

# SPECTATORSHIP



**EDUQAS A-Level Film Studies**

**Section B: American Film Since 2005**

**Group 1 – mainstream film**

# General aspects of spectatorship:

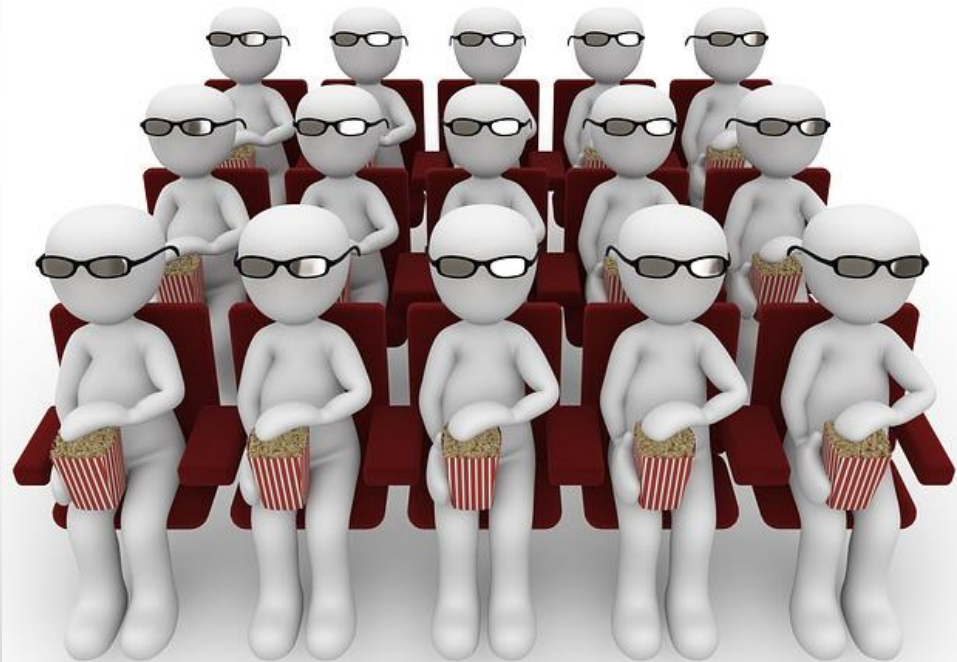
- viewer response
- audience positioning
- point of view

# ACTIVE versus PASSIVE spectatorship

This debate hinges on the question of whether:

- Film audiences are **homogenous**, undifferentiated **collections of people** who are likely to **respond** to the films they watch in a more or less **identical** way

OR . . .



- Are they **more individualistic** in their viewing, reading and **responding** to a film's coded messages in a **wide variety** of ways?



???




IMAGE CREDIT: KENISHI NOBUSUE

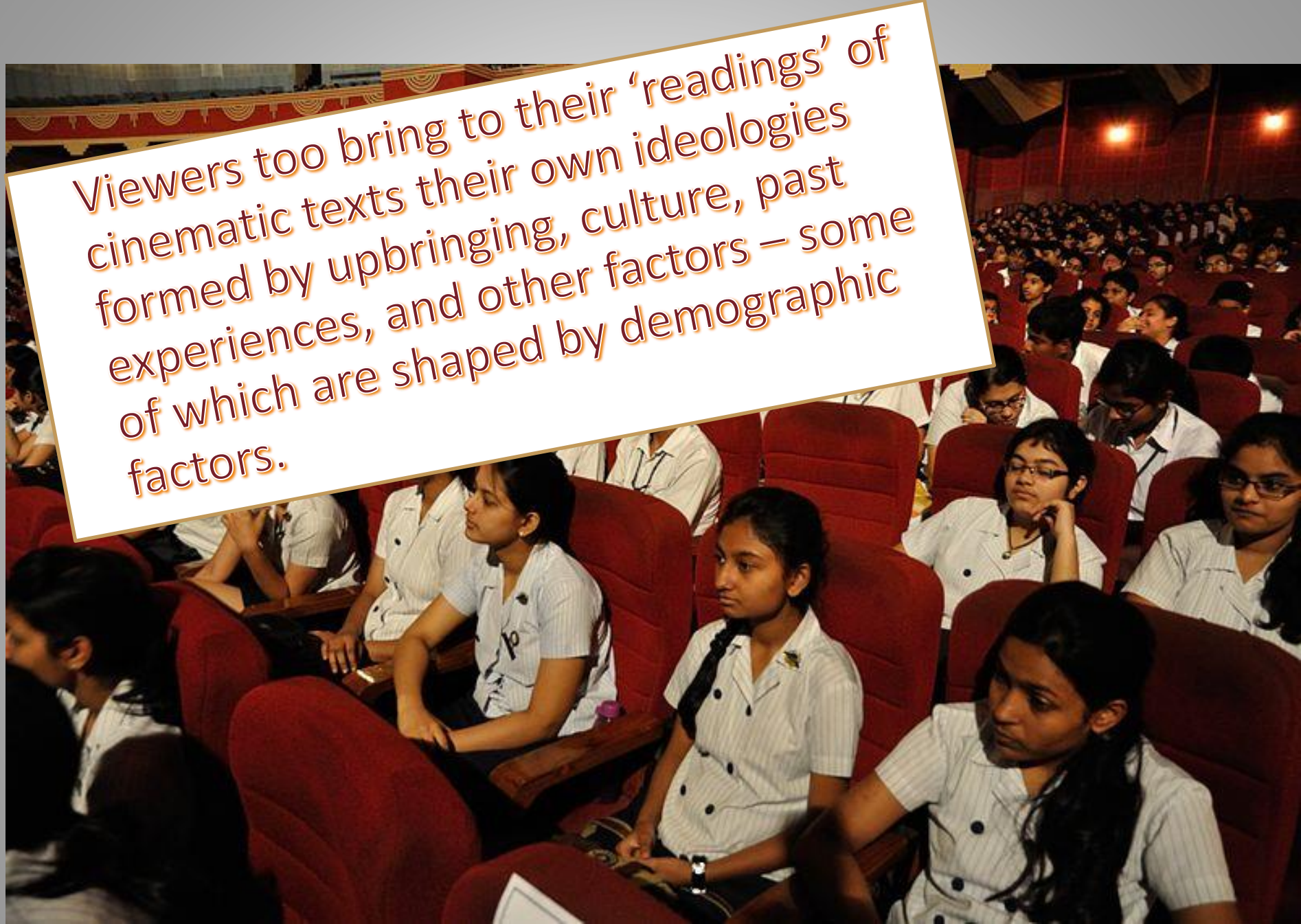


Examiners expect you to understand that the **interpretation** of a film is a **dynamic** interaction between the **text** and the **audience**.



The image features the iconic globe logo for Universal Islands of Adventure. The globe is a large, blue, perforated sphere with a textured, brownish-gold landmass on top. The word "UNIVERSAL" is written across the globe in large, 3D, white letters with gold outlines. The background shows a clear blue sky, palm trees, and a crowd of people walking around the globe. A decorative metal fence is visible in the foreground.

Filmmakers construct stories laden with meanings that they hope to communicate, whether they convey meanings, morals, values and ideologies deliberately or unconsciously.



Viewers too bring to their 'readings' of cinematic texts their own ideologies formed by upbringing, culture, past experiences, and other factors – some of which are shaped by demographic factors.



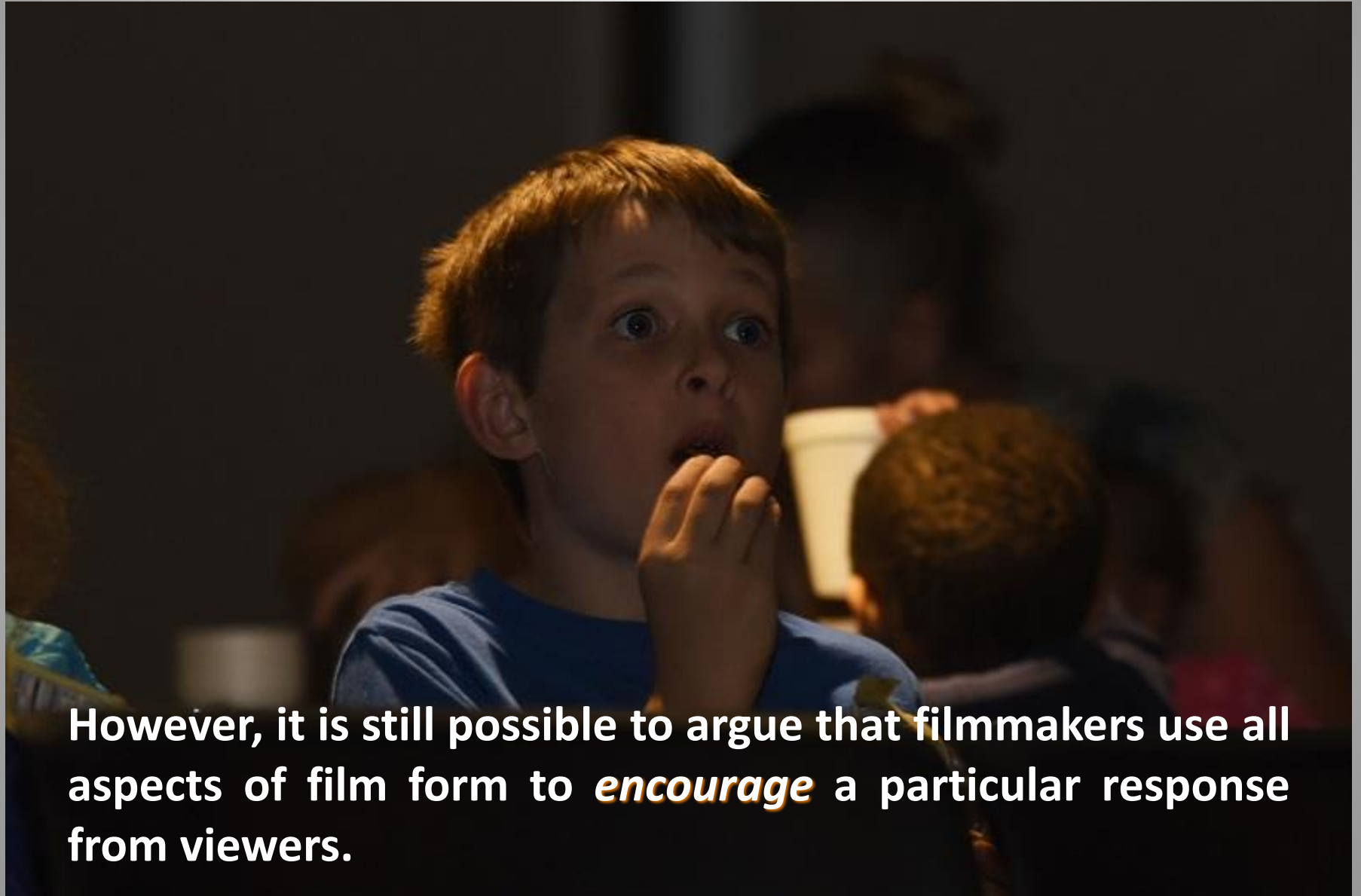
Early theories of communication assumed that mass audiences were mostly *passive*.

These models stressed the power of Hollywood films to use escapist narratives as 'misdirection' – distracting public attention away from social problems such as poverty and inequality.

Genre films tend to offer fantasy solutions to real world problems, or to downplay/ignore those problems altogether.

The HYPODERMIC  
NEEDLE MODEL

Such mass audience theories have since been challenged.



However, it is still possible to argue that filmmakers use all aspects of film form to *encourage* a particular response from viewers.

# Activity:



**Brainstorm some examples of how films deliberately manipulate viewer emotion, identification and positioning.**

# Did you come up with any of these?

- Point-of-view shots / eyeline matches
- Big orchestral scores to produce sentiments like excitement, adventure or nostalgia
- Low angles to make characters look powerful or imposing/threatening
- Voiceover narration to position you with a character and his inner thoughts
- Use of close ups to show a character's reactions/emotions

# Narrative



- ***How*** a filmmaker **tells a story** also encourages spectators to take a side or to feel invested.



**Archetypes (heroes, villains, protector figures, femme fatales, wise old teachers, blondes, jocks, nerds, etc.) are shorthand for social positions/'types' and lead viewers to have certain expectations of characters.**



**STYLE** also shapes how we watch and experience a film.

Some films use **continuity editing** and **naturalism** to encourage us to get lost in the story, while more **expressionistic** uses of film form tend to remind us that we are watching a constructed film.

INTERTEXTUALITY can encourage viewers to become a bit **distanced** from the film because they are reminded of **other** films and may begin to think **beyond** the artificial 'borders' of the particular film they're watching.

[Click HERE](#) for a good example of  
**INTERTEXTUALITY**



# Exam preparation

- It is a good idea to select **three** key sequences from the film you are studying for this section.
- Examples of key scenes are those which feature **exposition**, **tension** and **emotion**.
- For each of your chosen close study sequences, reflect upon **how film form is being used** to generate specific **responses** from the audience. Upon what are viewers encouraged to **focus**?

VIEWING CONTEXTS –  
when we watch films in  
the cinema, we can be  
encouraged to laugh or  
to scream when others  
do.



Cinema is an **immersive** experience. Large screen and surround sound make us feel more **involved** with the action.



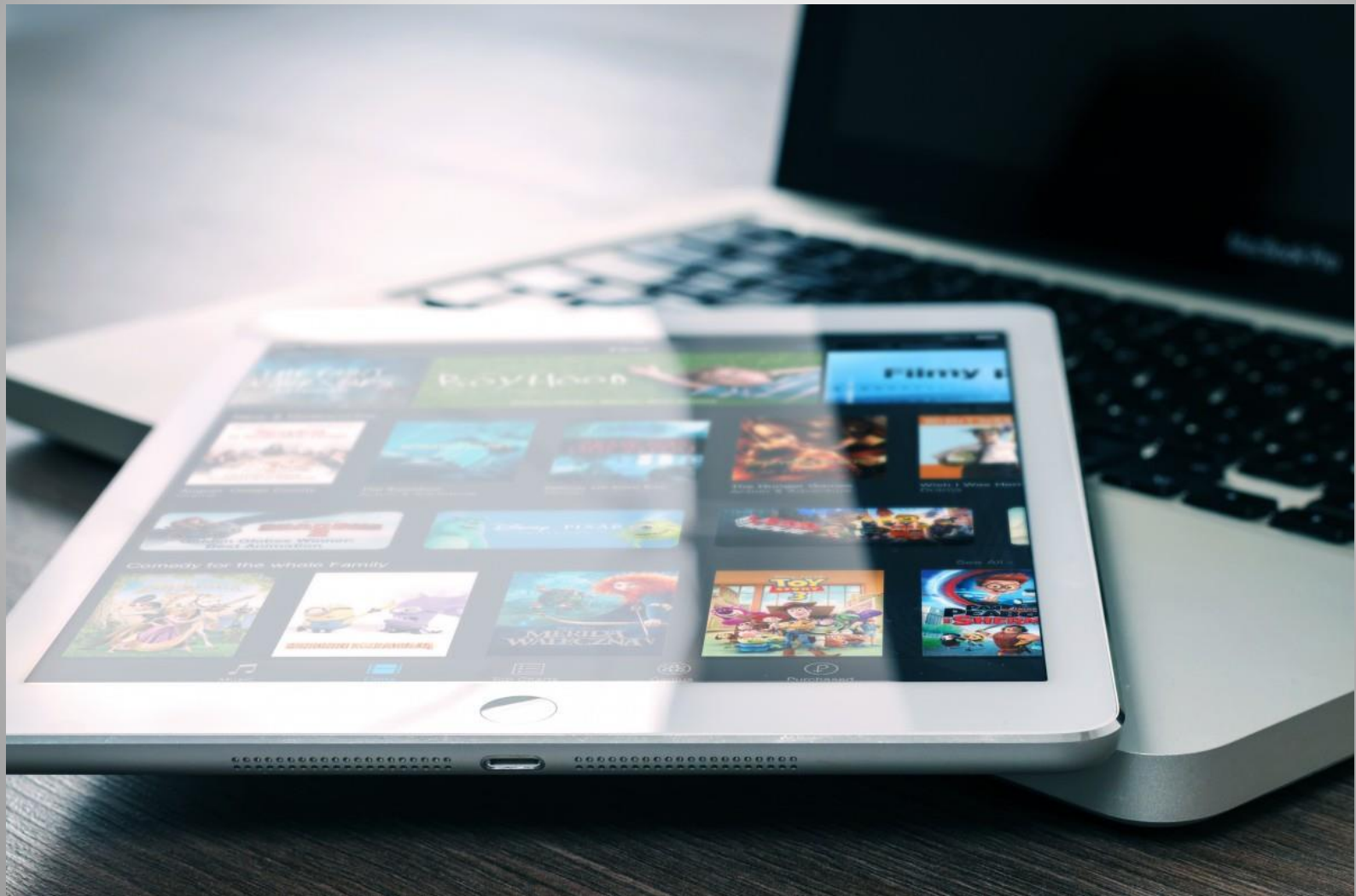


The **uninterrupted** nature of the cinema, as opposed to other ways of watching films, can have an impact on how we respond to the film.



THIS  
EXPERIENCE

# IS VERY DIFFERENT TO THIS ONE!



**DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS** can also impact upon spectator response.

- 
- **SEX\*** (see notes)
  - **AGE**
  - **ETHNICITY**
  - **SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND**
  - **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

# Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model



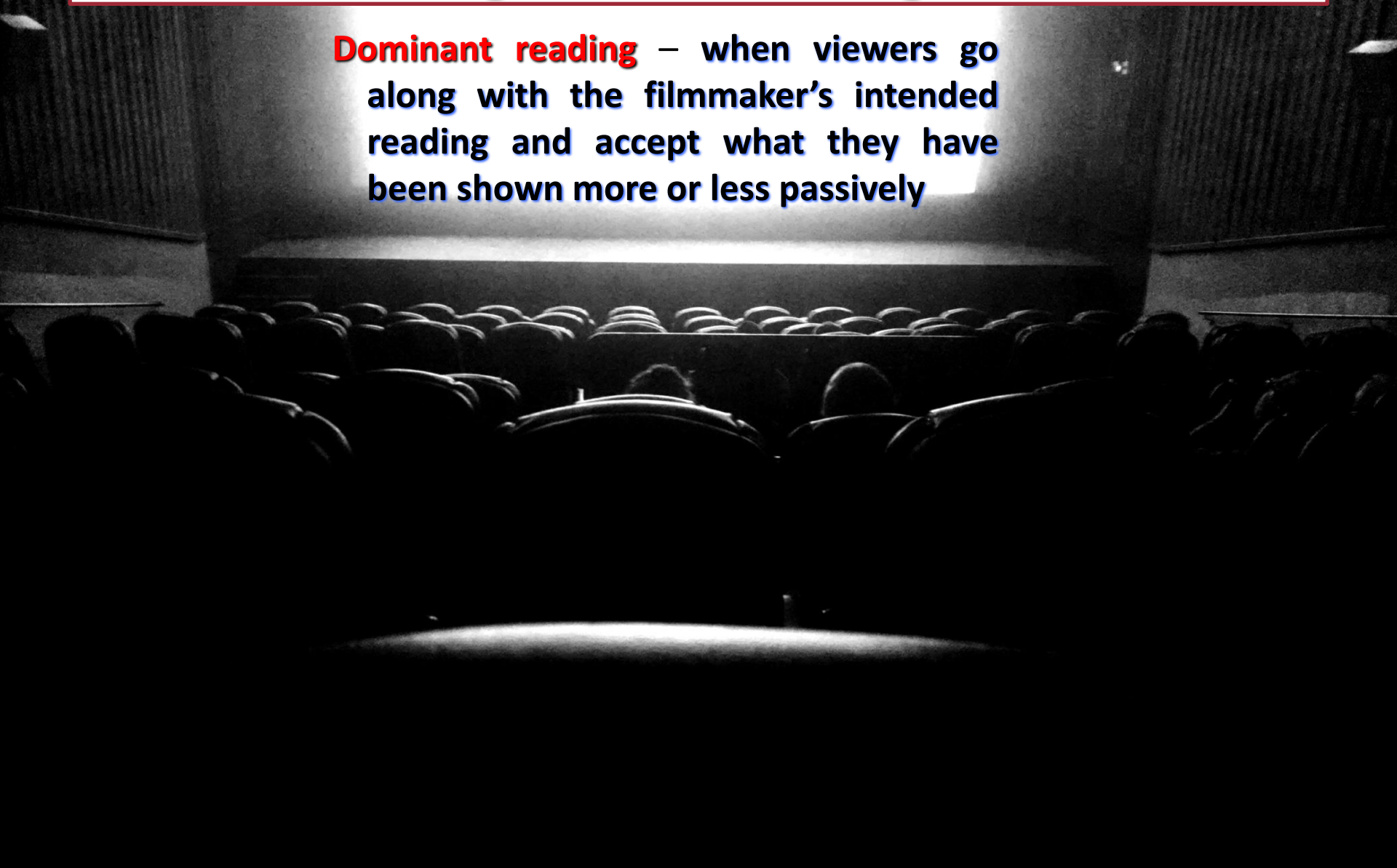
- Jamaican-born cultural theorist & Marxist sociologist
- Born 1932
- Moved to UK in 1951
- Founding figure in Birmingham School of Cultural Studies
- Founder, *New Left Review*
- Became a professor at The Open University in 1979
- President of British Sociological Association 1995 -1997

# In a nutshell . . .

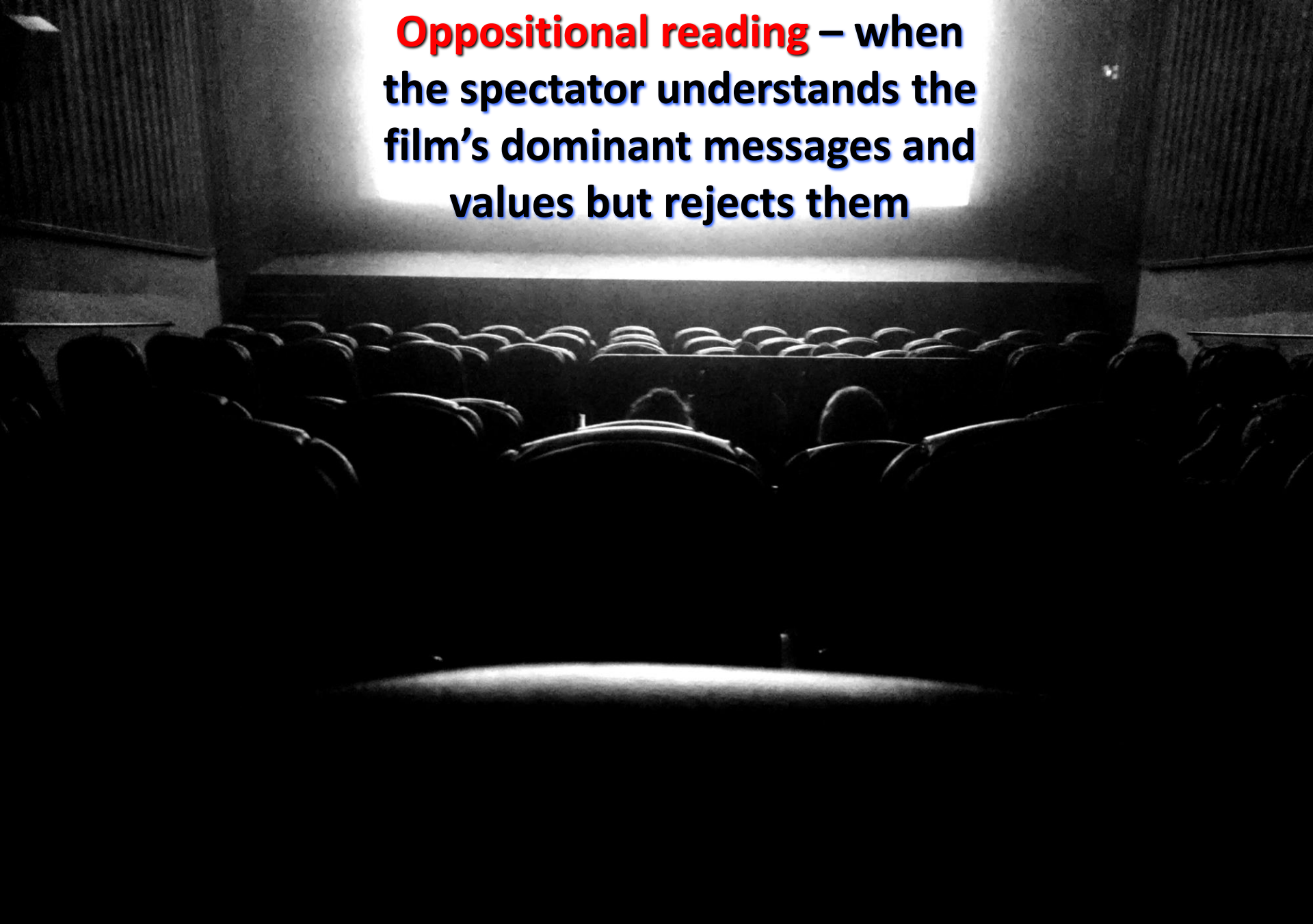
- modern audiences are not just 'cultural dupes', mindlessly consuming whatever the dominant culture feeds them in a one-way process
- Texts are 'encoded' by their producers and 'decoded' by their audiences
- This process means that texts are open to alternative meanings and interpretations
- This potential for multiple meanings in a text is called 'polysemy'
- However, in practice Hall believed that texts were 'structured in dominance' to the extent that only a *limited* polysemy was possible

# Hall argued that there are 3 ways of reading and decoding texts:

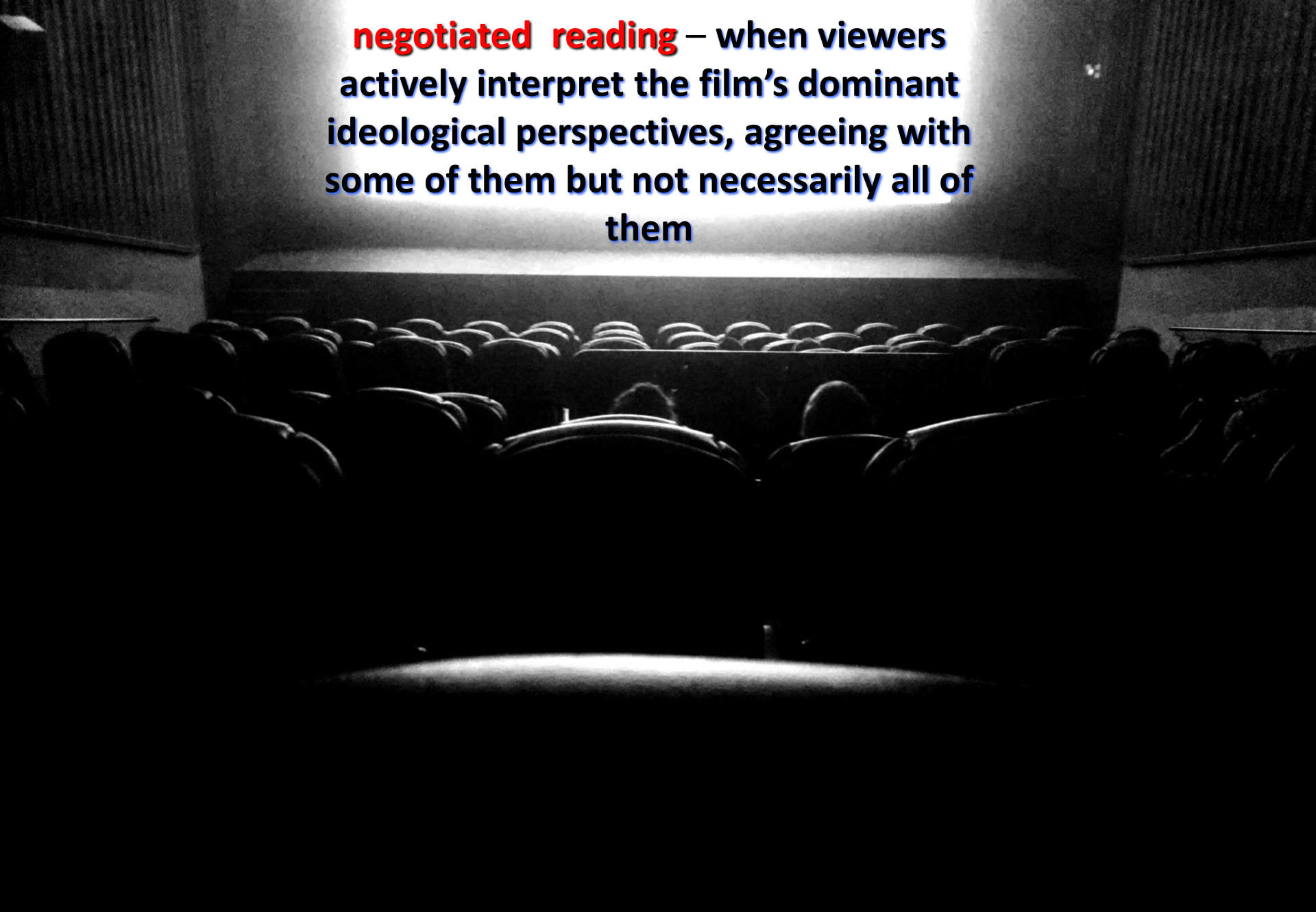
**Dominant reading** – when viewers go along with the filmmaker's intended reading and accept what they have been shown more or less passively



**Oppositional reading** – when  
the spectator understands the  
film's dominant messages and  
values but rejects them



**negotiated reading** – when viewers actively interpret the film's dominant ideological perspectives, agreeing with some of them but not necessarily all of them

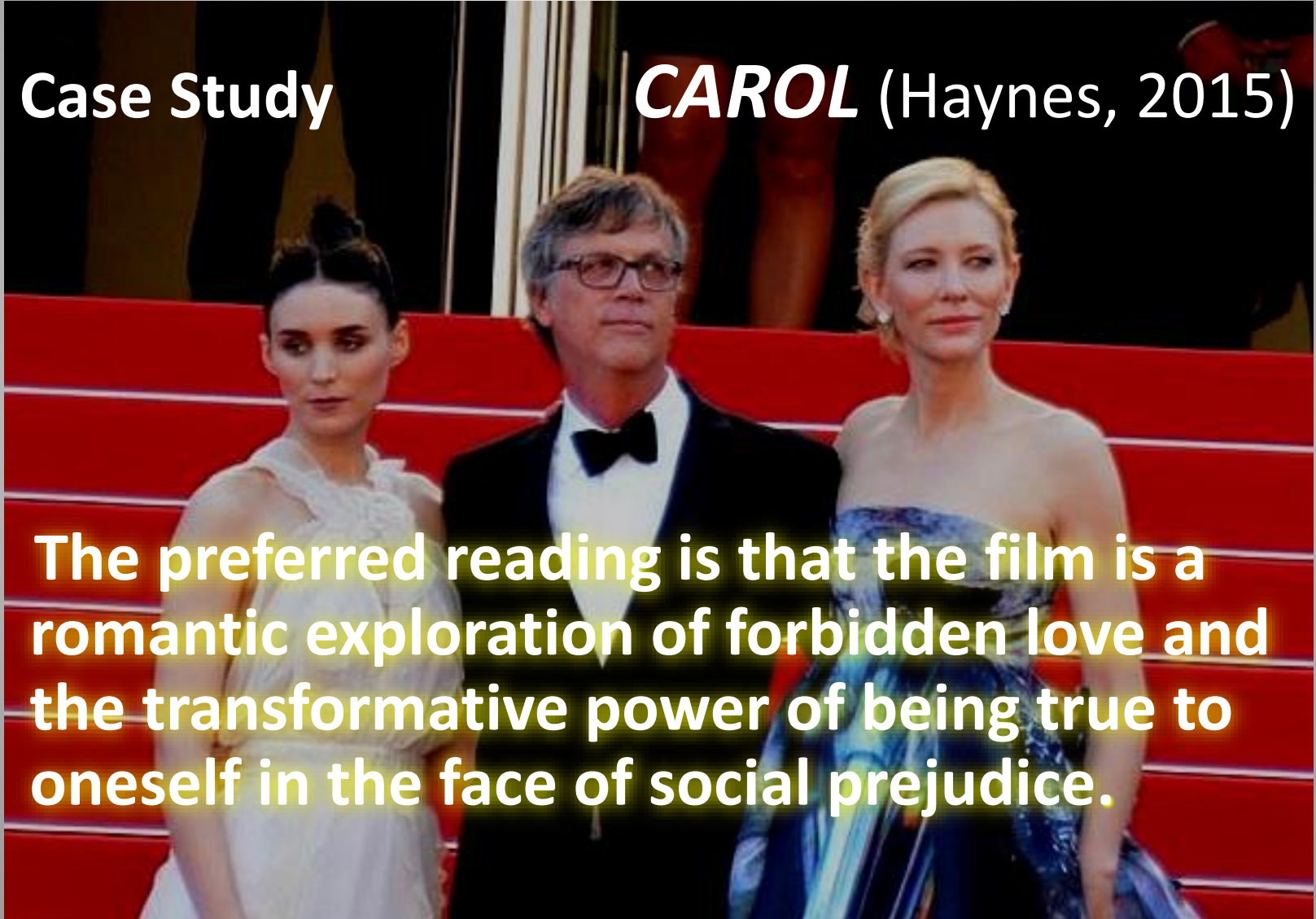


# Applying Hall's theories

Case Study

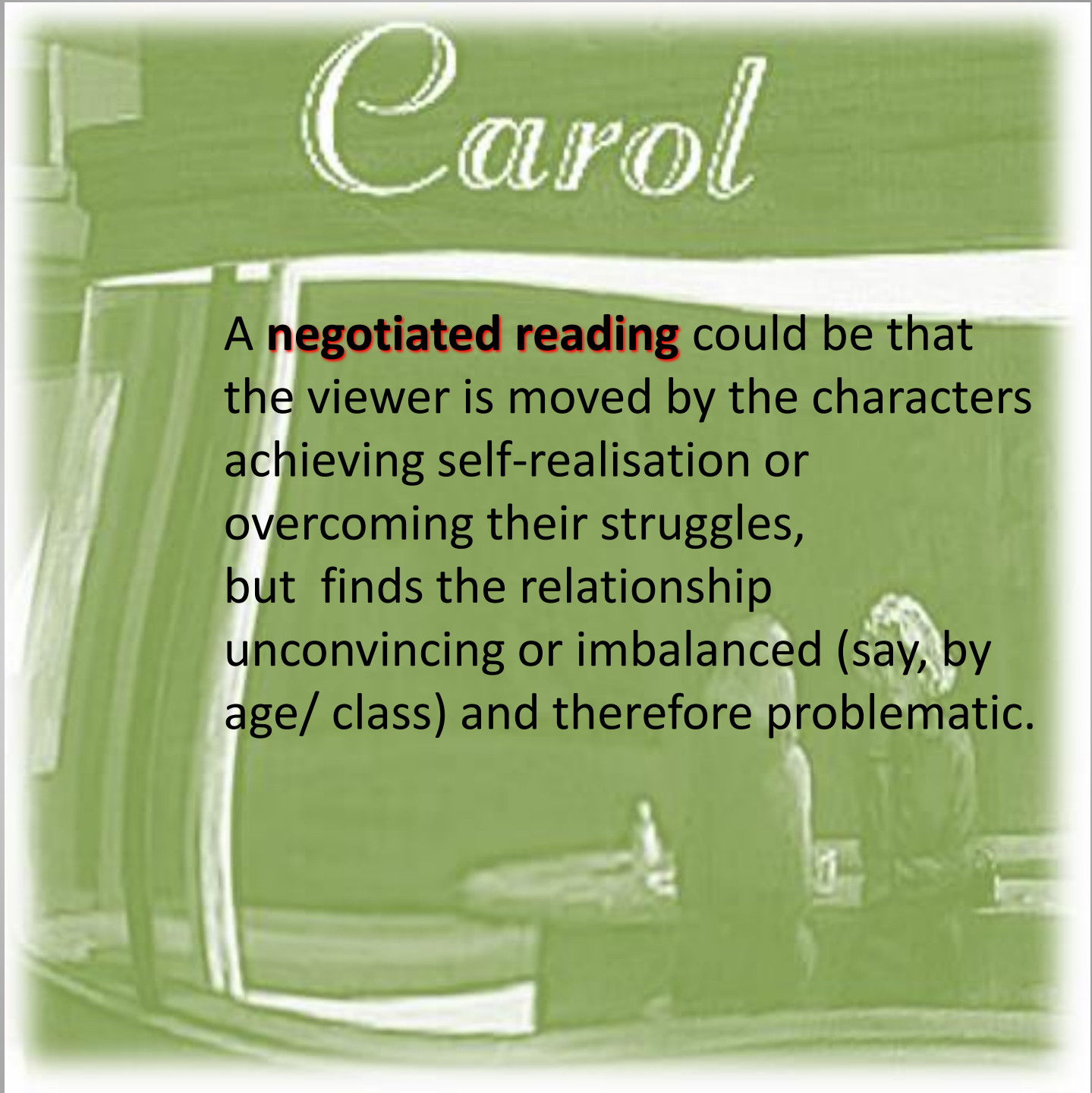
*CAROL* (Haynes, 2015)

The preferred reading is that the film is a romantic exploration of forbidden love and the transformative power of being true to oneself in the face of social prejudice.



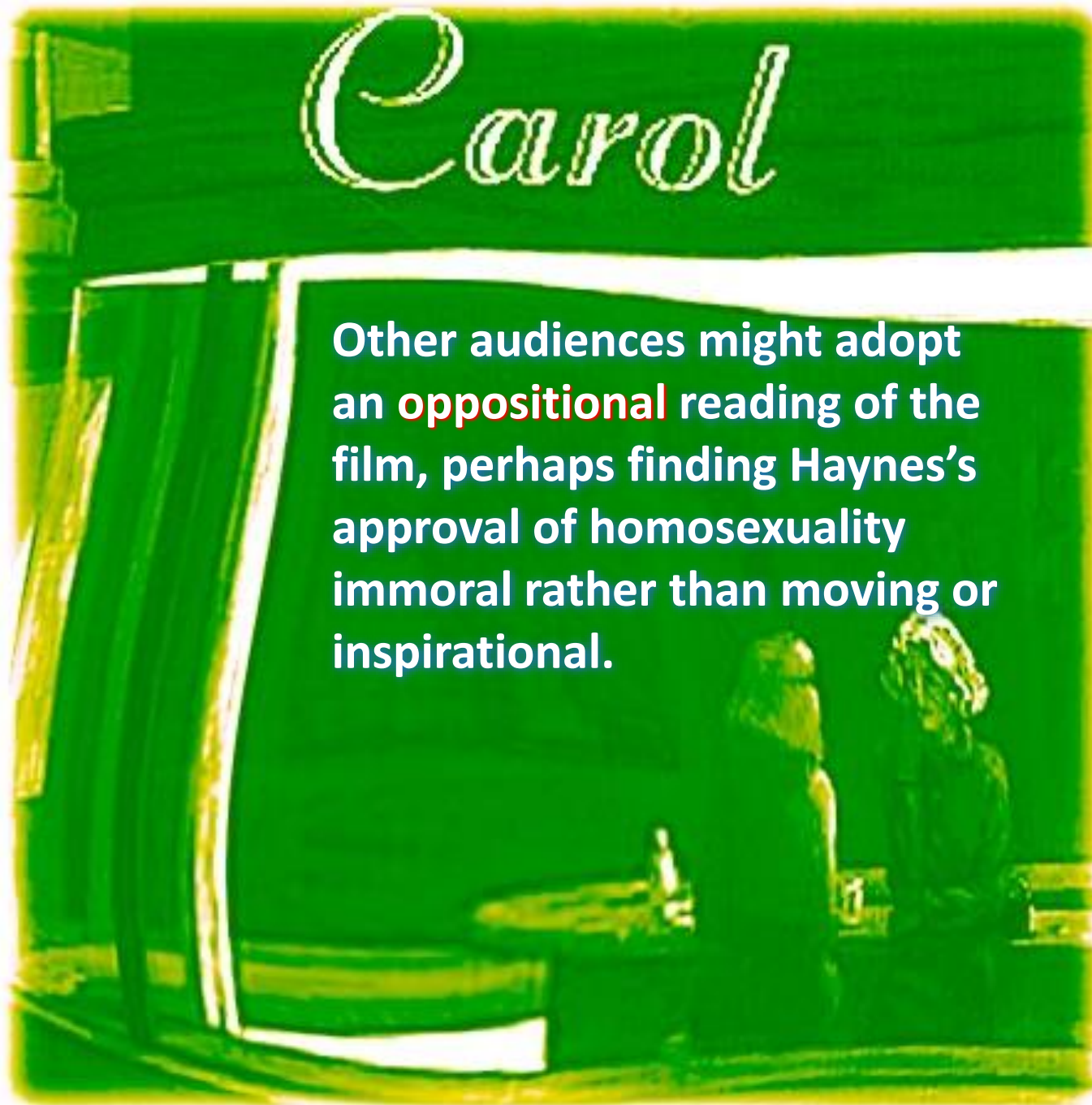
# Carol

A **negotiated reading** could be that the viewer is moved by the characters achieving self-realisation or overcoming their struggles, but finds the relationship unconvincing or imbalanced (say, by age/ class) and therefore problematic.



# Carol

Other audiences might adopt an **oppositional** reading of the film, perhaps finding Haynes's approval of homosexuality immoral rather than moving or inspirational.



# A feminist interpretation of *CAROL*

One argument could be that the film plays **against** the dominant Hollywood convention of deploying a 'male gaze'. Therese possesses a **camera** and through her use and 'ownership' of her lens *within* the film, Haynes transfers the **dominant POV** to a female character, thus allowing audiences to experience *her* lust for Carol from a **woman's perspective**. This makes Carol the object of a **female gaze**.



# EDUQAS says

to achieve a high level (band 5) mark, . . .

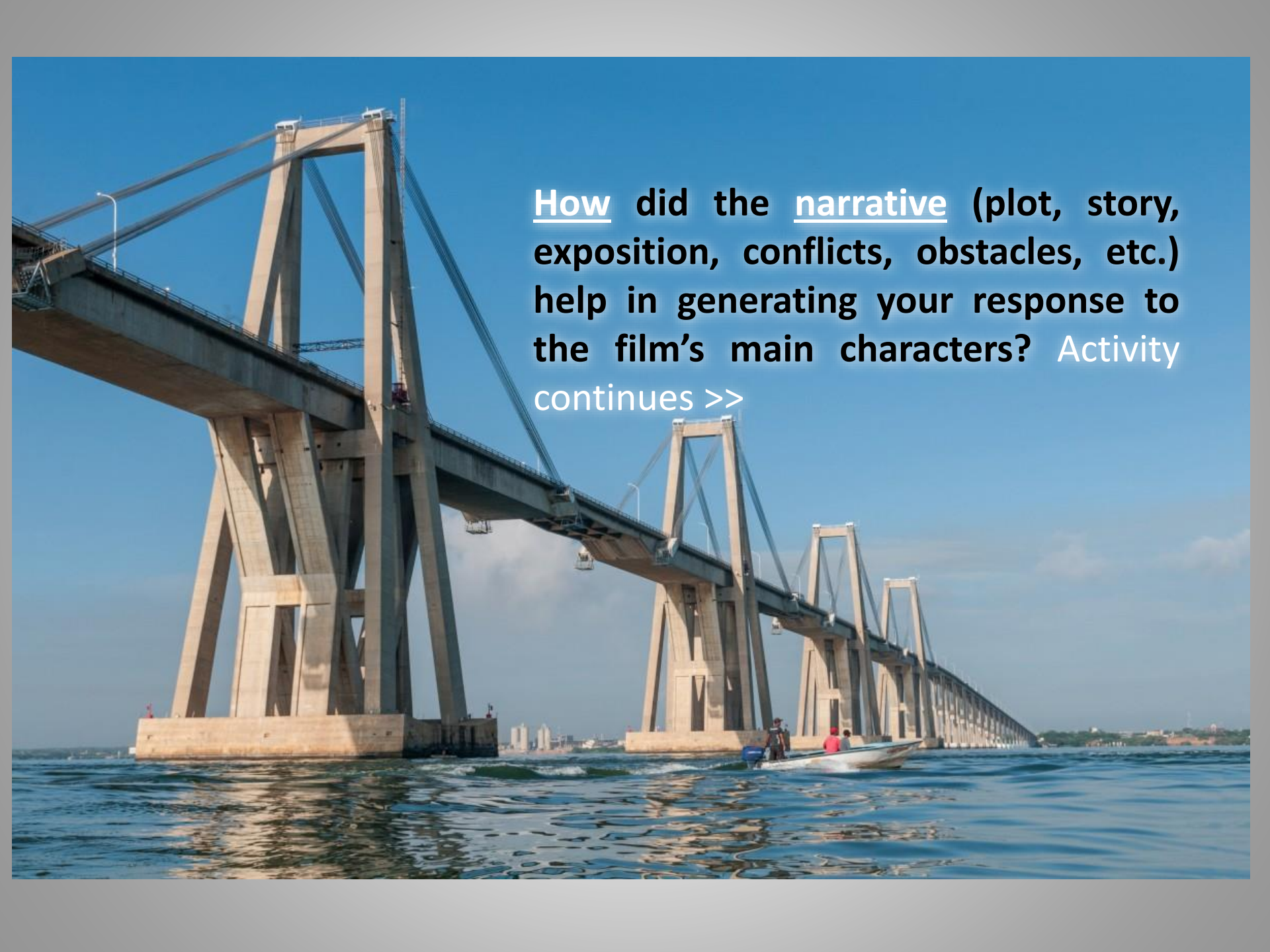
## Candidates may include the following:

- an understanding of spectatorship in terms of the level and type of engagement a film elicits in the spectator including, for example, concepts such as identification, alignment and allegiance
- how key features of the films, such as camera position, editing, sound, performance or aspects of narrative and genre can create passive and active responses
- some recognition of the role of viewing context and spectators' social and cultural background in influencing spectator response
- a recognition that spectators are likely to shift between passive and active viewing.
- **Band 5** responses may see the relationship between passive and active spectatorship both in terms of shifting responses and as a tension between spectators' points of view (their ideological positions) and the points of view (ideologies) films may convey.

# Activity

Thinking of your chosen study film, answer the following questions in pairs or small groups:

- With which character(s) did you most strongly **identify**?
- *Why* do you suppose you responded to him/her in this way? Was there something about **HOW** the film was constructed that helped to generate this response? (Activity continues next slide >>)

A large cable-stayed bridge with multiple concrete piers and stay cables, spanning a body of water. The bridge is viewed from a low angle, emphasizing its height. In the foreground, a small boat with several people is on the water. The sky is clear and blue.

How did the narrative (plot, story, exposition, conflicts, obstacles, etc.) help in generating your response to the film's main characters? Activity continues >>

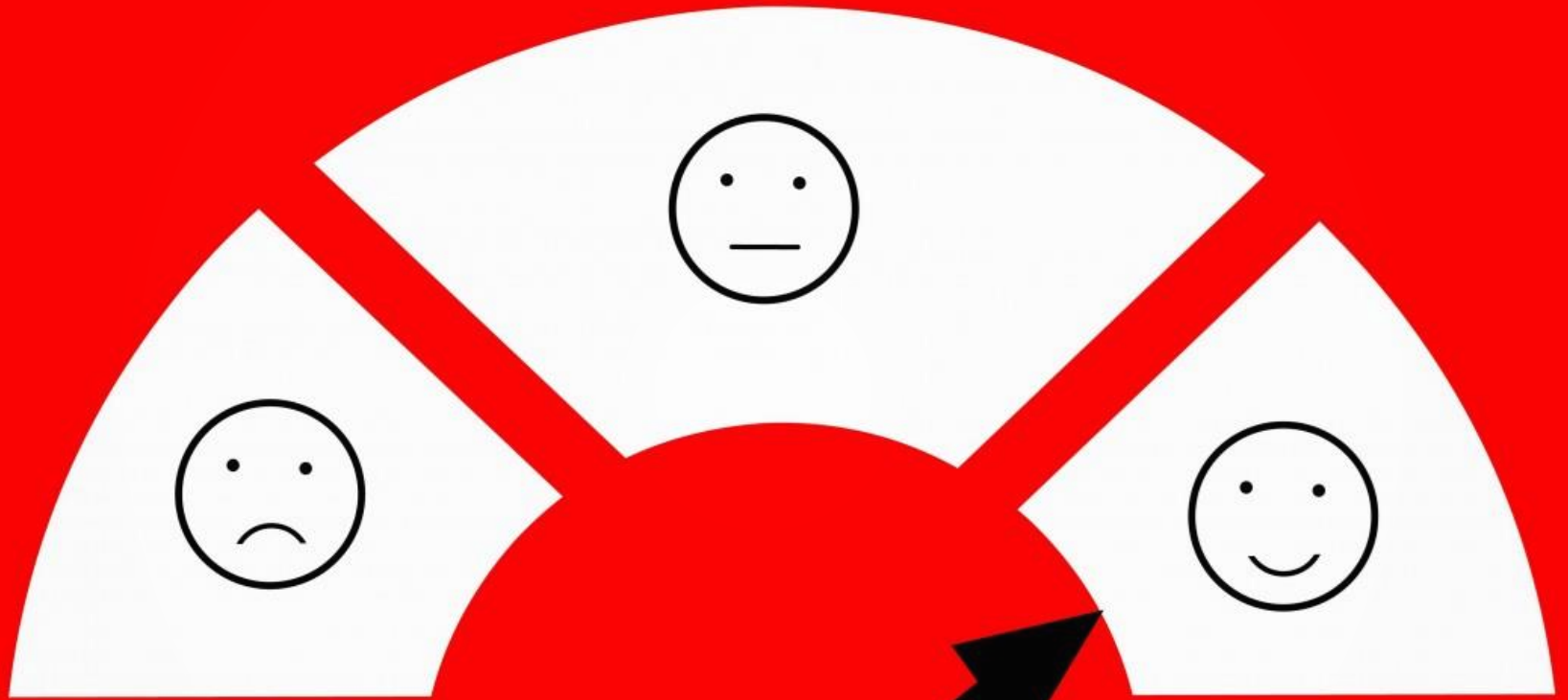
- Which themes or values did the film present to you? Activity continues >>>>>



How do the film's main ideas relate to  
**you** and **your** life?



Now **feedback** from small groups or pairs **to the whole group**:



- Was there **uniformity of response** or a **variety of different responses**?

Consider reasons for ***why*** some people may have had different responses to the film.



# SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT

## Component 1: Varieties of film and filmmaking

Written examination: 2½ hours

35% of qualification

This component assesses knowledge and understanding of **six** feature-length films.

### Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 (comparative study)

**One** question from a choice of two, requiring reference to two Hollywood films, one from the Classical Hollywood period (1930-1960) and the other from the New Hollywood period (1961-1990).

### Section B: American film since 2005 (two-film study)

**One** question from a choice of two, requiring reference to **two** American films, one mainstream film and one contemporary independent film.

### Section C: British film since 1995 (two-film study)

**One** question from a choice of two, requiring reference to **two** British films.

## Component 2: Global filmmaking perspectives

Written examination: 2½ hours

35% of qualification

This component assesses knowledge and understanding of **five** feature-length films (or their equivalent).

### Section A: Global film (two-film study)

**One** question from a choice of two, requiring reference to **two** global films: **one** European and **one** produced outside Europe.

### Section B: Documentary film

**One** question from a choice of two, requiring reference to **one** documentary film.

### Section C: Film movements – Silent cinema

**One** question from a choice of two, requiring reference to **one** silent film or group of films.

### Section D: Film movements – Experimental film (1960-2001)

**One** question from a choice of two, requiring reference to **one** film option.

## Component 3: Production

Non-exam assessment

30% of qualification

This component assesses **one** production and its evaluative analysis. Learners produce:

- **either** a short film (**4-5 minutes**) **or** a screenplay for a short film (**1600-1800 words**) plus a digitally photographed storyboard of a key section from the screenplay
- an evaluative analysis (**1600 - 1800 words**).