

CRITICAL AWARENESS

AN APPROACH TO LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

Critical Awareness: An Approach to Literary Criticism and Theory is a study guide to revisit the basic tenets of Literary Criticism and Theory. It is a re-studying and analysis of Classical Literary Criticism and Modern Literary Theories by some of our contemporary literary scholars, who have, through their understanding, redefined and simplified the basic elements of Criticism and Theory in Literature.

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ANTHOLOGY AND REFERENCE BOOK OF
RESEARCH ARTICLES ON LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM

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LITERARY THEORY

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Cinema as Pedagogy through Film Theories

Mohammad Adeel

ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a comprehensive scholarly overview of film theory, spanning formalist and realist paradigms to psychoanalytic, semiotic, feminist, Marxist, postcolonial, and contemporary digital/post-theory perspectives. Anchored in foundational theorists such as Sergei Eisenstein, André Bazin, François Truffaut, Laura Mulvey, Christian Metz, and David Bordwell, it explores how different theoretical lenses interrogate cinematic form, authorship, spectatorship, ideology, gender, race, and technological change. Through close readings of seminal texts (e.g., *Film Form*, *What Is Cinema?* “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”) and integration of recent empirical and digital studies, the chapter illustrates evolving modes of critique. Sectional case studies highlight how classic and contemporary films may be analyzed through multiple approaches—for instance, using formalism and auteur theory for Hitchcock, feminist critique in horror, and postcolonial analysis in world cinema. The chapter concludes with reflections on the continued relevance of pluralistic theory in an era shaped by streaming, VR, and algorithmic spectatorship. This chapter aims to serve advanced students and scholars by synthesizing rich intellectual traditions with emerging empirical and digital trends.

Keywords: Film Theory, Formalism, Psychoanalysis, Feminist Film Criticism, Post-Theory

Cinema, beyond its role as entertainment, has emerged as a dynamic medium for education, critical inquiry, and cultural reflection. In the contemporary academic landscape, films are not merely consumed as passive spectacles but analyzed as complex texts that engage with issues of ideology, identity, power, and representation. The study of cinema through film theories allows educators and learners to approach films as pedagogical tools—vehicles for exploring cultural narratives, questioning social norms, and fostering critical thinking. Film theories, ranging from psychoanalysis and feminism to postcolonial and Marxist perspectives, provide interpretive frameworks that deepen our understanding of how cinema shapes and reflects societal values. Using cinema as pedagogy involves moving beyond surface-level appreciation toward a more rigorous engagement with meaning-making. It invites learners to question how images, narratives, and cinematic techniques influence perception and

ideology. For instance, Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" challenges viewers to interrogate the gendered dynamics of visual pleasure, while postcolonial theory uncovers how films perpetuate or subvert colonial legacies. Such theoretical lenses transform the classroom into a space of dialogue where films become catalysts for critical debates on politics, identity, and culture. By situating cinema within theoretical discourse, educators not only validate films as serious academic texts but also empower students to decode their implicit ideologies and aesthetic strategies. This approach bridges the gap between visual culture and critical scholarship, making film a potent pedagogical medium for the 21st century. This chapter charts the evolution of film theory across ten sections: beginning with early formalist and realist approaches, moving through auteur, psychoanalytic, semiotic, Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial theories, and concluding with post-theory and digital perspectives. Along the way, it highlights case studies demonstrating how these theories function as interpretive tools. The chapter provides readers with a foundation to understand not only the historical development of film theory but also its ongoing relevance in an era of media convergence.

FORMALIST FILM THEORY

Formalist theorists see cinema as a distinct art form that constructs meaning primarily through technical and stylistic elements. Pioneers such as Hugo Münsterberg and Rudolf Arnheim were among the first to consider film an expressive medium rather than mere photographic reproduction. Arnheim, in *Film as Art* (1957), argued that film's aesthetic value derives from its manipulation of reality through framing, camera movement, editing, and sound. Sergei Eisenstein, one of the most influential formalists, advanced montage theory as a revolutionary approach to editing. In essays collected in *Film Form* (1949), Eisenstein argued that juxtaposition of images creates intellectual and emotional effects beyond the content of individual shots. Montage, for him, was not simply a technical process but a dialectical method capable of eliciting political and psychological responses from audiences. His films, such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), remain touchstones for understanding formalist aesthetics. Béla Balázs contributed to this discourse by emphasizing the close-up as a means of revealing the soul of characters and the subtleties of human expression. Together, these formalists positioned cinema as a deliberately crafted medium, where meaning and affect arise from style as much as narrative.

REALIST FILM THEORY

André Bazin, conversely, posited that cinema's greatest strength lies in its ability to capture reality. In *What Is Cinema?* (2009), Bazin championed long takes, deep focus, and minimal editing as techniques that respect the integrity of time and space, allowing viewers to engage with scenes as they would real life. For Bazin, cinema was an ontological extension of photography—a medium uniquely capable of presenting the world as it is, fostering a contemplative and democratic spectator experience. Bazin's advocacy for realism coincided with Italian neorealism, whose films, such as Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), captured the struggles of ordinary people without melodrama or overt