aspect of the art. Originally, film as an art started with series of images. Images as a language of film also connotes and denotes which informs audience's reading and interpretation. Roland Barthes in *Image Music Text* notes that "Certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect analogon and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph... it is a message without a code; from which proposition an important corollary must immediately be drawn" (17). Some images also bear "collateral text" messages which could literarily be read by viewers, thus shaping the perception, understanding, and experience in totality.

### **Film Theory**

Film has generated different reactions and interpretations from different individuals over the years. The question of understanding differs just as personalities differ. These differences in understanding and appreciation have to a great extent determined or influenced film theories and criticism. Some of these theories were established as a result of studies and formal experiments while some are probably from personal impressions of films on the theorists. Duley Andrew in *Concept in Film Theory* explains that;

Modern theory approaches nothing directly, neither the audience through questionnaires and neuro-physiological experiments, nor the film through minute formal analyses and experiments. Such audience studies and formal experiments which do go on in mainstream film theory are invariably guided by the current general discourse, that is by reflective concepts (3).

Andrew's supposition implies that there are different theories that are used to explain film according to the different

ingredients used in achieving movies. Some of the theories rely on established concepts and principles, with newer theories and criticism emerging every day in a fast changing world and a technologically advanced environment. Some of the well-known theories include; aesthetic theory, psychoanalytic theory, feminist theory, humanist theory, cultural theory, structuralist theory, apparatus theory, screen theory, formalist theory, auteur theory, etc. Since the aim of this study is not to study theories, few theories will be discussed to enhance the argument in this study.

### **Formalist Film Theory**

With the globalization of film and the growth of the film industry, other forms of technology and advancement were introduced. These include lighting, shot composition, sound, set design, etc. The formalist theory deals with these technical elements of film. Some scholars explain that formalistic theory is not limited to the technicalities of film making, though the technical elements constitute almost if not all aspects of the formalist theory. Implicit in formalistic theory is a sociological ideology which accounts for the extent of technical imputes in most of the films. The “film noir” as named by Nino Frank for example, is believed to be an ideological representation of the pessimism and nihilism during the world war and the post war era. Fritz Lang, a German who emigrated to the United States of American is believed to be a leading proponent of this ideology. With the use of stylised lighting effects, Lang presented the German disillusionment caused by the war. 'Film noir' as a representation of an ideology was therefore characterized by poor lighting, dark images, location shooting and lower production values (Gianetti:np). Formalist film theory however centres on the synthesis of all the elements of the production of a specific movie and the effects of such synthesis with respect to the individual elements including editing.

## **Structuralist Film Theory**

Just like structuralism in dramatic theory, structuralist theory of film is based on the conveyance and translation of meanings through the use of codes and conventions in film production. These codes and all conventions are very much in related to how languages are used in achieving meanings in our daily communications. Thus, the structuralist consider film as the embodiment of languages in the form of codes that translate into messages for audience consumption. Unlike linguistic theory, structuralist film theory analysis are based on the finitude nature of film. This makes the theory more reliant on what Jorg Sternagel et al describes as the "Prague linguistic circle" or the "Ostensive signs" (307). The code ranges from the type of shots, the angle, lighting, juxtaposition of shots, and even the cultural context of images. The combinations of these elements are expected to create a certain feeling and meaning in the audience just as the combination of words could in basic language communication.

## **Psychoanalytic Film Theory**

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory which was expanded by Jacques Lacan is the core foundation of the psychoanalytic film theory. This theory as some of the early exponents believe is based on the assumptions that film represents the unconscious state of the human mind. Todd McGowan in psychoanalytic film theory opines that the first wave of the theory existed between 1960s and 1970s while the second wave was in the 1980s and 1990s. According to McGowan:

Psychoanalytic film theory occurred in the two distinct waves. The first, beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, focused on a formal critique of cinema's dissemination of ideology and especially on the role of the cinematic apparatus in this process. The main figures of this first wave were

Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry, and Laura Mulvey. They took their primary inspiration from the French psychologist Jacques Lacan. The second wave of psychoanalytic film theory has also had its basis in Lacan's thoughts, though with a significantly different emphasis. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s... shifted the focus from cinema's ideological work to the relationship between cinema and a trauma that disrupts the functioning of ideology (np).

In psychoanalytic film theory, the latent meaning in films often referred to as the subtext accounts for the interpretation of a movie.

### **Feminist Film Theory**

With the rise of feminism in socio-political studies comes new ideologies and theories. This theory is so complex because it covers different areas and perspective of the film. It is mostly influenced by the second wave feminism and gender studies/women studies. A leading personality in the feminist film theory is the British Film theorist Laura Mulvey popularly known for "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," an essay she wrote in 1973 but published in 1975 in the British film journal *Screen*. According to Patricia Erens in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* Mulvey is of the opinion that "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with the appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (28). Laura Mulvey therefore condemns the scopophilic representation of women in films. By her opinion, films use women as erotic objects to achieve pleasure. Patricia Eren further notes that Budd Baelticher, another feminist critic believes that in most films "what counts is what the

heroine provokes or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance” (28). The core of the feminist film theory is 'womanhood' or 'femaleness'. The theory looks at every woman in a film. It questions from the number of female representations, to the roles, costumes etc. the women are assigned in a movie.

### **Auteur Theory**

It is widely believed that the auteur theory originated in France in the 1940s. The word “auteur” according to Constantine Santas refers to an individual artist who controls every aspects of a collaborative creative work, a person equivalent to the author of a novel or play (18). The concept first developed in French Criticism as a system of ethics as proffered by Andre Bazin and Alexandre Astruc. At inception, the theory was used to distinguish French new wave filmmakers from the Hollywood studio system directors. Since the birth of the auteur theory, there have been several arguments on what the theory implies and should imply. Bordwell and Thompson in *Film History: An Introduction* posit that Andre Brazin and Roger Leenhardt in explaining auteur theory argue that “it is the director that brings the film to life and uses the film to express their thoughts and feelings about the subject matter as well as a world view as an auteur” (382). But the major, and probably the most interesting debate about the auteur theory is who should be described as the “auteur” or master artist. While some argue that the film embodies the creative work of the director who should claim “authorship” a second group argues that the principal “auteurship” rests on the screenwriter. It is this view that inspired David Kipen to develop the “Schreiber theory” (np) in defense of the screenwriter. Algean Harmetz, a film historian argues that the theory “collapses against the reality of the studio system” (29) which implies that the studio editors can also claim “auteurship.”

Another historian, Georges Sadoul in his opinion explains that a film should rather be judged as a collective work of different artists not individualized. The significance of these diverse views by the critics only emphasizes the facts that film is appreciated differently according to individuals' perceptions just like the interpretation of language.

### **The Place of Critical Theories**

German Sociologist Max Horkheimer gave the first definition of the term "critical theory" in 1937. As an advancement of the traditional theory which is devoted to understanding and explaining society, critical theories aims at critiquing and changing the society. Mike Sell quoting Fred Moten in *Avant-Garde Performance & the Limits of Criticism* opines that "critical method can easily devastate the progressive interrogation, destruction, and revision of a culture's symbol systems"(4). In Horkheimer's view, a theory is critical once it seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (244). The theory canvases for the consideration of the society in totality With respect to historical specificity, through integration of all the major social sciences in the study and understanding of a phenomenon. But the postmodern critical theory went a step further in analyses "by situating them in historical and cultural context to implicate themselves in the process of collecting and analyzing data, and to relativize their findings" (52). It therefore rejects the assertion that the work of a researcher is an "objective depiction of a stable order" (52). The critical theory took a more imposing dimension in the postmodern era by discarding the earlier traditional and "strictly" culturally based approach to criticism. Dudley Andrew avers that;

Naturally it assumes that its more modest ambition, especially its refusal of a totalizing view, protects it from the excesses of idealism. In addition, self-consciousness is integral to its method. Modern theory, critical



and self-critical, mediates upon and uses its own situation whereas, earlier theories believed they could transcend the moment of their writing and speak of cinema for all time (11- 12).

Critical theory acknowledges the fact that the film is more of an intersection of several disciplines such as anthropology, psychology (psychoanalysis), linguistics, philosophy etc. Therefore there can be no “absolute truth” in the criticism of movies. It accommodates “structuralism, semiotics, ideological analysis, psychoanalysis, deconstructivism” (Andrew: 12) in the study of cinema. It is the form of “new criticism” that gave birth to theories such as genre theory, coherence theory, blending theory and mental space etc.

### **Genre Theory**

‘Genre’ as a word, is derived from the French language meaning “class” or “kind”. It has been used in different fields as a distinguishing term. But the term has also generated controversies among several scholars on what should fall under a genre. David Bordwell questions the traditional meaning of genre as applied to criticism and asks, “Are animation and documentary films genres or modes? Is the film play or comedy performance a genre? If tragedy and comedy are genre perhaps then domestic tragedy or slapstick is a formula” (147). Genre theory functions in different forms when applied to film. Since as earlier stated, the film is made up of several disciplines, genre theory therefore proposes the analysis, criticism, and discourse of film based on the isolations of each component or elements of the film. Thus the linguistic properties of film could be analysed using Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL), and may also be classified under semiotic codes which would be different when focusing on the rhetoric of social ideology(ies) projected in the film. Bordwell in this vein offers an insight into what genre probably comprise by listing:

Grouping by period or country (American Films of the 1930s), by directors or star or producer or writer or studio, by technical process (cinemascope films) by cycle (the “fallen woman” films) by series (the 007 movies) by style (German Expressionism) by structure (narrative) by purpose (home movies) by audience (‘teenpix’) by subject or theme (family film paranoid politics movies) (148).

### **Coherence Theory**

The cognitive theory deals with available and physical materials and experiences for interpretation. It is a spectatorship analysis that relies on the organs of perception for data collection. An advocate of coherence theory Paul Thagard posits that:

The best interpretation is one that provides the most coherent account of what we want to understand, considering both pieces of information that fit with each other and pieces of information that fit with each other and pieces of information that do not fit with each other (16).

Coherence theory therefore implies the sifting of what is 'there' from what is not 'there'. It means separating the “wheat from the tares” in order to make proper analysis of the yield. Coherence theory is of the view that the audience embodies a residual knowledge which is expected to interact with the presentation. In accordance, Todd Oakley in *Towards a General Theory of Film Spectatorship* acknowledges that “the film spectator works with associated concepts activated and

reactivated from long-term memory that mesh with the current perceptual situation (i.e. Images projected on a theatre or television screen)” (3). The perceptions contain both “relevant” and ‘irrelevant’ elements which the spectator gradually reorganizes while thinking. Through this process, “the patterns begin to stabilize, activating those elements that fit together and deactivating those that do not fit into his interpretation and understanding. Oakley also listed six (6) distinct dimensions of coherence proposed by Thagard namely; perceptual, conceptual, analogical, deductive, explanatory, and deliberative believed to be influenced by “metacoherence emotions such as contentment, anxiety, happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, fear, pity, empathy, or disgust” (Oakley:4).

### **Blending Theory and Mental Space**

This Theory relates with the extraction and implications of meanings with regards to scenic and phenomenological dimensions of evaluations, i.e. the 'restricted' and 'expansive' dimensions respectively. Mental space theory applies to the location of meaning in a speaker’s mental representation, understanding linguistic structures as what prompts the speaker to set up and relate elements within the improvised representation. Oakley observes that:

mental space theory has proven to be useful for describing various sorts of semantic and pragmatic phenomena. In fact mental space theory does not only pertain to meaning in language but can be seen to apply to meaning in other domains including maths, gesture, music, and discourse. Hence its ready application to the problem of film reception (Oakley: 8-9).

The blending theory engages in the production and comprehension of the different “partial and idealized mental models,” which is processed and integrated to decipher a broader semiotic and semantic meaning(s).

Critical theory is therefore the study of history, literature, art, culture etc. from the perspective that assume that there is no “Objective” academic stance possible. That is, the “facts” are rarely really facts, but instead reflects the biases and beliefs of whomever is writing them down. Critical theory examine the methods employed to establish these 'facts.' In general, critical theory as applied to film interrogates all the elements that constitute a film, from ideology, gender, shots, semiotics, sexuality, language, the gaze, the audience, the body, culture, etc. These are perceived as distinctive codes to generate meanings based on individual perceptions. The place of critical theories in 'Reading Film as Text' can be explained as the deconstruction of the complexities in film making and film Language. This enhanced the development of the film theories conforming to different components and elements of film making. Thus, Dudley Andrew concludes that “film theory is, in short, a verbal representation of the film, complex” (3). Andrew further asserts that “many American radical scholars eagerly turned to film as an open set of texts where new theories appeared even newer and where there were as yet no traditional ways of dealing with the subject” (6). Critical thinking therefore led to critical theories to explain existing and emerging phenomenon yet unexplained and unaccounted for.

## **Conclusion**

This study considers what it entails to read film as text by first giving a brief description of the literacy meaning of text. The idea of “Reading film as text” as implied in this work refers to film as metaphors similar to complex use of language in need of decoding of meanings. Decoded meanings gave rise to the

development of theories used to explain most of film idiosyncrasies. This also led to critical theories and categorization or grouping of films. Robert Stam explains that:

While some genres are based on story content (the war film), other (sic) are borrowed from literature (comedy, melodrama) or from other media (the musical). Some are performer-based (the Astaire-Rogers film) or budget-based (blockbusters), while others are based on artistic status (the art film), racial identity (black cinema), locat[ion] (the Western) or sexual orientation (Queer Cinema) (14).

The place of film and critical theories in “Reading film as text” is therefore the evaluation, interpretation and appreciation of film as literature in order to make deductive inferences critical to the world of the film but in relation to our daily existence.

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## **AUTHOR'S NAMES AND ADDRESSES**

### **Vincent Uche Nnamele**

Department of Theatre and Film Arts  
Federal University Lokoja, Nigeria  
[vincentuche.nnamele@fulokoja.edu.ng](mailto:vincentuche.nnamele@fulokoja.edu.ng)

&

### **Anthony Nnalue**

Department of Theatre and Film Studies  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria