# Spectator's Comprehension of Cinematic Representation: An Analytic View

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*Abstract:* **It has been described how the cognition of films is not is congruence with the theory of modularity. The spectator and his comprehension have been described in this section. The endeavor here has been to comprehend the procedure of cognition of films from the perspective of coherence theory and blending theory. The process by which human beings comprehend films can be delved deep into with more clarity if we view films though the looking glass of these theories. Thus, the entire study has been aimed to understand films and how people cognize films.**

*IndexTerms*–**blending theory, coherence theory, film cognition, the spectator.**

## I.      Introduction

Film as a medium of communication is important primarily because of two reasons: one, it is an important art form, and two, comprehension and production of film involves complex cognitive processes. As an art form it has structural complexities and as the embodiment of cognitive processes it shows how crucial the structural complexities are in activating relevant cognitive structuring principles. Therefore, studying the relation between film and cognition will lead us towards a holistic understanding of human cognition. This understanding will answer how crucial the cognitive principles are in structuring schema, memory, etc. It will also explain how assimilation and accommodation are shaping and reshaping the existing structural resources, which is often considered as crucial in explaining human capacity to learn.

## II.      Film as a derived and intentional object

To start with, we have the notion of 'film.' We need to ruminate what film actually is. Interestingly, scholars prefer either to be in silence or to come up with different types of definitions addressing different aspects of film. For the purpose of the research, film is a derived intentional object. It is 'derived' because it is not the literal presentation of the real world. It is 'intentional' because it is directed to someone. Events narrated in a film are ordered much like the way expressions are ordered in utterances. This essentially suggests that film is the collection of audio-visual syntagms. These syntagms are produced with certain type of communicative intention which is crucial in layering meanings in different levels of representations in case of film. These layers constitute the filmic representation. While decoding this representation, spectator has to invoke conventionalized experiences. Often, the spectator performs inferential tasks to get hold of the intended sense of the director encoded in the film.

## III.      Film Spectatorship: The 'conscious' and the 'unconscious'

What follows then is the fact that film spectatorship is a cognitive activity which is partly conscious and partly unconscious. Interpreting the perceptual categories of the audio-visual stimuli and performing inferential tasks to activate different schemes of cognition are directly guided by the various principles derived from the daily experiences that the spectator has with him/her. As an example, we can talk about the three dimensional interpretation of the audio-visual representations when they are two dimensional in reality. The gap between the percept and the concept here is bridged with certain types of inferential behavior about which the spectator is hardly conscious. However, being unconscious does not necessarily mean that the spectator is absorbed by the film. In fact, spectator remains unconscious to the extent of not confusing the boundary between the experience and one who experiences.

## IV.      Film: a-modular in its nature

The very basis of Noam Chomsky's idea of innate nature ofthe human brain to acquire linguistic capability gives rise to the theory that the mind is actually organized into different modules and every module is assigned with a different function. The claim of modularity is also supported and propagated by Jerry Fodor who opines that the human mind consists of an array of input systems and that the input systems create a number of modules which are domain-specific computational systems that get characterized by thefactors like informational encapsulation, restricted access, high-speed, and neural specificity.

The basis of his hypothesis of modularity is the theory of innate language module in human mind which was publicized by Noam Chomsky. However, it needs to be mentioned that Chomsky actually went on to dissociate himself from the view of Fodor as he claimed that the central system of the brain is inscrutable. In stark contrast, Chomsky opined how the central system could be modularized.The most common and obvious proof of our brain being organized into various modules is that people who suffer brain damage in certain parts of the brain can actually forget how to talk, though they have their general cognitive functions and

intelligence stay like before and such people are still capacious of playing chess and so on.It needs to be understood that the thesis of modularity is not adequate enough to explain film cognition. There is no specific, encapsulated, cognitive module for experiencing the movements and gestures of fictional characters projected on a screen, nor are there specific cognitive modules for aesthetic experiences generally.

It is also evident that film as a form of communication is multi-modal. Because of being a-modular, the modular theories like the one proposed by Chomsky and Fodor are not capable enough to explain the cognitive processes involved in the production and comprehension of filmic language. In addition to this, our current understanding of human cognition has no knowledge of any cognitive module responsible for the processing of aesthetic experiences. Hence, the research needs to traverse in some other avenue to comprehend how we cognize films.

## V.  Coherence Theory and Blending Theory for understanding film cognition

To deal with this type of complexities often in cognitive linguistics, researchers prefer to distinguish everyday experience from aesthetic experience, (much like the way metaphors areclassified as primary and secondary respectively.) The assumption behind this type of dichotomization is simple, however elegant. For instance, in case of metaphor, it is often argued that primary metaphors are situated and grounded in our daily life experiences; whereas the secondary metaphors are experiential only through the mediation of the primary metaphor. Similar argument can also be put forward while discussing the embodiment of the aesthetic experience – which is situated and grounded in our everyday experiences. Production and comprehension of filmic language along with its all aesthetic imports depend heavily on the experience of the daily life.

Two theories can be taken to be explanatory of the process of cognition of films by the human mind. These are Coherence Theory which was propagated by Thagard and Kintsch and Blending Theory which was propagated by Fauconnier and Turner. As such, explaining film comprehension requires an in-depth understanding of the category what we call spectator. To explain the cognitive processes associated with the spectatorship there will be discussion about the two different theories on film cognition, Coherence theory and Blending theory. The reason why these two theories have been selected instead of one is due to the fact that Coherence theory is useful in explaining interrelation between the structural constituents and the congruencies found among them; whereas the significance of Blending theory lies with those subtle cognitive processes which controls the inflow of commonsensical knowledge in the interpretation of a film from the view point of a spectator.

## VI.  Coherence Theory and the spectator

Perceptual and conceptual are dialectically related: Mental contact with an object in the immediate perceptual field elicits application of concept. Analogical involves the use of one situational template to another one. A situation is marked as deductive, when all propositions attributed to this situation are compatible. When hypotheses and evidence correlate positively with one another explanatory coherence comes into play. Attainment of desired goals and outcomes results into deliberative coherence.

While discussing the problems associated with film interpretation, coherence theory identifies six different dimensions of coherence. These dimensions are perceptual, conceptual, analogical, deductive, explanatory and deliberative. Study shows that these six dimensions of filmic coherence reflects the underlying meta-coherence found in various emotions namely contentment, anxiety, happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, fear, pity, empathy or disgust. It needs to be understood how this happens.

According to coherence theory, perceptual and conceptual are dialectically connected - because most concepts are "given" concepts; that is, mental contact with an object in the immediate perceptual field elicits application of a concept. Analogical coherence involves extracting a "template" from one situation and applying it to another situation. A spectator's ability to experience continuity from scene to scene depends on analogical coherence, particularly at the categorization point on the continuum. A situation attains deductive coherence when all the propositions attributed to that situation are compatible, whereas a situation fails to achieve deductive coherence when propositions attributed to it contradict one another. A situation attains explanatory coherence when hypotheses and evidence correlate positively with one another, whereas a situation fails to achieve explanatory coherence when hypotheses contradict one another or when a hypothesis does not account for available evidence. A situation achieves deliberative coherence when it matches our desired goals and outcomes. A situation fails to achieve coherence when it contradicts or is otherwise incompatible with our desired goals and outcomes.

As per coherence theory, a film attains emotional coherence when the evoked emotional valences fit with a salient coherence dimension or set of dimensions. However, it is also argued that incongruent emotional stages can also construe a meaningful interpretation: Local emotional incoherence produced by warring percepts and concepts is a salient property of our experience of fictional representations in film accounting for ways we "resonate" with the story (mimesis), with the artistry behind the telling of the story (diegesis), and with the way the story and its medium may be relevant to the world outside the theater (realis).

## VII.  Blending Theory and the spectator

This theory has proven to be useful for describing various sorts of semantic and pragmatic phenomena. The fundamentals of blending theory consist of mental spaces and the processes involved in mapping one space over other to capture the dynamics of human thinking. Mental spaces "contain" mental models of entities, elements, and relations of any given scenario as perceived, imagined, remembered, or otherwise understood by a speaker. Because the same scenario can be construed in many ways, mental

spaces are useful analytic devices for partitioning incoming information about elements in the referential representation. The virtue of mental spaces is that they allow the addressee to divide information at the referential level into concepts relevant to different aspects of the scenario.

Blending theory works on the premise that the production and comprehension of signs entails the construction of a large number of simple, partial, and idealized mental models, each occurring by means of selective attention mechanisms and working memory. Complex human thought and understanding develops as we cobble together many of these simple idealized models, forming networks of mental spaces that can give rise to what has come to be known as blended mental spaces. A blended mental space combines conceptual structure to create new inferences not available in the other spaces. In addition to this, blending theory presumes spectator's life-world (lebenswelt) determines the "natural attitudes" taken when allocating attention (noesis) to a piece of film (noema). This leads to an enquiry into the way different dimensions of awareness involved into the very process of meaning construction. To understand the way attention is allocated we need to discuss awareness from three different viewpoints, namely story awareness, medium awareness, and world awareness.

The spectators become story-aware spectators when they experience the film as a fully realized realm. The viewers are thus placed in the mental condition of becoming story-aware more than any other modality and this is seen mostly in classic Hollywood films. This mode of spectatorship is attained when the spectator experiences the movie as a set of events which unfold before them as if they were themselves present in the events which they are watching on the screen. The conscious experience of the spectator is represented by the virtual and blended spaces. The perceived actors are the characters, the perceived locale is the setting and the plot which is perceived by the spectator gets experienced as a real event in space and time. This is known as the virtual identity blend. This virtual identity gives rise to a sensory illusion by which the people think the events are actually occurring here-and-now in opposition to the there-and then. This mode of awareness constitutes the optimal viewing arrangement and the spectator's experiences are aligned to the experiences of the protagonist of the story. This viewing arrangement is maximally subjective and the spectators have minimum self-awareness of the events which are shown onstage.

The main difference between the cognitive underpinnings or story-awareness mode of spectatorship and medium-awareness mode of spectatorship is the relative status of the presentation space which has been described before. In this case, the presentation space is the primary influencing space to the virtual and blended spaces. Although there remains a link between the represented and representation, the sense of virtual contrast develops in the blended spaces. This goes on to define the cognitive disposition of the people watching the film at that moment. It is due to the comprehension of the blend that the spectators take the film as a multi-layered aesthetic object.This mode of awareness also enables the spectator to make analogical coherence via inter-textual comparisons between films. The viewing arrangement remains subjective in this mode. In medium-awareness, the spectators delve deep into the affective style of the movie. They can take note of the causal connection in the sequences of the film. In the subjective arrangement the audience remains unaware of their involvement and hence is outside the objective scene. In the objective arrangement the audience gets placed inside the objective scene. However, a virtual contrast blend is constructed in both these instances and interrogation of the representation-represented mappings is thus accessed.

In the world-awareness mode of spectatorship, the audience utilizes the diegetic world of the film as the reference point for reasoning about the real or non-diegetic realm. This reference can be from the past, present or future and can also be real or imagined on the part of the spectator.The spectator then goes on to integrate the two spaces into a blend which can be termed as the virtual reference point space. As a result, there is a compression of the relations like identity, cause-effect and space into the scene of the film which is unfolding both in the virtual and the blended spaces.The reference point blends go on to create analogical links with the real or envisaged world and thus the spectator starts having coherent deductions or hypotheses about the events.

Thus, these three modes of film spectatorship in unison provide a scheme for describing the conceptual, emotional, perceptual, deductive as well as the deliberative dispositions of the audience while they endeavor to make sense of the film which they see. These modes represent the relationship among the realm of the story which is being told, the medium through which the story is portrayed and the realm which lies outside.

## VIII. Conclusion

Thus, it can be comprehended that the cognition of films is a very complex process which needs the involvement of many features on the part of the mind. There can be no experimental proof to the functions of the mind which are involved in the cognition of films.However, it is possible to try and comprehend the process theoretically making use of the frameworks which can be drawn from the discourse of cognitive linguistics. Much advancement has been made over the years in this field in recent past and this thesis attempts to contribute in some way to the endeavor of deciphering the complex processes involved in the cognition of films.

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