Why Audience Identification is Important
BG thinks the common appeal to *viewer identification with a character or characters in a film* "is part of the **folk wisdom** of responding to films". Often the success or failure of a film is ascribed to the presence or absence of audience identification occurs, and the quality and strength of emotional responses depend on identification. Thus, theories explaining emotional reactions to films must at least give an account of identification.
Yet…
Film theory has "a curious reaction to this folk wisdom."

> **1. Psychoanalytic film theories are favorable toward, but hyperbolic in in their way of treating identification.**

>> How they do this: by treating viewer identification with a more fundamental stage of self-identification in psychological development, or evokes/mirrors other features of psychological self-identification/identity (i.e., the viewer becomes identified with the 'invisible observer [the camera]' turning the viewer into a sort of 'transcendental subject' in whom the film rests just as the unified consciousness of the viewer is the seat of all real-life experience).

> **2. Analytic film theories reject psychoanalytical ways of explaining identification, rejecting "the claim that identification occurs at all."**

>> E.g.: Carroll rejects identification as the model for describing emotional responses of viewers; Currie says that identification does not occur in the point-of-view shot; Murray Smith replaces identification with his own, preferred concept of 'engagement' which replaces rather than analyzes identification itself.

>> JP: Be sure to point out to students that there is a trend in contemporary philosophy of mind to regard how ordinary human beings interpret their own cognitive and affective 'interiors' as based on a *suspect* 'folk psychology' that clearly is in evidence among the more cognitivist film theorists in philosophy of film.

BG means to 'rehabilitate' the notion of identification for cognitivist theories of film, 'that the notion does not suffer from the deep conceptual confusions alleged against it, and to demonstrate that it has explanatory power in accounting for spectators' emotional responses to films."[261Lm/b]

The Concept of Identification

BG first point: 'identification' cannot be taken to mean what it seems to mean *literally*. If in reading John Gunther's son Johnny I identify with the son, it is not that I take myself to be *him!* A better word would be *relate to him*. I *see aspects of myself in him* (particularly his nerdy wit, his intelligence, and his bravery [which I hoped I could have one day]).

Possible Views of Identification
> Identification as **Caring-for-the-Character**
>> Problem: If I don't identify with a character because I don't care for them, in that case asserting that I *don't care for them* as the reason that I don't *identify with them* seems circular. But what we want in an account of identification is not to replace it with some other feature of how we respond to the character, but rather, to what *explains* identification.

I. Identification as a result of **Placing Yourself In Their Shoes**

Problem: taken literally, this would require that viewers who identify with a character are *irrational* and lose a proper sense of *where they really are* (in a theater, not swinging through the trees in the rainforest on a vine with Jane!)

II. Identification as a result of **Suspension of Disbelief**

Problem: this view seems to require that viewers of a horror film would storm out of a theater when the character they identify with is about to be killed.

JP: I think this is *the correct* view for viewers who has **a child's imagination** and thus *really do suspend disbelief* [because they are not that well-attuned to the attitude of **belief** that amounts to the 'this-is-real' attitude].

III. Identification as a result of **Imagining Oneself in the Character's Position**

Problem (dubious in my view): you cannot <u>succeed</u> in imagining you are literally someone *you are not* (this is a stupid view given that it treats imagination as if it is <u>an act of creation</u>, which is remarkably bone-headed in the extreme)

BG's response is correct: even if I accept that I cannot *by way of imagination become someone else* [because that is **metaphysically impossible**], that doesn't mean that I cannot *imagine* something that is *impossible* [imagination is **not so fine-grained!**].

Problem 2 (from Wollheim): imagining myself to be a character is a two-way relation. Insofar as I *do* imagine myself to be Jeeves the butler, that requires that I also imagine that Jeeves is taking over my life while acting 'Butler-ish' in a way that would be disconcerting.

BG fixes this problem by simply pointing out that what I am imagining is **not that I am Jeeves** but, rather, that **I am me in Jeeves situation, feeling what he does, etc.**

Wollheim objects to this resolution because he thinks it means that I have to in principle be able to imagine *meeting myself AS JEEVES* in the **Jeevian situation**.

BG puts paid to this silly objection, since it turns on supposing that to imagine myself in Jeeves' position requires that I *include* the possibility of *meeting myself* **as Jeeves!** BG points out that to <u>imagine being in another's situation</u> includes everything that goes with that, including things that are *impossible for the character Jeeves* (e.g., to **meet himself**).

Option III still has problems, though. They stem from differences between imagining ourselves in the position of a person we know in the real world (or have heard about, etc.) and imagining ourselves to be *a character in a film* **whose existence is a function of the 'features of film text' that generate the as-if-real illusion**. If we identify with film characters as we do people in the actual world, then some facts about how people respond to film fictional characters is not as it should be.

Example 1: While 'point-of-view' shots are often treated as paradigmatic invitations from the film text to *identify with the character whose point of view is represented thereby.* Yet we don't actually identify with such characters in that setting (e.g., we don't think we are about to be killed in a horror film when our character is moving around a corner in a dark basement and we are seeing things from their point of view.). This shows that insofar as I *do* identify with the character, I *really **don't put myself even imaginatively in their shoes***).

BG puts paid to this, and like-minded objections, with a swift kick of good sense: "These points about point-of-view shots are well taken, but they do not force us to abandon the claim that identification can occur in such cases. Once we construe identification as a matter of imagining oneself in a character's situation, the issue becomes pertinent of *which aspects* of the character's situation one imagines oneself in."

BG considers where this 'aspectual identification' can really carry the weight of *identification of viewer with character* in all cases. Moreso, some think this means giving up the identificatory function of identification when we remove the idea that this is 'identification in all aspects'.

  BG counters: this is a faulty objection since *if* identification **were global, IT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN!!!** [263Rt/m]

Finally: '[w]hat we are to imagine is shaped by the knowledge that we are looking at an artifact designed to prescribe certain imaginings, and our imaginings are shaped by the demands of the context."

  Upshot: a *possible* **fictional world** is very different from a *possible* **actual world** in that the former is not in any plausible degree ***something whose essential features must be filled in*** **(or even: are usually filled-in**).

Other forms of Identification
  Identification **via Empathy**
  Identification **via Sympathy**

263-265Lt/m is detailed by nothing not already in play is more than reinforced there.

Identification and Film Techniques
Reaction shots vs. Point-of-View shots can do a better job evoking/stimulating 'viewer identification'.
  "The point-of-view shot has in fact fairly crude options available for the conveying of feelings."[266Rt]

Empathy and Sympathy are 'mutually-reinforcing'.

Epistemic and affective identification tends to foster empathy.

Identification and Learning

Two kinds of learning arising from viewer identification with a character:
  Kind One: "[T]hrough empathy our emotional reactions mirror those of a character, and .. as she grows emotionally we do, too" [267Rb] Here we **grow with their development**.
  Kind Two: this kind "comes from identifying with a character, but coming to realize that her reactions are in some ways inappropriate to her situation, and discovering that there is a deeper perspective on her situation, different from her own." Here we **grow from her mistakes.**

BG's example of Kind One is *The Crying Game* where the viewer comes to reconsider their (possible) view of homosexuality and its relationship to the possibilities of loving another person different from you, ones that most audience members at the time of the film's release were decidedly *unfriendly/orthogonal* to a gay-friendly point of view.

BG's example of Kind Two is *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.