Psychoanalysis & film theory

• Psychoanalysis & Film theory → 1970’s
• 2 strands: Freud & Lacan
• 3 areas of investigation:
  – Film texts
  – Apparatus-spectator relation (→ text-spectator)
  – Fantasy
Psychoanalysis

- Theory of sexual, divided subject (thru loss of and separation from the mother)
- Question of subject: who is the subject? (text, auteur, spectator?)
- Effects of enunciating text on spectator (film as performance)? Effects of filmic text? What are the 2-way ideological effects (film on spectator & vice-versa)?
- What are the pleasures derived by the spectator as he/she moves in and out of the text (identification?)?
- Context in terms of meaning production → modes of production / social/ political/ historical context. Modes of representation?
Freud – Theory of the subject

• Human psyche
  – strive to fulfil desires (sexual)
  – suffer pain in case of failure
  – feel guilt for desires and become self-critical, self-hating
  – repress frustration & self-disgust into unconscious
  – can resurface (in dreams or projection)
Human psyche

• **Id** → uncontrolled, repressed part

• **Ego** → consciousness (attempts to control id)
  – Realist ego (satisfies some of id’s desires + conforms to social expectation)
  – Narcissistic ego (libidinal reservoir – invest in itself or other objects)

• **Super-ego** → attempts to act as higher-order authority over id & ego (greater critical conscience of psyche – ‘parental’ voice)
Oedipal trajectory

• Dyadic mother/child relationship (narcissitic→ mutual identification & desiring)
• For growth → must severe tie (Oedipal complex or crisis)
• Paternal intervention→ threat of castration (renunciation of mother to find own woman)
• In classic narrative film→ protagonist must resolve crisis (often triangular nature) to attain social stability
Lacan – language model

• Child born into lack & wants to regain imagined entity of pre-lack (unity with mother)
• Shift from Imaginary to Symbolic (mirror stage)
• 1st order of subjectivity - Imaginary $\rightarrow$ unity with mother (concept of jouissance $\rightarrow$ narcissistic self-idealisation
• 2nd - Symbolic order (Law of the Father) $\rightarrow$ based on language $\rightarrow$ entry into lack - repression of desire for mother
  - Child then upholds and perpetuate patriarchal law
• 3rd- Real order- what is ‘out there’
• Film works at unconscious level (Freuds’ libido drive & Lacan’s mirror stage)
• Screen analogous to mirror
  – Projector positions spectator voyeuristically
• Each viewing – enactment of move from Imaginary to Symbolic + Oedipal trajectory
• Metz: cinemagoing & viewing = regression to childhood
• To contain & make safe (m)other’s lack & allay fear of castration → fetishism
• Absence / presence (film = fetish as it makes present what is absent → disavowed by spectator → suture effect thru seamlessness)