

Take Home Midterm
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Film 40
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Section 1

A) Controlled accident

Film as an artistic medium has always been heavily associated with reality and the way it captures it. Film's relationship with reality stems back to its inception, and the beginning of arguments for and against its classification as an official art form. Film, unlike a painting, is at the mercy of reality (Deren, CV, 149). A painting is not a direct depiction of what the artist is seeing, however, a film is forced to be – especially early film, where special effects were still limited. As a result of film being forced to depict the exact subject it is capturing it is required to make compromises with reality e.g. weather, nature, etc. The uncontrollables that come with film, and filming outside of a set can lead to situations deemed controlled accidents (Deren, CV, 150).

A controlled accident speaks to the hybrid nature of the reality of a film scene. A hybrid relationship between the naturally occurring aspects of the scene – for example, the wind blowing through trees, or birds chirping – combined with the artificial aspects of the film itself – the actors telling the story etc. Film and its hybrid relationship with reality and artificiality create the concept of controlled accidents. An example of a controlled accident can be seen in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) when Scottie and Madeleine are by the water and the waves crash up. In the above example, the controlled accident is seen through the combination of the artificial reality of the actors and their story being presented in front of the actual reality of the waves. The relationship between a film's narrative and the controlled narrative is that it ends up “borrowing reality” to add to the film's created reality (Deren, CV, 151). The reason for it being deemed a controlled accident is in due to the decision-making of the filmmakers, in other words, a filmmaker knows what scene they want so they will choose a desired location – for example how

Utah was used to create the concept of ‘the Wild West’ in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) – but in order to maintain a better sense of reality they must not over control every aspect of the environment. By not overcontrolling every aspect, the filmmakers can maintain and create a better reality, by borrowing aspects of reality, thus allowing, and including controlled accidents such as waves, or wind.

E) Plato’s cave as an allegory for film spectatorship

Plato’s cave theory presents the idea that most of what a person sees is not reality, but rather a projection or mirror of reality. Plato presents the idea that people go through life as if stuck in a cave, in the dark, watching the color and image of reality pass by them (Plato, 7). The cave theory can be very clearly seen to draw parallels with the film spectator, not just in what a film presents but even in the way a person views and experiences film .

Film seeks to portray reality, whether that be ‘actual’ reality or a created reality within the narrative of the film. Film also provides a level of immersion into their portrayed realities that other mediums don’t offer, thus creating a more immersive and arguably more real experience for the viewer. By going to a cinema and viewing a film, a person is almost replicating Plato’s cave theory, in that they are going into a dark cave – room – to sit motionless and be at the mercy of the reality they are seeing on the wall – the screen – as they cannot do or say anything to change it or protect themselves from it. Film spectators are “prisoner[s]” of the film, and its reality (Plato, 7).

However, the direct correlation between the cave and film is less obvious outside of a cinema viewing experience, because up until now the cinema has been serving as the cave within Plato’s cave theory. Outside of the cinema, the viewing experience of film experiences some

variation. Variation of viewing experience fuelled by wider access to movies, now means that people can view films on phones and TVs wherever they want to, whether that be in the living room, on a train, or in their college dining hall. The diversity of viewing experience then dilutes the ties to Plato's cave as people are no longer just viewing film in a dark –cave-like – room, but at all times of day, at all light levels. By no longer being in a 'cave' it can allow for more agency placed upon the viewer, in that they do have the power to change the reality they are viewing/experiencing through pausing or even just talking.

However, the ties with the film itself are still there, in that people are viewing a projected reality. Furthermore, one could argue that even if viewing in broad daylight in a busy gas station, through a viewer's suspended reality they are creating their cave mentally, rather than placing themselves in a physical one.

Section 2

Group 1

1) Film and notably TV – much like art – are often created as a reflection of society's present values and ideals, or simply the filmmaker's. *He's All Yours* (Mary Tyler Moore, 1970) follows the titular character Mary as she has to deal with the nephew of Lou Grant – Allen – as he pursues her. On top of the inappropriate advances and actions taken by Allen the rumors, discussions, and reactions from other characters throughout the episode fuel themes of sexual harassment/assault as being a normal occurrence for women in the workplace. Within the episode there are two scenes which particularly showcase the show's opinions towards sexual harassment/assault in the workplace.

The first scene is between the times of 10:58 and 12:31, where everyone is back in the office following Alan having been at Mary's place the evening before. It starts with Alan talking to two other male co-workers of Alan and Mary. Alan – while talking to the two male co-workers – never explicitly claims to have done anything, however, the choice of language he uses is highly suggestive. The reactions of the male co-workers to Allen are actually mixed with one – Murray – choosing not to believe, and the other – Ted – enthusiastically asking for more information. When Mary enters the scene Murray lets slip what Alan was saying, and then Mary confronts Alan in front of Murray. However, rather than coming clean Alan continues his charade and continues to imply something happened between him and Mary. The final reaction of Ted and Murray is even more telling, as they both provide expressions that imply they believe Alan rather than Mary. This scene showcases how the episode harbors a normalized view on sexual harassment not just in the way Alan is speaking and creating rumors about Mary, but also in the way Murray and Ted react to both Alan and Mary's side of the story. The fact that Alan is

allowed and essentially actively encouraged to talk about Mary in an inappropriate way, and then when Mary tries to defend herself she is unable to, speaks to the somewhat normalized concept of workplace sexual harassment. The placement of belief also furthers patriarchal structures where the man's word is more immediately believed than the women's. Furthermore, the fact that Alan even begins to make up the stories can be seen to normalize women as a man's bragging tool or even object for social growth.

The other scene occurs at the end of the episode from 19:44 when Mary enters her apartment to 24:08 when the scene ends. Within the second highlighted scene there are two definable parts, the first one is the conversation between Alan and Mary, and the second is when Lou Grant enters and talks to Alan and Mary. The initial conversation between Alan and Mary sees Alan explaining to Mary that there is something 'wrong' with him, simply put he is a virgin. As Alan is explaining his situation, it seems he is placing himself as almost a victim of women, because he has not slept with one before. Furthermore, as the conversation continues he then tries to use his newly created position of a victim to try and guilt trip Mary into sleeping with him, as a way to help him. The first aspect of this conversation highlights incredibly patriarchal themes in relation to sex and suggests ideas that in order to become a man, a man must sleep with a woman. On top of this the ideas around gender and virginity are reinforced, in that he – the man – feels it is unfair that he had to go through college as a virgin, however, Mary implies she did just that yet she does not attempt to gain sympathy. Gender and even the concept of virginity is steeped in patriarchal themes, arguably even down to its origin as a concept as it is often disproportionately in a negative way towards women – the idea being women should stay pure – while it is flipped for men – it is embarrassing to still be a virgin – with the conversation between Mary and Allen highlighting this.

The second half of the scene is where Lou Grant interrupts Alan trying to guilt trip Mary into sleeping with him despite her clear lack of consent. The main moment in this part of the scene is when Lou Grant tells Alan that he is not allowed to pursue Mary, and must instead view her as if she was his cousin because he views her as his daughter. At first glance it may seem good that Lou Grant is defending Mary, however, the fact that his only reason for telling Alan no was because he viewed Mary as a daughter, is problematic and helps normalize sexual harassment towards women in the workplace. The normalization comes about due to there being no mention to the fact that Alan has been acting inappropriately and Mary has been actively saying no to Alan, asking him to stop, within Lou Grant's reasoning. Lou Grant instead uses his patriarchal status as the head of the 'family' to stop it due to how it is effecting him and his business – Alan isn't reporting because he is chasing Mary – and not how it is harming Mary (Feuer, CV, 614).

Furthermore, in both of the scenes – and throughout the entire show – there is a constant theme of humor, which is often used within serial TV to help its sustainability (Feuer, CV, 617). However, to suggest that Mary being harassed by Allen is a funny situation, is to normalize it, and thus in this situation produce the harmful message that it is ok – funny even – to sexually harass female co-workers. The addition of a laugh track breaks down any deep thinking and fuels the melodramatic theme as rather than hearing the potential negative connotations of a statement, the laughter draws only on the funnier ones (Feuer, CV, 617).

Overall the episode *He's all yours* broadcasts a plotline that doesn't just end up normalizing sexual harassment of women in the workplace, but seeks to gain laughs from it. Through making a serious subject funny and lighthearted it is suggesting that the actions taken by Allen are normal and ok, similar to the popular phrase "Boys will be boys". On top of this,

humor can also end up not just normalizing but also encouraging actions, as people seek to entertain and do funny things and in this case sexually harassing a female co-worker is the key to gaining laughs and prestige in the workplace for the sake of making characters.

Group 2

1) Balazs' readings seem to highlight the connection between character/narrative and the spectator in relation to the emotions and experiences of viewing a film, much like is suggested within theories of cinema as mirror.

Cinema as mirror – arguably derived from Balazs readings – is a theory that suggests a much more blurred relationship between spectator and film as opposed to other theories. The blurred boundary between spectator and film is created through a more personal connection to each film which cinema as mirror suggests. A spectator might think they see themselves within the narrative or a particular character, and as such 'mirror' their feeling and emotions onto themselves and the narrative. As a result of the personal connection cinema as mirror presents, there is also a variation on the 'distance' that a spectator might feel when watching a film, with mirror suggesting that there is little the viewer can do to distance themselves from the film as they are essentially 'in it' (FT, 64). Take the film *Cleo from 5 to 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962) as an example, within this movie the combined use of close ups and pov shots create the illusion that the spectator is Cleo and Cleo is the spectator, creating a mirrored relationship.

Balazs highlights the close up as a way to break up a scene and almost allow the spectator to find themselves and their feelings within the scene (Balazs, CV, 128). Drawing back to *Cleo from 5 to 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962) and the scene where she is singing the song with the male writers at the piano. Within the scene a close up is included, however the way the close up is created makes it seem like there is nothing but Cleo in this moment – a black background with Cleo's face front and center. The close up shot singles out Cleo, forcing the viewer to interpret the emotions on their face. The close up relies on the spectator to find meaning and emotion in

the face of Cleo resulting in a mirroring of emotions from character to spectator and vice versa to create the scene (Balazs, CV, 128). Balazs also speaks to how close up creates the idea of cinema as mirror in relation to other 'human' close ups, not just those of a face. Balazs suggests that spectators are able to recognise abstract visuals through mirroring their own understanding onto them (Balazs, CV, 130). *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1994) has a scene where the spectator is shown what initially seems like a series of abstract shapes, yet – Balazs argues – that through the spectator having their own hands and mirroring themselves onto the scene, the spectator is able to quickly recognise the abstract shapes as fingers (Balazs, CV, 130). Through identifying the fingers as fingers via our own fingers – mirroring – it is again representing the inability to regulate distance, or just simply the lack of distance when looking at cinema as mirror. The lack of distance comes about due to the implied suggestion that the spectator might not have recognised the fingers as fingers if they were not able to mirror themselves onto the film, meaning that if there were distance the film would be harder to understand and experience.

Balazs also argues that the close proximity to the film and the characters through close ups and mirroring theories can allow for more emotion to not just be conveyed but also felt by the spectator. Balazs highlight microphysiognomy as the reason for higher levels of emotional understanding between character and spectator, as he argue that a person's face can tell more about a person and what they are experiencing than words can describe (Balazs, CV 132/134). In *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) it is clear to see how the spectator is expected to see Joan as a representation – or rather mis-representation – of themselves through mirroring. Joan is the focus of the mirroring as it is through varied close ups of her face and the emotions she conveys through her expressions that drive the tone and the experience of the film. Furthermore, through viewing *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) through

the theory of cinema as mirror and the combination of the close up shots proceed immediately by medium stationary and tracking shots of the priests, it suggests to the spectator that the medium shots might actually be POV shots. Through connecting with Joan and her emotions and experience the medium shots become POV shots which the spectator continues to overlay the emotions of Joan onto. Balazs suggest that the connections between the shots – explained through mirror theory – is that of an emotional connection, which in turn bridges the visual gap. The emotional bridge suggested by mirror theory is even more important in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) because at no point are we visually told that Joan is in the same place as the priests; instead the film completely relies on the emotional bridge.

Balazs heavily emphasizes the importance of emotion in his readings, but not just emotion, specifically the visual; the ability to see a person's face and understand what they are feeling. Balazs even goes further to highlight the complexity of emotions that can be presented through a person's face, suggesting the idea of 'polyphonic' features(Balazs, CV, 133). Polyphonic features suggest that a person's face never just shows one emotion, but rather a complex variety, which in itself forms a singular state of being. The diversity and simultaneous nature of the emotions representation surpass what words could describe, and can only be interpreted and experienced through viewing and mirroring oneself with the character portrayed. It is thus, through face and close up that deeper, more complex emotions within a narrative can and are portrayed. Furthermore, the reliance on emotions can also begin to suggest emphasis on the concept of the spectator as an individual as opposed to a group, simply due to the more individual experience of emotions.

Overall, Balazs readings suit the concept of cinema as mirror best due to the emphasis and reliance on emotions and shared emotions between the characters of a film and the viewers.

Cinema as mirror – as opposed to as frame/window and door/threshold – highlights the more blurred boundary between spectator and character in which there is little ‘distance’ between the two, instead they seem to blend into one, with each spectator creating their own experience.