

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION
Modernism, Feminism, Postmodernism

by

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, May 1993.



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ABSTRACT

This study is an investigation into the shifts in ways of knowing which have been subsumed under the label of postmodernism. More specifically, it is concerned to relate theories of postmodernism to the construction of film as an object of knowledge, and to feminism's place in a Modernist/postmodernist divide.

Chapter One offers an examination of competing readings of the nature of aesthetic Modernism drawing primarily upon debates on Modernist epistemological legitimation advanced by Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard.

Chapter Two utilizes Lyotard's notion of Modernism as knowledge legitimated by the grands récits of speculation and emancipation to propose a understanding of the conceptual parameters of avant-garde film Modernism.

Chapter Three examines Lyotard's view that postmodernism is a condition of cultural 'incredulity towards metanarratives' by introducing feminist interventions into avant-garde Modernism: it is argued that feminist deconstructionist film plays a crucial role in delegitimizing film practices brought under the metanarrative of speculation by challenging the non-gendered mode of spectatorial knowledge claimed for them.

Chapter Four extends postmodernist critiques of 'totalizing' discourses to the grand récit of liberty, and advances the view that feminist deconstructionism, and related psychoanalytical theories of female subjectivity/spectatorship, are in turn delegitimated for instrumentalizing and homogenizing the feminist 'social bond'.

Chapter Five considers Lyotard's propositions for a fragmentation of Modernist models of the 'social bond' in relation to his proposal for a theory of resistance defined in terms of 'dissensual paralogy'. Within the context of cultural and technological shifts in contemporary image-culture, the usefulness of a theory of postmodernism which remains embedded within Modernist epistemological differentiations is questioned. A proposal for a theory of film postmodernism which dispenses with the avant-garde/mass culture binary is suggested as a prerequisite for clearing a theoretical space for a politics of resistance which is not founded on instrumentalized and homogeneous spectators.

Chapter Six extends this to consider how postmodernist notions of the dissolution of the 'self' and the fragmentation of 'social bond' relate to feminist emancipatory claims. A parallel to the theoretical 'loss' of Modernist foundationalisms is offered by drawing on black and lesbian perspectives on film spectatorship to argue for theories of film meaning which reflect a multiplicity of modes of spectatorial positioning.

The study concludes with an assessment of feminism's place in critiques of totalizing discourses and argues for local, contextual rather than metanarrative validations of film as critical discourse.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special thanks to Dr. Mark Millington for much-appreciated tutorial guidance, for invaluable comments on rough drafts and for unfailing personal encouragement throughout this project. Thanks also to Dr. Douglas Tallack and Dr. David Murray for advice on the early stages of this study, and for patient support during its completion.

A debt of gratitude is owed to Jeff Baggott (Film Officer - East Midlands Arts and film maker) for supporting information on avant-garde Modernist film practices and for arranging private viewings of some of the more inaccessible examples.

I should like to offer sincere thanks to my parents, to many friends and colleagues for their continued support in the writing of this work and, particularly, to Robert and Louis to whom this is dedicated.

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The work that follows aims to provide a new understanding of shifts in 'ways of knowing' provoked by the emergence of the concept of 'postmodernism'. More specifically, it is concerned to investigate what it might mean if debates on postmodernism were applied to film. Questions of whether the late twentieth century is indeed best understood in terms of a 'postmodern condition' have led to major re-examinations of key areas in intellectual enquiry - political and social sciences, global and cultural studies, art practice and aesthetics. During the early period of my research, however, few theoretical studies had approached film and its relationship to philosophical debates on postmodernism. Where film did find its way into discussions on postmodernist culture, as in Fredric Jameson's seminal essay 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' and Linda Hutcheon's A Poetics of Postmodernism, the contexts of these analyses suggested that visual features or filmic strategies exhibited by contemporary films were illustrative of broader theoretical propositions: 'pastiche' and 'parody', 'depthlessness', the 'waning of affect' and 'le mode retro' in Jameson; self-reflexivity, signification through historical quotation and ironic parody in Hutcheon.¹ Both critics were concerned to insist that these features were indicative of wider cultural and historical processes, but the ease with which theorists drew equally upon fiction, film, architecture and

philosophy to construct a notion of 'postmodernist culture' obscured the terms upon which film as a specific cultural 'apparatus' might be construed in view of shifts from modernism to postmodernism. From this, it became evident that for thinking through the relationship between film and the concept of postmodernism, it was important theoretically to separate two components. Firstly, postmodernism as the signifier of epistemological change. The prefix 'post' brings with it a cluster of conceptual difficulties: notions of succession, periodization, historical sequence and causality, serial discontinuity, the relations of 'pre' and 'post'. Further, the issue is raised of whether postmodernism represents a new theoretical 'paradigm' or knowledge-block marked off from modernism before it. Secondly, postmodernism as it designates the effects of this change. Rather than the fact of change itself, the term has come to signify certain styles or sets of production techniques (of interior design, magazine graphics, buildings, films, music, videos, paintings, sculptures). When isolated in this way, two distinct routes towards an analysis of the meaning of postmodernism and film were offered: through the broader conceptual resources which constitute film as modernist or as postmodernist, and through analysis of contemporary stylistic changes in modes of filmic signification exhibited by specific texts. However, my research was framed by a wish to evolve some theoretical means which could account for, and interrelate, both 'levels' of analysis for film. My bias towards theories of critical analysis led me to the belief that a more considered understanding of film's relationship to postmodernism could be reached from the epistemological level, from

which film is constructed as an object of knowledge. Regretfully, this approach has precluded detailed visual analyses of film texts though I would suggest that the issues raised by this study have some bearing on the theoretical 'conditions' under which such work might be conducted. My interest in the ways in which film has been subject to historically shifting modes of construction should signal that this thesis has been guided by the view that there is no 'natural' object of study called film but, rather, that debates on modernism and postmodernism indicate the irretrievably historical nature of conceptual resources for constituting epistemological 'objects'.

Michel Foucault has contributed much to 'excavating' the discursive nature of intellectual/academic subjects of study²: for instance, the conceptual unities secured by such terms as book, genre, oeuvre, author; the forms of continuity offered by notions of influence, tradition or causal succession; the divisions of discourse (knowledge/truth) that mark off fields and boundaries along traditional institutional departmental lines - all are formalized at the level of the discipline. Foucault's archaeological method sets out to disturb discursive coherence and to displace these structuring concepts in order to expose and trouble the 'obviousness' of their effects. Instead of the immediate and 'natural' objects given for study, Foucault offers the means to understand the formation of an 'object' of study as already implicated in a vast and intricate work of historical construction. And it is from a similar position that I have investigated the divergent 'constructions' of film as object of knowledge in both modernist and postmodernist discourses. Film,

and the modes of its analysis, then, forms a site, or a space:

... the object does not wait in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations.³

Foucault's 'discursive formation', it should be clear, does not reduce the formation of objects to an idealist or solipsistic situation in which objects are wholly created through thought. Rather, the politics of the archive demand that the thoroughly historical conditions of that system of formation be recognized. The epistemic space opened up in/by discourses on postmodernism demands full recognition that 'objects' as such - films, sculptures, buildings, advertisements, critical writings, clothes, furniture - do not nor cannot themselves provide rules for their study, the modes of approach for analysis, nor dictate definitions of their 'proper' or 'essential' nature. As a consequence, film study is a loose approximation of a certain activity which is articulated through a set of conceptual operations rather than from the confrontation of critic and preexistent set of objects. I am aware that these observations raise myriad theoretical problems which I intend to address over the course of this work. At present, I simply wish to signal an awareness that the 'complex group of relations' that permit film to become an object of study are subject to change.

My thesis is shaped by the view that debates on which epistemological resources are available for the construction of film as an object of modernist or of postmodernist knowledge are profoundly historical ones. Foucault suggests that the 'unity of a

discourse is based not so much on the permanence or uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed'.⁴ His archaeological method can be used to argue that debates on 'postmodernism' represent a recasting of the meaning of the 'specificity' of the 'space' that can be occupied by film. It is thus clearly untenable to hold that a theory of film postmodernism can be constructed without reference to a network of other epistemological 'realignments', and theories of socio-economics, history, politics, textuality, and subjectivity have contributed significantly to this process. A brief outline of key components of this complex or network of ideas that have been characterized as 'postmodernist' may be useful for positioning this study in a wider context:

a) **Economics**

Debates over the emergence or existence of a 'post-Industrial' socio-economic condition of society; the shift away from production to consumption-led economies; critiques of Marxist class-based models of social structure; Baudrillard's society of the simulacrum;

b) **Politics**

Challenges to conceptions of mass political groups; e.g. Foucault's reformulation of previous monolithic ideas about power, society and the politics of the individual; emergence of historically new political imperatives which contest old models of historical development and political action;

c) **Aesthetics**

Contestation of older aesthetic forms of modernism and its claims for autonomy; the move to thinking of artistic practices as wholly embedded within economic and ideological systems and shrinking of the domain of art as privileged aesthetic critique of social reality;

d) **Post-structuralist Theory**

Derridean deconstructions of 'presence' and 'logocentrism'; post-Saussurean theories of language and semiotics; decentring of the Subject/production of subjectivity through mechanisms of textuality; critiques of formalist models of textual explication.

Again, this is not to suggest that the shift from modernism to postmodernism marks off one coherent historical and/or intellectual movement across a range of practices. To pose the question of what postmodernism 'is' has itself been subject to critique: demanding a positive definition which can accommodate all aspects of academic enquiry points to a desire to force a multiplicity of features into a conceptual 'unity', often to facilitate a neat historical succession of coherent periods (as in Jameson's Marxist notion of postmodernism as 'cultural dominant'). My view is that this kind of thinking is too dependent on Enlightenment or historicist epistemological sets that postmodernism works to unsettle. Instead, my analysis has been guided by the view that it is inappropriate to attempt a definition of postmodernism in general - I hope my understanding of it emerges from the theoretical material I am using. Thus, to avoid the potential pitfall of 'totalizing' contemporary discourses into a unitary postmodernist culture, my approach to this study was guided by some fundamental questions that relate specifically to film. Under what circumstances could film be construed as modernist? Was postmodernism a variant of modernism and thus a concern only for the minority 'avant-garde' as a form of a 'postmodernist aesthetic'? How did the 'postmodernist' features of contemporary mainstream Hollywood texts identified by Jameson and Hutcheon relate to a strong definition of film modernism? Or, did postmodernism denote the view that the cultural dominance of realist narrative cinema had marginalized modernist film practices so thoroughly that the claims of something called post-modernism need hardly be entertained? Further, did the absence of substantial debates over the meaning of postmodernism

for film suggest that film studies had already accounted for the effects attributed to a shift into cultural postmodernism? It seemed appropriate to frame an enquiry by asking these questions since it brought into focus that what was missing from early notions of film postmodernism was a clear set of conceptual parameters for defining film modernism. As Peter Dews rightly states:

One cannot... provide a coherent account of postmodernity without a determinate concept of modernity; and such a concept cannot be developed a priori, but is necessarily dependent on the theorization of long-term historical processes...⁵

This has indeed been a primary intention of the work that follows though it is important to recognize that the 'coherence' of a theory of film modernism is necessarily one of theoretical reconstruction. By way of an analogous example of such a process: despite the constructional and visual diversity between the eclectic 'historicist' buildings of James Stirling, Michael Graves and Richard Bofill, the term 'postmodernist' has been used to argue that these architects are united by being 'post' the modernist 'International Style' of le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Berthold Lubetkin.⁶ That the International Style's aesthetic of functionalist purity of space, mass and form was but one manifestation of the Modern movement (compare with the 'organic' forms of Frank Lloyd Wright or the 'expressionist' architecture of Erich Mendelsohn) suggests that quite disparate understandings of postmodernism can be construed according to how modernism is defined. In short, a definition of the term 'postmodernism' is rendered more complex by the fact that what it is held to succeed (or subsume) cannot itself be forced into a single conceptual

unity. Or, to look at this another way, concepts of postmodernism can be purchased though perhaps inevitably at the expense of forcing modernism into a conceptual 'unity' which may belie historical and cultural diversity. This work has attempted to circumvent criticism of this mode of procedure by demonstrating that modernist film is not reducible to a historical past, to a single mode or visual language. Nonetheless, if it is accepted that postmodernism is meaningful only in its relationship to modernism, I would hope that a certain reductiveness can be permitted as a necessary consequence of the nature of this endeavour. In other words, I do not claim that the trajectory outlined in this study has explanatory validity beyond the level of its locality and particularity.

I am aware that the terms of this Introduction have tended to suggest that film modernism and postmodernism can be neatly polarized. Rather, it is important to state that my understanding of postmodernism is both a negative and a positive one. By this I mean that postmodernist conceptual 'breaks' are necessarily indebted to former modernist modes of thinking: this is not to claim that postmodernism is 'really' only part of or an extension of modernism, without positive content of its own. I think it is useful to conceive of postmodernism as a double movement which grasps its reliance on modernism but only to make clear the terms and sustaining concepts that it 'inherits' and then works on/through. This becomes particularly acute when considering where feminism is positioned by debates on the meaning of a modernist/postmodernist divide. One of my guiding concerns has been to determine whether, and on what conditions, feminism is

implicated in the theoretical divide opening up in debates on modernism and postmodernism. The title of this work, The Politics of Representation, has been selected for the semantic value of the term 'representation' in two closely related senses:

- a) as the designation of a huge corpus of critical debates around the relation between reality and the forms of its reproduction; the nature and forms of meaning-bearing behaviour;
- b) the political processes of representation - the cultural/social construction of relations of dominance and exclusion; the boundaries of identity as systematized versions of hierarchy/authority.

'Representation' in the first sense is perhaps the sole common ground for a continually shifting domain of critical theory. A familiar inventory forms a certain theoretical conjuncture: semiotics, linguistics, literary theory, psychoanalysis, political and social theory, Marxism, deconstruction, discourse analysis, and media studies. Each of these has contributed to debates over the nature, forms and effects of systems of representation at the levels of theory and of particular practices. My use of the term, though, is underwritten by a concern for the importance of the second sense of the term. This should indicate that my reading of film and postmodernism is fundamentally informed by a concern for politics: the course of this work intends to demonstrate that it is feminism which offers the best understanding of these developments since it is feminism which has the largest investment in the political effects of the transformations offered as postmodernist. Feminism can be seen to imbricate levels of

analysis from the larger sphere of socio-economics, to the epistemological space of cultural/aesthetic practices such as film and then to the specificities of filmic/textual operations. I do not, however, wholly agree with Patricia Waugh's diagnosis that postmodernism is only the acceptable 'male' appropriation of feminist analyses of cultural and social productions if only because postmodernism has also come to include neoconservative and anti-feminist positions too.⁷ Nonetheless, I must admit to a deep sympathy with her work and hope to show how feminist critiques do make visible the very contradictions involved in rethinking a postmodernist politics of representation. Accordingly, a substantial portion of this work has been concerned with determining the conditions of feminism's relationship, firstly, to modernist film aesthetics and, secondly, to postmodernist dissolution of the epistemological foundations upon which feminism's emancipatory claims have been constructed. I will argue that feminism's relationship to both modernism and postmodernism is in both cases a highly ambivalent one. In some ways, this is to run counter to the import of some theories of postmodernism (such as Baudrillard's or, as I shall demonstrate, Lyotard's) which appear to deny the ground upon which a politics of film, especially of film spectatorship, might rest though it should be clear from the outset that my interest in postmodernism has been determined by a refusal to give up the task of defining postmodernist 'conditions' for feminist knowledge-claims. However, I do take seriously postmodernist critiques of the epistemological 'conditions' of aesthetic modernism, and have made it a central

feature of this thesis to consider feminism's investment in the 'loss' of the modernist tenet that art is oppositional, the site of resistance per se, that it offers an oasis of 'authentic' feeling in a desert of alienation and reification. As Dick Hebdige has pointed out, the 'radical' nature of modern art, and particularly painting, is now thoroughly implicated in a wholly economic network: the gallery system, the auction and publicity machines for selling canonized commodity 'masterpieces', university and polytechnic arts curricula.⁸ Similarly, the adoption of Modernist shock effects, for example Surrealist juxtaposition, by the language of advertising. This suggested that a pertinent question to ask, also posed by Suzi Gablik, was whether modernism has 'failed' in its historical role as either revolutionary, avant-garde or politically meaningful, and I shall endeavour to answer this in relation to film.⁹ This is not simply a question of the dissemination or 'popularizing' of modern art or film (though it is about this as well), but has important repercussions for cultural practices which recognize the severely contracted place that art, as the critique of a given reality, has to occupy. Postmodernist practices in architecture, sculpture and photography are typified by attempts to think through this shrinkage of the realm of the 'purely' aesthetic; there appears to be an acknowledgement of their existence as practices within a social/historical 'condition' which cannot sustain the notion of an autonomous 'critical' sphere called Art, as propagated by certain philosophies of Modernist film.

The 'radical' nature of modernist art has also been subject to revision for its implication in a whole network of cultural exclusions that define it in:

... its 'Eurocentrism', its 'masculinist' stress on transgression and transformation, its downgrading of everything that doesn't fall within its definition of what's important i.e. women's art, domestic culture and reproduction, black and Third World art, 'bourgeois' and 'socialist' realism, peasant and working-class white 'mass' culture...¹⁰

These critiques reveal that modernism does not provide a unique, timeless and authentic system for opposition but is wholly bound to the conditions that gave rise to it, to the cultural experience of modernity at the turn of the century. That this was expressed in patriarchal and colonial terms marks its distance from current politically informed practices and theories which seek to destabilize the monolith of a homogeneous position of opposition. As Hebdige's article suggests, postmodernism thus defined appears in many guises which, from the orthodoxy of Left politics, seem to threaten the fundamental principles that permit belief in mass radical action. The fracturing of oppositional discourses into a conflict of socially and historically underrepresented and diversely oppressed groups has contested the models underlying the claims of modernist visions of emancipation. From a feminist position, I have a heavy investment in forcing an activity or politics of difference through since it is premised on understanding the discursive, constructed nature of the (power) relations at work in the term 'opposition'. A politics of difference has of necessity to reject the older forms of political activity/intervention since diverse groups offer quite distinct analyses of whose interests are served by the functionings of power, what that functioning consists of and what strategies are best employed against its effects. Foucault repeatedly emphasizes the fact that it is an effect of power deployed in a certain way to

believe that power is simply found 'somewhere' like the State or with institutions. Power is not only coercion exercised by a corporate body (cf. Louis Althusser)¹¹, and for that reason it cannot be seized: power is multiple, fragmented and effective at the micro level through a lateral network of relations rather than an 'imposition' from above (though, admittedly, it may be true that it is often seen and experienced as such). There is a sense in which the very terms of political critique are being questioned by postmodernism's exploration of the power-effects of homogenization. Again, from a feminist perspective, I do not find this disabling - a political sensitivity to difference has to be based on a dethroning of 'taken-for-granted' ideas about power, society and the individual. In this way postmodernism provides a perfect chance for rethinking social meaning and the power effects of theories of representation. For feminists this is not a new activity and I shall be addressing feminist contributions to postmodernism's 'sense of the interrogative' throughout this work.

'A' postmodernist sensibility characterizes diverse fields, strategies and modes of analysis: it is difficult to be specific without reinscribing the boundaries that have been challenged. But for all its potential faults, debates on postmodernism have raised the need for recasting older antinomies set up by avant-garde modernism as oppositional political discourse. Similarly, it poses the possibility that 'our' culture is defined by new modes of knowledge production commensurate with a distinctive form of social organisation variously called 'post-industrial', 'computer' and 'informational' society or the 'society of the spectacle'. For film study, what is at stake is the dissolution of older modernist

criteria used to discuss the relations of representation to reality and to the place of the text, and the role of the reader/spectator in consuming those representations. With the retraction of the sphere of the aesthetic as an autonomous realm of aesthetic experience, postmodernist artists and theorists have had to evolve means of critique not from some global trans-historical perspective but from within the confines of representational practices themselves. Critical debates over the term 'postmodernism' have at least forced open the question of the necessarily historical nature of conceptual apparatuses and it is in this that the debates find their political charge. If it can be shown that the categories through which an object is known (constructed) and then interpreted are subject to change, to historical transformation, the next step should be to challenge that construction on political grounds. In this sense the critique of representation that I have characterized as postmodernist moves beyond the realms of theory to offer points of contact and open new connexions with the sphere of the political in its broadest sense. I would argue that while at first glance postmodernism seems a negative, destructive term (which in some forms appears to make meaningful action a 'humanistic' fantasy) it can be pressed into the service of the political. My understanding of postmodernism is one from which, I would argue, it is possible to hold that film becomes once again political: not as a specialized form of aesthetic experience, but as a 'space' of contestation fully implicated in the political, cultural and historical formation that grounds it.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

1. Fredric Jameson, in New Left Review, 146 (1984), pp. 53-92.
2. On the historical formation of 'objects' of study see especially Foucault's The Order of Things (1970) and for a more systematic description of their discursive constitution see his The Archaeology Of Knowledge (1972).
3. Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972) p. 45.
4. *ibid.* p. 32.
5. Peter Dews, 'From Post-structuralism to Postmodernity' in ed. L. Appignanesi ICA Documents on Postmodernism (1989), pp. 27-40, (p. 37-8).
6. For major statements on Modern Movement and International Style architecture, see Siegfried Giedion, Space, Time and Architecture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); Nikolaus Pevsner, Pioneers of the Modern Movement (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), and Rayner Banham's Theory and Design in the First Machine Age (London: Butterworth, 1960). Compare with Charles Jencks' theoretical work on Postmodernist architecture What is Postmodernism? (London/New York: St Martin's Press, 1986) and The Language of Postmodern Architecture (London: Academy Editions, 1981). See also Paolo Portoghesi's Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society (New York: Rizzoli Publ. Inc, 1983)
7. Patricia Waugh, Feminist Fictions: Re-visiting the Postmodern (1989).
8. Dick Hebdige, 'New Times: After the Masses', Marxism Today 33: 1 (1989), pp. 48-53.
9. Suzi Gablik's Has Modernism Failed? (1984) discusses processes of the moral, aesthetic and economic incorporation of a New York avant garde modern art fringe from the early 1950's to the present situation which she characterizes as 'transmitted and controlled by means of corporate-management techniques, public relations, and professional marketing' (p. 13).
10. Hebdige (1989), p. 49.
11. For Louis Althusser's most influential reformulation of Leninist ideas of State power in terms of a Gramscian split between 'coercion' and 'consent', see his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in Essays on Ideology (1984), pp. 1-57.

CHAPTER ONE

MODERNISM/POSTMODERNISM: TERMS OF DEBATE

Just as modernism was not only an artistic phenomenon but can also be identified in philosophy and epistemology, postmodernism too pertains to specific practices as well as to the theories available to conceptualize them. My first task is to provide a broad understanding of modernism and modernity before defining what is specifically Modernist in film practices (capitalized to denote this specialized and limited use of the word). To do this, I want to work through some of the issues that arise from what has become known as the Lyotard/Habermas debate as both theorists engage with the pressing question of what philosophical resources are available to the late twentieth century for understanding its historical and conceptual place in relation to other 'unities' entailed by the idea of modernity.

Modernism, Modernity: A Framework

The need for defining one's epoch in its singularity against all others is not in itself new. Indeed, a historical perspective on the emergence of the term postmodernism shows that most recent historical periods have been characterized by a certain anxiety about how the Age fits with the long term development of history,

of Progress, and of whether the Age is truly at the forefront of historical development, that is, truly modern.¹ This historical consciousness though not new must, however, be understood as particular to the onset of modernity itself²: the task of placing one's epoch in relation to the unfolding of historical development is one of the most enduring conceptual legacies of that great cultural mutation in European history named the Enlightenment. The task of defining postmodernism is rendered all the more difficult since it requires that one conceptualize the difference and specificity of one's age from those preceding it but without this modernist epistemological and philosophical inheritance. As Foucault suggests, to ask 'what is Enlightenment?' or 'what is modernity?':

... always comprises two objectives which are, in fact, indissociable and interdependent: on the one hand, the search to identify in its chronology, constituent elements and historical conditions the moment when the West first affirmed the autonomy and sovereignty of its own mode of rationality - Lutheran Reform, 'Copernican revolution', Cartesian philosophy, Galilean mathematization of nature, Newtonian physics? And, on the other hand, an analysis of the 'present' moment which seeks to define, in terms both of the history of this Reason and of its current balance sheet, its relation to that founding act: a relation of rediscovery, renewal of a forgotten meaning, completion and fulfilment, or alternatively, one of rupture, return to a prior epoch, and so forth.³

That is, answering this question is a double movement; it involves, firstly, a definition of the nature of modern rationality and, secondly, a scrutiny of one's own epoch in relation to the emergence of that form of Reason. To answer the similar question 'what is postmodernism?', then, is not only to define the specific characteristics of contemporary culture but to return to that 'founding act' of modernity and the emergence of Enlightenment

rationality to define one's difference from it. Here, the debates conducted between Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas are central to any study concerned with these questions. While heeding Warren Montag's observation that postmodernism is in danger of being reduced to the opposition between Lyotard and Habermas,⁴ an exploration of these thinkers does provide an initial arena in which to pose some general relations between art and rationality, modernity and culture, political action and artistic practice. Both theorists are concerned with what happens in the shift from a modernist understanding of the social function of art to a postmodernist one. Their arguments, however, rest on much larger philosophical claims about the organization, regulation and dissemination of knowledge which must be considered if their more programmatic statements are to be fully appreciated.

The Project of Enlightenment

Current arguments over the nature (or existence) of a specifically postmodern 'condition of knowledge' necessarily entail ideas and definitions of that which is thought to precede it. Modernism for both Lyotard and Habermas is a much greater cultural event in Western history than the European art movement with which it is commonly identified. Habermas' theory of modernity can usefully be played off against Lyotard's claim that the term 'postmodern' 'designates the state of culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century,

have altered the game rules for science, literature and the arts'.⁵ Lyotard's report on knowledge, The Postmodern Condition (1984), concentrates on the area of science and the procedures which legitimated or validated scientific knowledge in the period of modernity; it is a statement on the end of this period and describes the new conditions for knowledge in 'computerized' or 'information' societies. In contrast, for Habermas, modernity is an 'incomplete (unvollendetes) project' which was inaugurated by a differentiation of the spheres of religion/metaphysics with the 'birth' of secular humanism before and during the seventeenth century.⁶ By the eighteenth century, Western Enlightenment knowledge becomes organized around three new conceptual fields - science, morality and art - and is characterized by a division of the previous form of religious substantive rationality between the three autonomous disciplines in a process of secular rationalization. Habermas here takes on Weber's distinction between formal rationality and substantive rationality.⁷ The first can be defined in relation to action which is rational to the extent that it is executed according to principles that have been rationally calculated to achieve given ends, for instance, administrative bureaucracies, formal law, scientific or economic production. The second type refers to the possibility of applying these principles to the cultural or normative sphere and to the grounding of definite goals/values; this would seek to apply rational principles to ethics, morality, social aims and conduct. Habermas contends that the Renaissance witnessed the separation of religious knowledge from knowledge of human society and it is this major differentiation that permits the historical emergence of the

new disciplines. With the gradual lessening of the role of the 'substantive' rationality of religion and metaphysics, Habermas suggests that the older forms of enquiry come to be legitimated by new sorts of validity. The emergent disciplines of science, art and morality demand new forms of validation to legitimate them as bodies of knowledge, producing the following commutations:

scientific discourse	:	truth
morality/ethics	:	normative rightness
jurisprudence	:	authenticity
production/criticism of art	:	beauty

As a result of this redistribution:

Each domain of culture could be made to correspond to cultural professions in which problems could be dealt with as the concern of special experts. This professionalized treatment of cultural tradition brings to the fore the intrinsic structures of each of the three dimensions of culture.

('Modernity', p. 9)

This cultural differentiation, at the same time a process of professionalization and institutionalization, brings corresponding new forms of rationality for the new 'dimensions' or disciplines:

science	:	cognitive/instrumental
morality	:	moral/practical
art	:	aesthetic/expressive

Habermas situates the historical project of the Enlightenment within this emergence of specialist modes of rationality; it is sustained by the belief that knowledges of 'objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic' would:

... promote not only the control of natural forces but also understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings.

('Modernity', p. 9)

The disciplines had to develop as objective and autonomous in order for their specificities be understood, controlled and hence used in the pursuit of human happiness. Modernity, then, in Habermas' scheme is characterized by this increasing tendency towards the specialization of knowledge but which, crucially, intensifies at the expense of the overall Enlightenment project. By the twentieth century the broader 'substantive' social goal has all but disappeared leaving only 'segments treated by specialists and their separation from the hermeneutics of everyday communication' ('Modernity', p. 9); knowledge is produced in 'alienated' or rigidly autonomous modes.⁸ In painting, the gulf between artistic production and its reception by the non-expert is celebrated in the aestheticist's slogan of 'art for art's sake', while the break from representational painting brings further estrangement of art from any social or ethical function it might once have had. This raises issues which are fundamental to any modernism/postmodernism analysis of the nature and politics of film as an artistic practice. They will be explored in depth in due course but for the moment suffice it to say that from Habermas' position, one might expect that an end to the production of knowledges in this Modernist form would be welcomed since 'commonsense' has come to equate Modern art with inaccessible and arcane abstract painting as the most visible form of the specialization that he laments. However, far from accepting the end of the Enlightenment plan

implicit in the term postmodernism, Habermas argues that the project of modernity, as the historical movement towards substantive social rationality, has yet to be fulfilled. To counteract the effect of socially alienated knowledge, he proposes that the task ahead lies in 'the appropriation of the experts' culture from the standpoint of the lifeworld' ('Modernity', p. 13). This task, Habermas warns, must avoid the pitfalls of 'false programs of the negation of culture':

A reified everyday praxis can be cured only by creating unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements. Reification cannot be overcome by forcing just one of those highly stylized cultural spheres to open up and become more accessible.

('Modernity', p. 13)

While contesting the form that knowledge production takes under late twentieth-century conditions, Habermas will not abandon the telos of modernity. What he terms 'societal modernization', by which economic and administrative rationality comes to organize more and more areas of human social experience, must be distinguished from this historically sublimated imperative. To counter the further retrenchment of the production of knowledges in autonomy from the demands or needs of the 'life-world' he argues instead for a new form of communicative rationality. It is not enough, with the Surrealists, to simply negate or refuse the mode of rationality embodied in one sphere alone (here, Art as aesthetic or expressive) while leaving the others intact. Rather, the project of modernity holds within it the seeds of a future social organization in which all knowledges are part of 'practical discourse' following a concerted attempt at a 'differentiated

relinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis' ('Modernity' p. 13). Habermas' type of rationality is concerned with 'the task of passing on a cultural tradition, of social integration and socialization', of defining a future type of rational society in which, freed from economic administrative rationality:

... the communication community of those affected, who as participants of a practical discourse, test the validity claims of norms and, to the extent that they accept them with reasons, arrive at the conviction that in the given circumstances the proposed 'norms' are 'right'.⁹

The project of modernity is thus rescued from its present cultural reification by universal rational consensus.

It is at this point that discussion can return to Lyotard's statement that postmodernity is, in part, the result of transformations in the social 'administration' of knowledge. It should be apparent that Habermas and Lyotard agree that the late nineteenth century witnessed a major mutation in the organization and social validation of knowledge in all spheres. For Habermas, this period (modernism) represents an aberration on the path to the fulfilment of modernity since the intensification of its autonomous forms of rationality signal a shift away from the originary Enlightenment raison d'être. Lyotard also concerns himself with fundamental questions of what and who knowledge is 'for', and of its function in the present condition of society. He seeks to understand the transformations at the end of the last century in the context not of intensification of autonomy but of a 'crisis of narratives'.

The Pragmatics of Knowledge

Lyotard's thesis of postmodern knowledge rests on three propositions:

- a) all forms of knowledge require legitimation both in social terms and at the micro level of each discipline;
- b) legitimation can be understood by analogy with the idea of language games as procedures of validation;
- c) the development of 'computerized' or 'information' societies have been accompanied by radical changes in the way scientific knowledge is legitimated.

Lyotard borrows Wittgenstein's theory of language games to explain the mechanisms and procedures by which any piece of knowledge comes to be a piece of knowledge. Every statement made implies a 'game' in the sense that each utterance 'can be defined in terms of the rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put' (PC, p. 10).¹⁰ Thus utterances can be classified according to the way the sender, addressee and the referent of the utterance are implicated in predetermined relations. Lyotard is interested in 'the facts of language and in particular their pragmatic aspect' (PC, p. 9) because they furnish models of legitimation procedures which sanction the production of knowledge and information. Thus denotative, promisory, performative, prescriptive, interrogative and narrative utterances differ in that they are pragmatic executions of the language games that permit them. From this, Lyotard observes three consequences:

- a) their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation but are the object of a contract, explicit or not, between players (which is not to say that the players invent the rules);

- b) if there are no rules, there is no game; even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game;
 - c) every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in the game.
- (PC, p. 10)

To clarify these propositions, I want to consider three types of utterance which bear heavily on Lyotard's 'crisis of narratives' thesis:

Denotative utterance

Example: The path of the planets is circular.

This places the sender in a position of knowledge (since it is he who knows what the situation with the universe is); the addressee has either to give or refuse assent to the statement; the referent is thus given as something that 'demands to be correctly identified and expressed by the statement that refers to it' (PC, p. 9).

Performative utterance

Example: I declare the University open.

This distinguishes itself because the 'effect of the utterance upon the referent coincides with its enunciation' (PC, p. 9). The sender is thus in a position of authority (since she has the authority to make the statement); the statement is not open to discussion or verification by the addressee 'who is immediately placed within the new context by the utterance'.¹¹

Narrative utterance

Example: Here is the story of...as it was told to me.

The pragmatics of this utterance 'cannot of course be universalized' (PC, p. 21). A general property of this form is that the sender's only claim to competence is that he heard it himself; the addressee 'gains access to the same authority simply by listening' (PC, p. 20); the referent in this case is occupied by the protagonist of the story.

This creates a situation in which:

... the right to occupy the post of sender... is based upon the fact of having occupied the post of addressee, and of having been recounted oneself... by a previous narrative - in other words, having been positioned as the diegetic reference of other narrative events.

(PC, p. 21)

While outwardly the most straightforward form, the narrative utterance is in fact a complex speech act which is:

...in no way limited to the functions of enunciation; it determines in a single stroke what one must say in order to be heard, what one must listen to in order to speak, and what role one must play (on the scene of diegetic reality) to be the object of the narrative.

(PC, p. 21)

Chapter 7 of The Postmodern Condition is given over to explaining the 'pragmatics' of scientific knowledge in terms of the expansion of the first example, the denotative utterance: 'Scientific knowledge requires that one language game, denotation, be retained and all others excluded. A statement's truth-value is the criterion determining its acceptability' (PC, p. 25). At the same time, any scientific statement or 'move' must be validated/legitimated through:

... a process by which a 'legislator' dealing with scientific discourse is authorized to prescribe the stated conditions (in general, conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification) determining whether a statement is to be included in that discourse for consideration by the scientific community.

(PC, p. 8)

Lyotard's point here is to show that scientific knowledge has never been, nor ever could be, self-validating, and that the 'legitimacy of science has been indissociably linked to that of the legitimation of the legislator' (PC, p. 8). The 'right to decide what is true is not independent of the right to decide what is just' for, contra Habermas, there is a 'strict interlinkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics and

politics' (PC, p. 8).

It is precisely because of its embeddedness in sociopolitics - institutions, pedagogy, professional practice, governmental policy - that the 'crisis of legitimation' which Lyotard observes affecting science since the 1960's can be linked to the emergence of 'computer' societies or a 'postindustrial' (though, notably, not necessarily a postcapitalist) age. The central feature of this crisis is the recognition of a dissonance between the old (modernist) ways of legitimating the production of knowledge, and the new (postmodernist) 'technologized' society which makes quite different demands:

... for the last forty years the 'leading' sciences and technologies have had to do with language: phonology and theories of linguistics, problems of communication and cybernetics, modern theories of algebra and informatics, computers and their languages, problems of translation and the search for compatibility among computer languages, problems of information storage and data banks, telematics and the perfection of intelligent terminals, paradoxology.

(PC, p. 3-4)

The effect of these technological transformations has been radically to alter the way knowledge is produced and transmitted in society. Lyotard makes two important points: a) the miniturization and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available and exploited; b) the nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged; it can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information (PC, p. 4). The new situation, Lyotard argues, results in a 'mercantilization' of knowledge which destroys the old relations of its production:

The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume - that is, the form of value. Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its 'use-value'.

(PC, pp. 4-5)

This is the basis of Lyotard's 'performativity' principle of legitimation, but, before considering this more fully, his controversial thesis on the crisis of the grands récits need to be examined.

Lyotard begins by removing the qualitative distinction between narrative and scientific understanding; since 'knowledge [savoir] cannot be reduced to science, nor even to learning [connaissance]', it necessarily subsumes science which then becomes its subset:

Knowledge, then, is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of the criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), of justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), of the beauty of a sound or colour (auditory and visual sensibility).

(PC, p. 18)

Lyotard is here remarkably close to Habermas' three forms of rationality. The modern predilection for regarding physics-type hard sciences (based on verification/falsification procedures) as 'real' knowledge leads to the downgrading of those forms of knowledge provided by narratives (myths, stories, maxims). Sustaining the production of scientific knowledge in the modern period is the ideological assumption that its validity does not depend on this inferior narrative mode of understanding. The scientist 'questions the validity of narrative statements and

concludes they are never subject to argumentation or proof':

He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children.

(PC, p. 27)

Lyotard proceeds to demonstrate the specific ways in which scientific knowledge necessarily has recourse to narrative knowledge 'at least to the extent that the language game of science desires statements to be true but does not have the resources to legitimate their truth on its own' (PC, p. 28). The Platonic dialogue which inaugurates science:

... is not scientific, precisely to the extent that it attempts to legitimate science. Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in the position of presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns: begging the question, proceeding on prejudice.

(PC, p. 29)

To be brief, Lyotard contends that modern science can be classed according to which of two modes of narrative legitimation is utilized.

The first is the narrative of liberty, or social emancipation. This legitimates the project of scientific knowledge by its appeal to the nascent bourgeois democracies of the nineteenth century. 'Humanity' or 'the People' take on the role of protagonist in the narrative forms, for whom the State, like science and education, is legitimated by the consensual aim of freedom for the nation as a whole through the spread of knowledge to the population. The concept of historical Progress is thus intimately tied to the

legitimation of the new authorities; political power, knowledge and legitimation are tightly bound in the sustaining narrative of the Enlightenment project.

The second is the narrative of speculative spirit. This does not resort to the 'state-political' language game of legitimation but invokes philosophical speculation. Lyotard suggests that the founding of the University of Berlin (1807-10) embodies the narrative; the University contests the view that the project of learning should be left in the hands of the State/People and rejects the first narrative's claim to the organization and control of knowledge. It offers itself as the legitimating institution of a 'language game that links sciences together as moments in the becoming of Spirit' (PC, p.34). For Lyotard, Hegel's Encyclopedia exemplifies this narrative in its attempt 'to realize the project of totalization' (PC, p. 34). The effect of this is to produce a 'metanarrative': 'German idealism has recourse to a metaprinciple that simultaneously grounds the development of learning, of society, and of the State in the realization of the "life" of a Subject' (PC, p. 34). The most important outcome of this has been the legitimation of knowledge not from the point of view of the 'immediate truth-value' but from the fact that it occupies a 'certain place in the itinerary of Spirit or Life' (PC, p. 35). 'True knowledge, in this perspective, is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy' (PC, p. 35).

For Lyotard the modern period begins in the nineteenth century and falls into crisis through a process of 'delegitimation'

inherent in these narratives themselves. This is an important point, because Lyotard's now (in)famous characterization of postmodernism as an 'incredulity' towards legitimation by narratives must not be reduced to a simple social disenchantment with their explanatory power. For the narrative of speculative enquiry:

The 'crisis' of scientific knowledge, signs of which have been accumulating since the end of the nineteenth century, is not born of a chance proliferation of sciences, itself an effect of progress in technology and the expansion of capitalism. It represents, rather, an internal erosion at work inside the speculative game, and by loosening of the weave of the encyclopedic net in which each science was to find its place, it eventually sets them free.

(PC, p. 39)

Disciplinary boundaries are thus dissolved, the borders between sciences cannot be maintained, the older hierarchy of learning 'gives way to an immanent "flat" network of areas of inquiry, the respective frontiers of which are in constant flux' (PC, p. 39); the speculative legitimation of the University is lost, reducing it to the 'replication of teachers rather than the production of researchers' (PC, p. 39). For the narrative of liberation, the process is more complex. If delegitimation is fuelled by the demand for legitimation itself, then posing self-reflexive questions of the scientific basis of knowledge would be enough to 'erode' the pragmatics of narrative utterance. It will be recalled that narrative knowledge specifies its 'truth' (and 'social bond') by interrelating ethical, social and political claims ('a threefold competence - "know-how", "knowing how to speak", and "knowing how to hear" - through which the community's relationship to itself and its environment is played out' (PC, p. 21). 'Incredulity' and

'delegitimation', then, derive from this inability of narrative knowledge (of prescriptive/practical statements) to 'supervise' the game of science (of denotative/cognitive statements). In sum, the recognition that the 'two statements belong to two autonomous sets of rules' effectively ends the claims of the political/ethical upon the scientific/technological knowledge-practice which can now be said to have escaped from the rules of the 'game' of prescription.

In the absence of the grands récits, Lyotard suggests that the contemporary social administration of knowledge can be understood in terms of an expansion of the second type of utterance outlined above, the performative. 'Performativity' belongs with the new 'game' of technology in that it is legitimated by a different set of utterance relations than those specified by the metanarratives: it pertains not to the distinction between true/false (denotation), nor to just/unjust (prescription) but to the criteria of efficient/inefficient. Technical competence is defined by the principle of 'optimal performance: maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process)' (PC, p. 44). Lyotard traces a historically novel interdependence of wealth, efficiency and truth manifested in a technology which implicates all three in the production of a unique mode of knowledge legitimation. He stresses that not all knowledge is 'totally subordinated' to the technological investment which legitimates through the 'discourse of power' (PC, p. 45). Where it is, though, it is the category of efficiency which now serves the performance of the system.

It would not be difficult to find supporting evidence for the features that Lyotard argues are the symptoms of the reduction

of knowledge, and education, to the demands of a 'technologized' view of society. The predominance of the performativity criterion has insinuated itself into almost every aspect of contemporary social life. Even those areas that were once regarded as 'non-productive' e.g. hospitals, schools, and social welfare agencies have had to become 'functional' for the system. The rhetoric of 'efficiency' which serves, for example, to determine governmental funding and research policies for the new 'corporations' of Higher Education lends Lyotard's account some authority. From this it might be argued that in Britain, for example, the Thatcherite 'social transformation' has consisted largely in moving economic efficiency from its restricted sense as a concept of industrial production/consumption to being a general explanatory social paradigm. Lyotard's schema raises the possibility that this shift might perhaps be only the most visible manifestation or social consequence of the breakdown of narrative claims to supervise scientific knowledge production. In turn, this raises the crucial issue of whether the crisis of the Enlightenment narratives of speculative spirit and of liberty should be understood as temporally (or logically) prior to the specific socio-economic/political features he identifies; does The Postmodern Condition simply describe current conditions of the organization and administration of global capitalism or does it explain them as the outcome of previous shifts caused by the process of delegitimation? It is important to be clear on this since quite differing political interpretations of Lyotard's thesis can be drawn, depending on whether or not one sees these features of performativity as the direct effect of delegitimation. This has an

important bearing on objections raised about the nature and status of social change in theories located within a postmodernist framework. It might be argued, for instance, that as ethical (humanistic) claims no longer legitimate science (as human Progress), the loosening of these bonds has led to the obverse: scientific and technological criteria have come now to supervise the ethical/prescriptive realm. This would fit with a Habermasian analysis of a specifically post-1960's socio-economic/political situation as evidence of an increase and intensification of the way in which capitalism makes knowledge functional for itself. What Lyotard observes would then be in fact global capitalist relations rendered so transparent that knowledge can be produced without even the veneer of social or humanitarian usefulness for its justification; his 'postmodern condition' would then actually be no more than the latest in a historical succession of states which have increasingly revealed the interdependence of relations of capital ownership, profit, technology and knowledge production. However, Lyotard's proposition that postmodernism is the condition consequent on the process of delegitimation inherent in the modernist narratives must be clearly distinguished from this position and, indeed, from any position that comfortably reconciles him with traditional Marxist interpretation of this kind since Marxism depends on the very narratives that Lyotard believes are bankrupt.

The real point of divergence between Marxist and post-narrative analysis comes over the status of the 'social bond' which sustains the narrative of liberty. In Lyotard's schema, the teleological narrative of historical Progress for the People

necessarily entails a concept of a social body (nation/state/humanity/class) in whose name liberation is sought. If the narrative of liberty no longer supervises knowledge production, its 'social bond' which interrelates ethical, social and political claims is also subject to new game rules as a consequence. A shift into a postmodern condition, then, would involve a reconceptualization of the social bond. Thatcherism, as one particular socio-political instance driven by 'efficiency', would in this sense have to be seen as the result of this much broader late twentieth-century shift in how the social bond is now legitimated. For instance, Thatcher's own words - 'There is no such thing as Society: only individuals and their families' marks a public denouncement of the narrative of liberty as the general goal of social emancipation since the 'social bond' on which it depends is denied. Instead, executive political power, social ethics, and legitimation are all being bound to the principle of performativity for which neither the social group, nation, state and thus the narrative of liberty are functional. I would agree with this analysis for as long as the 'crisis of narratives' is held to be logically prior to the emergence of performativity (which should not be reduced to efficiency of production but include all the transformations in knowledge/information). There is in this, though, a danger of misreading Lyotard's theory as a very sophisticated apology for New Right/Libertarian social philosophies because a phenomenon such as Thatcherism is thus 'justified' as the inevitable outcome of these prior processes of delegitimation. Again, Dick Hebdige is to the point: 'It is easy to see why postmodernism has been characterised as an intellectual gloss for

Thatcherism - an invitation to people who should know better to give up, lie back and enjoy'.¹² Despite the fact that most strains of Marxist thinking also want to understand social transformation in terms of historical inevitability, there is a sense that any definition of postmodernism must confront the idea that modernist models for orchestrating social and political change are no longer viable for comprehending and challenging the relations between self and society that the performative model would suggest.

Returning to his thesis that the social bond is linguistic (consisting of all language statements - prescriptive, denotative, cognitive, etc.), Lyotard argues that the fracturing and proliferation of them into autonomous language games with none supervising the others requires us to rethink all the conceptual models inherited from the grands récits. If the metanarratives no longer supervise nor can be held to legitimate how knowledge is actually produced in Western capitalist economies, it is foolish to persist in the belief that the grands récits of the nineteenth century are adequate to address or analyse the nature of what must be recognized as a postmodern condition, qualitatively different from a modern one. Lyotard continues that 'the principle of unitotality - or synthesis under the authority of a metadiscourse of knowledge - is inapplicable' (PC, p. 40); the concept of homogenous 'Society/People' or the totality implied by the historical telos of 'Spirit' specified by the pragmatics of the two metanarratives cannot be retained after the crisis of legitimation. They too must be rethought as the major frameworks of social explanation. Lyotard's importance lies with the fact that he has attempted to think through the implications of delegitimation not

only in the realm of epistemology but also for social, ethical and political praxis. From an orthodox Left position within the teleological narrative of liberation of the People, Lyotard threatens to dissolve the very concepts used by Western philosophy to formulate programs of political and social change, making him anathema to most varieties of Marxist thinking - no cultural unity called the People, no teleology guaranteeing the historical project towards Enlightenment, no means of articulating resistance to the effects of these technologies. However, his work can also be read as a positive engagement which attempts to establish a pragmatic model for 'mapping' this splintering of knowledges (language games) which occurs after the breakdown of the models of social consensus entailed by the older metanarratives. His task is to take account of the material conditions of contemporary experience but without the epistemological certainties entailed by the grands récits. For such a model he turns once again to Wittgenstein, who proposed that:

Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.¹³

Wittgenstein, Lyotard notes, subjects the 'town' of language to the 'old sorites paradox' by asking - 'how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town ?' (PC, p. 40). Lyotard adds: 'new languages are added to the old ones, forming suburbs of the old town'. Hence the contemporary proliferation of language technologies - 'machine languages, the matrices of game theory, new systems of musical notation, systems of notation for nondenotative forms of logic... the language of the genetic code,

graphs of phonological structures' (PC, p. 40-41) - attest to a world fractured into the multiplicity of expert languages which can never to be 'totalized' as knowledge for Humanity or historical Spirit.

Lyotard's is one of the most important philosophical attempts to formulate postmodernism as a post-narrative social condition of multiplicity and fragmentation. It offers the possibility of two divergent interpretations which are decisive for determining whether this logically entails a 'rupture' or break in modernist/postmodernist terms. Lyotard anticipates his critics:

We may form a pessimistic impression of this splintering: nobody speaks all of those languages, they have no universal metalanguage, the project of the system-subject is a failure, the goal of emancipation has nothing to do with science, we are all stuck in the positivism of this or that discipline of learning, the learned scholars have turned into scientists, the diminished tasks of research have become compartmentalized and no one can master them all.

(PC, p.41)

So how can one articulate political resistance if both the social and epistemological bond have splintered beyond recuperation by the grands recits? The point to be stressed here is that those unable to relinquish the nineteenth-century modernist narrative models must find the concept of multiplicity impossible to reconcile with a politics based on an understanding of history as driven by struggle between monolithic blocks or groups (e.g. Proletariat/Bourgeoisie). On the other hand, those that accept the 'crisis of narratives' accept that the task ahead lies with formulating new models of power and new modes of political analysis more consonant with this postnarrative and hence postmodern condition: 'Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative. It in no

way follows that they are reduced to barbarity' (PC, p. 41). On the contrary, Lyotard formulates the possibility of linguistic/political action 'against' the condition of pure performativity in terms of 'paralogy' - unexpected moves in the linguistic game - which offers moments of resistance but within a radically decentred, non-monolithic and heteromorphous social model. Lyotard's formulation is not without its problems though I shall not pursue this line of thinking about 'totality' until Chapter Four which will examine the consequences of delegitimation of the social bond more specifically.

At present, I would like to situate some points arising from the preceding analysis relating to the status of postmodernism as the signifier of a major conceptual break from modernist epistemologies.

Postmodernism and De-differentiation

To clarify the terms of debate, it is worth returning to Habermas to draw out the distinctions his analysis sets up. Firstly, the project of modernity begins with the differentiation of religious/metaphysical knowledge and the emergence of new types of rationality which by the end of the nineteenth century have split into autonomous spheres of 'objective science', 'universal morality' and 'autonomous art'. Modernism can thus be understood as a later stage of this previous differentiation. Scott Lash has taken up Habermas' use of the concept of differentiation to define

modernism specifically as the rejection of realist epistemologies or 'foundationalisms'.¹⁴ In theoretical knowledge and morality, no less than in aesthetics, modernism manifests itself as a series of further specializations which are specific to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought. Lash looks to the major fin de siècle thinkers for evidence; Emile Durkheim's 'sociologistic epistemology', which separates the theoretical knowledge from the empirical 'real' world, and Max Weber's differentiation of the ethical from the theoretical spheres, Lash understands as wholly modernist responses to the previously dominant absolutes. It follows that postmodernism could be understood as a similar process of differentiation which results in a conceptual shift from these previous modernist categories. The concept of differentiation in the cultural sphere is, I think, an invaluable aid in assessing whether: a) there has been a major conceptual shift between modernism and postmodernism; b) postmodernism is actually continuous with its earlier forms; or c) there might be a way of understanding postmodernism as constituted, however paradoxically, by both movements. Bearing this in mind, the following discussion of Nietzsche should be read as a test case.

Nihilism, as formulated throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre, attacked the very possibility of having absolute cultural, moral or theological values. By Lash's criteria, this would qualify as a crucial modernist repudiation of the preceding 'foundationalisms' or certainties which were based on this premise. This would then place Nietzsche's anti-realism together with the philosophical scepticism of G.E. Moore who also rejected the possibility of deriving rational principles of morality from the metaphysical/

religious certainties of idealism, or from the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham or J.S. Mill.¹⁵ When modernism is thus defined as a specific historical period with specific epistemological and aesthetic parameters, it ought to be relatively straightforward to contemplate our present condition as 'post' modernist. However, the main issue of debate emerges when modernist thinkers are assessed from the point of view which takes postmodernism to be no more than the logical development or extension of the original modernist 'problematic', that is, when it is held that there has been no major conceptual discontinuity. Scott Lash notes in his article that critics of postmodernism (Callinicos, Jameson and Eagleton) tend to agree that whatever is held up as postmodernist can be traced back to an original event within modernist anti-realist epistemology. In this sense, the case of Nietzsche's theory of 'perspectivism' is instructive in how retrospective reading can work in this way to secure a conceptual continuity or 'tradition'.

Hilary Lawson argues in her recent work¹⁶ that Nietzsche should not be equated with the 'pluralism' of anthropological cultural relativism more recently encapsulated in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.¹⁷ Where cultural difference is construed in terms of norms, values and practices which are relative to each society, for Nietzsche, the status of the observer's knowledge of that society is thus radically compromised by the relativity of their own 'perspective'. Nietzsche wrote in Thus Spake Zarathustra (1909):

The perspective therefore decides the character of the 'appearance'! As if the world would remain over after one had deducted the perspective! By doing that one would deduct the relativity!¹⁸

This refuses the possibility of measuring variant interpretations of the world against a single, unified world of facts. Lawson's rereading suggests that Nietzsche's perspectivism thus extends the relativity of values to the field of 'facts', citing him:

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena - 'there are only facts' - I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in itself': perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.¹⁹

One might here detect the origins of a conventionalist critique of empiricist models of scientific knowledge now associated with Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend.²⁰ Both philosophers of science base their challenges on a refusal to accept that reality can be known independently of the 'conventions', or theoretical paradigms, which actually determine what appears as 'reality' or 'fact'. In this instance, the later theories seem implicit in Nietzsche's historically earlier concepts; Kuhn and Feyerabend are thus the logical fulfilment of his critical potential.

Another case in which the term postmodernist is rendered specious because of this kind of continuity with modernism is that of Ferdinand de Saussure.²¹ One might cite his structural linguistics as another emphatic modernist rejection of realist philosophy in its differentiation of language into a formal system for which the empirical 'real' world is not functional. However, I would reject any argument which claimed that poststructuralist theories of signification should be taken as continuing or developing Saussurean linguistics.

In this respect, E. Wright's Postmodern Brecht (1989) is also a pertinent case. She re-presents a pivotal modernist figure in the wake of poststructuralist theories of subjectivity and

Derridean deconstructions of Brecht's distinctions between illusion and reality. Rereading in terms of Lyotard's theory of desire, Wright claims that Brecht's earlier theatrical practice was proto-postmodernist before it ossified in the more formal structures of epic theatre:

The postmodernist Brecht is different from the modernist Brecht who produced the split subjects of the 'great' plays and who attributed this split to the divisive nature of bourgeois capitalism. In this other Brecht of the early plays the performative mode instead of the denotative mode of the later ones, with the result that accidental meaning subverts any didactic intention... Where in the 'great' plays the Fabel provided sense and meaning despite the disruptions of the epic mode, in the early plays theatricalization of experience undermines reference so that anything can happen in the communication process, both between one character and another, and between stage and audience. To theatricalize is to engage in a fictive experimenting with the interaction of language and experience, to explore the very ground of representation.²²

Wright's intention, of showing that Brecht is ambivalently both modernist and postmodernist, actually ends up by redefining modernism - it is a newly radicalized modernism which incipiently contains postmodernism. This reading backwards produces a modernist precedent (even origin) for the postmodernist critiques to which Wright subjects Brecht and then claims were there all along. The term 'modernism' comes to signify not a specific historical period and its related aesthetic practices but an atemporal description of a set of effects.

To claim that what postmodernism theorizes is 'really' modernist ought to be closely questioned. Firstly, it entails effacing the very real differences in the conditions and use of knowledge between the two periods - early and late twentieth century. Those who would want to undercut claims that

postmodernism addresses a distinct critical/historical configuration deny the real possibility of difference by reducing it to the principle of the Same. The concept of postmodernism as differentiation can make no sense if contemporary thought is in fact said to be governed by the same differentiation that historically and conceptually defined the modernist period.

Secondly, there is a tendency in critics (such as Jameson and Eagleton) to want to find postmodernism already incorporated in modernism. Their attachment to narrative models of historical/social explanation as outlined above should make it clear why the term postmodernism is troubling since the project of modernity depends upon them. From this, it might be said that one of the negative though important effects of debates about postmodernism will be felt in the redefinition of what Modernism itself consists - a revaluation which contributes to the maintenance of epistemological continuity for the project of Enlightenment.

Thirdly, the denial of postmodernism's claims to difference signally (and perhaps wilfully) fails to acknowledge the positivity of the emergence of historically new 'objects of study' which modernism did not nor cannot be made to comprehend: the emergence of global popular culture, the politics of difference, of sexuality and desire, non-monolithic conceptions of power and history, the transformations of information technologies, the shift from production to consumption as the major dominant of cultural experience in Western societies.

Taking all three objections together - the retrospective redefinition of modernism, the construction of continuity, and the

absence of issues of sexuality/difference - it should be clear why either/or thinking of this kind is destined to failure. Critical rereadings constantly negotiate the 'meaning' of their subjects; from the vantage point of the present, it becomes impossible (and largely undesirable) to determine the original intention or understanding of particular thinkers within their own intellectual environment with a view to enlisting them on one side or other of the divide. As I stated in my Introduction, I do not believe that there is an event or emergence of postmodernism in general but only postmodernisms bound, in and by their difference, to whatever has previously occupied a particular sphere. Rather than engage with the question of whether thinkers are 'really' modernist or 'really' postmodernist, I would like to approach the problem with a different proposition: that postmodernism is at the same time both a break with and an extension of the modernist problematic. To explain how this can be so, I would like to return to Lash's contention that 'if modernism and modernity result from a process of differentiation, or what German social scientists call Ausdifferenzierung, then postmodernism results from a much more recent process of de-differentiation or Entdifferenzierung'.²³

To argue for postmodernism as a major differentiation would be to lend support to any argument for a total break or rupture between two definable and discontinuous historical/epistemological blocks. However, Lash prefers to use the idea of de-differentiation which changes the emphasis from absolute break to a degree of relation.²⁴ The 'pastness' implied by the prefix 'post' can never be a statement of complete autonomy or self-sufficiency because dependency is already inscribed in the term; 'coming after'

thus need not necessarily be a temporal indication of pure succession but can entail that which came before it. This is not to reduce postmodernism(s) to what comes before but to underline that the process of breaking away has to be referred back to the previous formations. Baldly stated, modernism in this instance would be characterized by the separation (differentiation) or bracketing of reality as determining principle, and consequent reworking of the relations between knowledge and reality. Postmodernism would then be the de-differentiation of these relations - not a rejection of them but a dissolution of those modernist categories which created autonomous structures to counter the unproblematic realisms in philosophy, art and scientific knowledge. It follows that the 'de' prefix is essentially a negative gesture towards the idea that postmodernism is at present a state of flux or process; the positive content that a full scale differentiation would demand has yet to appear. This understanding of de-differentiation would explain why it is possible to find postmodernist positions implicit in certain modernist ones: not because the recent theoretical shifts are the same as the older forms, but because they engage them, work through them, and transform them. Here, what I term postmodernist (the de-differentiation of the older modernist categories) cannot be understood as separate since it is logically dependent on them as their prior conditions of possibility. This is not, I stress, to make them continuous.

This study is an investigation into one field in which this process of de-differentiation can be observed. It is a complex process, as Warren Montag observes:

The irreversibility of any theoretical break is necessarily linked to its unevenness and incompleteness, to the obstacles that it inevitably throws up to its own development. Philosophy, in turn, is never simply the guardian of a theoretical truth; it is the space in which the meaning of the developments in knowledge is constantly determined and fought over. It is a conflict between tendencies that seek to annul a given break or mutation (or, failing that, to exploit this 'event' to their ends) and tendencies that seek to clear the way to its further development.²⁵

With this in view, I want to appropriate Lyotard's formulation of postmodernism as the conditions for knowledge consequent on the crisis of the modernist grands récits to frame a theory of the meaning of Modernism and postmodernism for the politics of film. The 'crisis of the metanarratives' thesis is indeed a highly provocative one which has generated a useful working model for understanding the 'game rules' governing the Modernist production of art and more specifically, of film construed as Modernist knowledge. This is not to imply that I would want to rest my definition of postmodernism entirely upon Lyotard; my understanding of the bankruptcy of the metanarratives throws up a series of tensions (especially with regard to feminism and its claims to offer emancipatory knowledge) which have produced two contradictory and politically irreconcilable readings of Lyotard's propositions for postmodernist paralogical aesthetics. The 'unevenness and incompleteness' of Lyotard's theoretical break - the modernism of its postmodernism - will become apparent later.

As a necessary precondition of exploring the consequences of posing postmodernism as a condition of post-metanarrativity, in the following Chapter I intend to examine certain historical forms of film practice in order to arrive at a position from which it is possible to define why they are Modernist.

NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

1. For an excellent exploration of historicism and its variants, see M. Mandelbaum, History, Man and Reason (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971) and his work, The Problem of Historical Knowledge (London: Torchbook Edition, 1967).

Modernism, Modernity: A Framework

2. Michel Foucault addresses the relations between modernity and Enlightenment in his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' trans C. Potter in The Foucault Reader (1986), pp. 32-50. He asks 'What is modern philosophy? ... modern philosophy is the philosophy that is attempting to answer the question raised so imprudently two centuries ago: Was ist Aufklärung?' (p. 32).

3. Michel Foucault, Preface to George Canguilhem 'The normal and the pathological'. Cited in C. Gordon's 'Afterword' to his edition of Foucault's Power/Knowledge (1980), p. 229.

4. Warren Montag, 'What is at Stake in the Debate on Postmodernism', in ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Postmodernism and Its Discontents (1988), pp. 88-103. Dana Polan also identifies this tendency for theorists of postmodernism to line up on one side of the Marxist divide in 'Postmodernism and Cultural Analysis Today' in the same volume, pp. 45-58.

The Project of Enlightenment

5. Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984), p.xxiii. All subsequent references will be cited as (PC, p.).

6. I have relied on Habermas' essay 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project', in ed. Hal Foster, Postmodern Culture (1983), pp. 3-15, as it provides the most accessible account of the issue of the Enlightenment project. All subsequent references will be cited as ('Modernity', p.). See also his Legitimation Crisis (1976) for a detailed analysis of 'practical' rationality and legitimation within a materialist conception of society.

7. The substantive/formal distinction operates in a number of ways in sociological explanation, for instance, to classify theories according to the range of phenomena they include or by the degree of specificity of the object under study. See ed. P. Worsley, Introducing Sociology (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) esp. Ch. One for a discussion of the distinction. A. Giddens discusses Weber's use of the terms in his Capitalism and Modern Social Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) esp. pp. 168-84. In his article 'Postmodernity and Desire', Theory and Society 14: 1 (1985), pp. 1-33, Scott Lash claims that Habermas' use of substantive rationality is also a doctrine of substantive natural rights in that the application of formal rationality to social norms implies the rights and obligations that are inherent in all norms. Thus Marx's argument for substantive

natural rights (a society based on needs) can be contrasted with bourgeois formal natural rights of the individual (based on wants).

8. Compare with Edward Said's 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community', in ed. Hal Foster, Postmodern Culture (1983), pp. 135-59.

9. J. Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (1976) p. 105; also cited by Fredric Jameson in his Foreword to Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition (1984), p. x.

The Pragmatics of Knowledge

10. Lyotard's theory of utterance derives from the speech act theories of J.L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) and J.R. Searle, Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

11. The performative utterance has been closely examined by Jacques Derrida in his article 'Signature Event Context', Glyph, 1 (1977), pp. 172-97. Derrida 'deconstructs' Austin's distinction between felicitous and non-felicitous speech acts: the performative is held to be one which does not depend on the concepts of either 'communication' (as the semio-linguistic movement between fixed receiver/sender) or 'context' (as the definitional parameters of the situation in which the act is executed). Rather, the performative speech act differs because it transforms the situation of its occurrence. Derrida argues that Austin's analysis smuggles in both 'communication' and 'context' as guarantors of felicitous performatives in the form of consciousness or the 'conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act'. As a result, Derrida argues, 'performative communication becomes once more the communication of an intentional meaning, even if that meaning has no referent in the form of a thing or of a prior or exterior state of things' (p. 187). See also Searle's reply in the same issue 'Reiterating the Differences' (pp. 198-209) which suggests that Derrida's preoccupation with the semiotic independence of writing leads him to misread Austin's 'exclusions' of 'non-serious' (fictional) forms from ordinary language. Lyotard notes that the term performative 'has taken on a precise meaning in language theory since Austin' and that his own use of the term is not far from his because 'Austin's performative realizes the optimal performance' (Note 30 of The Postmodern Condition).

12. Dick Hebdige, 'New Times - After The Masses', Marxism Today, 33: 1 (1989), pp. 48-53, (p. 51).

13. From Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations first publ. 1953 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) sec. 18, p. 8.

Postmodernity and De-Differentiation

14. Scott Lash discusses postmodernism as de-differentiation in 'Discourse or Figure: Postmodernism as a Regime of Signification', Theory, Culture & Society, 5 (1988), pp. 311-36.

15. For a useful account of the broader philosophical milieu at the turn of the century in terms of its widespread rejection of idealism, and particularly Moore's doctrine of moral intuitionism, see eds. Cox & Dyson, The Twentieth-Century Mind Vol I: 1900-1918 (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), esp. pp. 174-224. The author of the chapter, David Bell, suggests that 'perhaps the most lasting effect of the comprehensive destructiveness of Moore's Principia Ethica was to replace philosophical debate within ethics, by philosophical debate about the whole enterprise and logical status of ethical enquiry' (pp. 177-8).

16. Hilary Lawson, Reflexivity: the Post-modern Predicament (1985) develops this line of Nietzsche's thought in a discussion of his critique of Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal worlds as objects of knowledge. See esp. pp. 32-55.

17. See Edward Sapir, Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality (orig. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949); Benjamin Wharf, Language Thought and Reality (orig. ed. J. Carroll, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1956).

18. F. Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans T. Common, (T.N. Foulis, 1909) p. 656. Cited in Lawson (1985), p. 36.

19. *ibid.* p. 36.

20. See T.S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Foundations of the Unity of Science Vol 2, no 2, 1962); P. Feyerabend, Against Method (London: Verso, 1978). For my own assessment of Kuhn's work in the light of his 'structuralization' of science, I refer the reader to my M.A. Critical Theory thesis (University of Nottingham, 1985) entitled Language, History, Structure: Some Positions. Terry Lovell's Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure (1983) is particularly lucid on this account.

21. F. de Saussure, Course in Structural Linguistics (1915) trans W. Baskin (1960). There now exists a huge corpus of secondary work on the impact of Saussurean linguistics - Terence Hawkes' Structuralism and Semiotics (London: Methuen, 1977) has an accessible and reasonably detailed bibliography. See also T.K. Seung, Structuralism and Hermeneutics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

22. Elizabeth Wright (1989), p. 97. It should be noted, however, that Wright's use of this method of 'reading backwards' is a deliberate theoretical tactic which, my criticism notwithstanding, is highly productive in this context.

23. Scott Lash (1988), p. 312.

24. See also Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', New German Critique, 33 (1984), pp. 5-52.

25. Warren Montag (1988), p. 89.

CHAPTER TWO

FILM AND METANARRATIVE MODERNISM

Extrapolating from The Postmodern Condition, the fundamental components of modern knowledge legitimation are:

- a) the narrative of liberty - requires some degree of social control over the production/consumption of knowledge in order for it to be referred back to and made effective for the goal of human emancipation and Enlightenment

= knowledge for social emancipation

- b) the narrative of speculation - permits the investigation of the principles and foundations of specific types of knowledge in autonomy from the immediate concerns of utility of the People or its abstract embodiment in the form of the State

= sanctions autonomous knowledge

Proposed in this way, Lyotard's modern/postmodern split in science suggests some particularly interesting avenues for a similar exploration of the transformations of the 'game rules' in the aesthetic sphere. The metanarratives can also be understood as the chief forms of legitimation for the production of modern art.

Nonetheless, in the Introduction to her edition of Postmodernism and Its Discontents (1988), E. Ann Kaplan warns against positing postmodernism as something affecting cultural practices in the same way. She argues for a broad framework of enquiry which should 'take into account the particular 'apparatus' being used, as well

as how modes of production/exhibition govern aesthetic strategies'.¹ This is a timely reminder against searching for the unity of a monolithic Postmodernist condition to pit against an equally monolithic Modernist one. Taken alone, the Lyotardian concepts of legitimation and delegitimation are too broadly drawn to illustrate the correlations between science and the aesthetic sphere. For this reason, I feel it is imperative to couple them with a concept of de-differentiation since this can be made to show more particularly the effects of post-narrativity in one area of the aesthetic sphere: film. By bringing together the larger processes of delegitimation and the more specific impact of de-differentiation for film, it is possible to delineate the key features of Modernism, and then to venture some reasons why postmodernism must necessarily be regarded as a break with (and not a continuation of) its 'project'. The main task, then, is to address the particularity of postmodernism in relation to the politics of film practice by identifying some historical and theoretical features of Modernism in this area. My first Chapter concluded that modernist epistemology should be understood as based upon several key rejections of realist 'foundationalisms'; one can venture to state that modernism in art witnesses a similar differentiation process in countering forms of realism (representation as mimesis²) by creating autonomous art practices. But the Modernist 'break' with realism in film is not identical with that in painting³, for instance, nor with the emergence of modernism in architecture⁴. To this end, I have identified four 'ideal-types' of Modernist film: Abstract Formalism, Structural & Structural/Materialism, Anti-Illusionism, and Surrealism. As a

critical theorist, my interest lies primarily with the philosophical positions which inform certain types of film making, and I accept that this is in some ways a reductive approach, preferring to isolate the various social/theoretical propositions rather than provide a 'history' or purely temporal understanding of their production and exhibition. This is not to relegate the importance of the specificities of historical and cultural production/consumption; on the contrary, I wish to isolate the theoretical bases of these four ideal-types in order to demonstrate that postmodernism's 'break' is indeed a historical and not purely an aesthetic phenomenon. The categories are by no means watertight, given that exceptions can be made to all of them. Also, features from one type can often be observed in others; similarities and overlaps can be found in the work of a single film maker while single films exhibit several tendencies which are here rather arbitrarily separated. However, this does not affect my basic contention that film practices which can be termed Modernist are those which:

a) must be referred back to the metanarratives for their philosophical legitimation;

and

b) specify their status as autonomous art (and as knowledge) according to a theoretical differentiation between representation and reality.

Autonomy and Modernist Differentiation

I would contend that the defining feature of each of the Modernist film practices I have identified is that they are in some way, even if negatively, bound to the concept of artistic autonomy, an understanding which entails two fundamental propositions about modern art and aesthetic differentiation. The first proposition is that, in general terms, it is the nature of art within modernity (later intensified by modernism) to offer a particular mode of experience or type of 'knowledge' which is qualitatively distinct from all other forms of human creativity; the specificity of aesthetic experience, however defined, is thus derived from the fact that art is held to be a highly specialised sort of knowledge, culturally differentiated from what may be termed reality or everyday life. It is this concept of autonomy, and consequent theories on the nature and degree of the relations between art and what functions as 'social reality', which has dominated theories and practices of art in the modernist period. This broad characterization must be narrowed at once with a second proposition to the effect that the constitution of modernist art as autonomous has historically been subject to several major inflections which have specified the effect of that autonomy quite differently. Modernist art can thus be very crudely classified according to whether the cognitive and/or epistemological distinction grounding aesthetic autonomy is embraced or rejected. Accepting the fact that the wider cultural processes of modernity have, since the

eighteenth century, tended towards the social specialization of art practices, it is possible to draw two broad categories of Modernist response to constitution of art as autonomous domain:

- a) Due to the specificity of its differentiation, it is felt that the greatest intensity of aesthetic experience is to be gained from the contemplation of what is essential to each medium, of that which distinguishes it from all other social practices, and from every other art medium;
- b) Due to the specificity of its differentiation from all other spheres of human activity, art is charged with a pedagogical or emancipatory function which allows artistic practices to be politically oppositional to the power structures of the culture that sustains them.

The analogy with Lyotard's metanarratives should be patent: the first group, in pursuit of the specificity of material of each medium, appeals for legitimation to the narrative of speculative spirit while the second validates the critical or radical function of autonomous art by appealing to the narrative of liberty for the People. Aesthetic 'knowledge' in modernism cannot then be reduced to either one of these basic modes or principles since the very constitution of modernity embodies within it both competing, contradictory but equally coherent and valid definitions of the nature, purpose and function of art.

Returning to the epistemological concerns of modernism, it is not surprizing to find that many theories of artistic practice do manifest a critical tension which may be understood as the failure to bring together the discourses of what I maintain are fundamentally irreconcilable metanarratives. For a preparatory example of my claim that the narrative of speculative spirit and

the narrative of liberty are also the dominant philosophical underpinnings of Modernist film (indeed, define it as such), one can turn to Adorno's Aesthetic Theory (1970) which may be read in terms of its attempt to articulate both positions simultaneously, to define modern art as autonomous and to make this the source of its capacity for radical social critique:

Did not art lose its foundation when it gained complete freedom from external purposes?

Art is and is not being-for-itself. Without heterogenous moment, art cannot achieve autonomy.

... first, works of art must be able to integrate materials and details into their immanent law of form; and, second, they must not try to erase the fractures left by the process of integration, preserving instead in the aesthetic whole the traces of those elements which resisted integration.

All works of art, including affirmative ones, are ipso facto polemical. The very notion of a conservative work of art is somehow absurd. By emphatically severing all ties with the empirical world, art in an unconscious way expresses its desire to change that world.⁵

Adorno secures a margin of critique for modernist art by arguing that formal autonomy, although essentially a negative phenomenon peculiar to the modernization process begun in the eighteenth century, is central to any modern radical aesthetic experience since it is precisely this irreducible difference or specificity which escapes appropriation by predetermined 'content' or 'ideology', and which resists direct social control (conservative or progressive). For Adorno, 'what makes art works socially significant is content which articulates itself in formal

structures'. Drawn in this way, Adorno's concept of the 'dual essence' of art points to a very significant feature of the modernist differentiation of the artistic sphere which has been picked up by several theorists, including Thomas Dumm:

... it is crucial that one remember that a radical aesthetic is only available to modern subjects because it originates in the same phenomena that have led to the increased differentiation of spheres of value in modern culture.⁶

Thus art can be either 'for itself' (autonomous) or oppositional (emancipatory) only under modernist - bourgeois - social relations since they are in fact two sides of the same coin, being two responses to the fact of modern differentiation which splits artistic practice from its Enlightenment trajectory. Any case made for a postmodernist condition will have to demonstrate that this primary constitution of the aesthetic sphere has been superseded, that there has been a major post-narrative de-differentiation which legitimates art quite differently.

A second example of thinking generated by the question of aesthetic autonomy and/or social usefulness takes discussion back to Habermas. Given his intimate relation to the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School⁷, it is perhaps not surprising to find a similar tension structuring his work. He identified the broader process of differentiation and specialization as part of the trajectory of modernity which has severed art, as alienated knowledge, from social praxis and from the needs of the 'life-world'. However, Habermas' proposals for returning to the overall goal of the Enlightenment is a 'communicative rationality' for a society in which all knowledges are part of 'practical discourse'.

It follows that any 'differentiated relinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis' ('Modernity', p.13) must balance this claim for art as everyday communication with Habermas' wish to preserve the specificity of the aesthetic as a mode of knowing. It remains untheorized in Habermas' work what the function or role of art can be once this 'reappropriation' has been completed and the older categories supporting the aesthetic/expressive sphere in radical autonomy from the rest of society (the 'inner logic' of bourgeois art produced and received under consumer knowledge relations) are broken down. I shall return to a discussion of postmodernist critiques of the larger political implications of Habermas' 'use' of aesthetics in the name of justice and freedom in Chapter Four.

By way of a preface to the four ideal-types of film practice I have identified, I have so far touched upon the mutually determining relationship of Modernism and aesthetic autonomy. There remains a third term, that of the avant-garde, which conjoins with 'modernism' and 'autonomy' to form something like a dominant paradigm for locating the category 'Art', and for gauging the terms of postmodernist de-differentiation. It is very useful to think of aesthetic modernism in terms of Lyotard's narratives since it permits a much-needed flexibility for addressing the complex issue of the avant-garde which has often been wrongly regarded as synonymous with modernism per se. Andreas Huyssen, in his excellent essay 'The Search for Tradition: Avant-garde and Postmodernism in the 1970's', warns against the easy assumption that modernism, artistic autonomy and the avant-garde are synonymous:

Both avant-garde and modernism may legitimately be understood as representing artistic emanations from the sensibility of modernity, but from a European perspective it makes little sense to lump Thomas Mann together with Dada, Proust with Andre Breton, or Rilke with Russian constructivism. While there are areas of overlap between the tradition of the avant-garde and that of modernism (e.g. vorticism and Ezra Pound, radical language experimentation and James Joyce, expressionism and Gottfried Benn) the overall aesthetic and political differences are too pervasive to be ignored.⁸

What need to be separated, and are often obscured, are the aesthetic, political and institutional determinants which specify the projects and terms of 'intervention' for various historical avant-gardes. To this end, several theorists have recently adopted Peter Burger's important distinction between two very different tendencies within modernism which, importantly, once again centres on the issue of artistic autonomy.⁹ The first tendency, which I understand as a centripetal one, tends further to entrench art in its autonomy from social life, pushing towards art as the pure analysis and exploration of the internal conditions of each medium. The second response, a centrifugal one, is not content with revolutionizing the internal (traditional) conditions of art - form, meaning, procedures - but more radically with challenging and dissolving the very constitution of the category 'art' which, Burger contends, is thoroughly implicated or 'institutionalized' in bourgeois society. Avant-garde refers only to the latter group (within the European Dada/Surrealism line) which attacks the ideology of autonomy while the former group are best understood as Modernist in their attempts to revolutionize but retain the cultural differentiation which constitutes the category of the aesthetic. However, I have been unable to find a suitable replacement that will capture the general use of the term 'avant-

garde' (simply, movements or groups effecting formal and/or politically motivated artistic innovation and transgression) and will have to continue to use it in this way: it should be clear when the phrase refers to Bürger's more specialized sense.

One of the most interesting features of trying to define Modernism in film practice is that the institution of cinema and its products, film, are subject to ambivalent cultural construction. There can be traced a conflict, inherent within the historical emergence of cinema, between understanding it as an 'aesthetic' form or, otherwise, as 'entertainment'. I am concerned here with isolating exactly what it is that permits a film to belong to the 'aesthetic' and more especially to be regarded as Modernist. This entails examining how the category of the aesthetic is primarily the result of the work of cultural differentiation that is specific to modernism.

The 'independent', experimental or avant-garde cinema is not homogeneous but denotes a plethora of nationally and historically diverse techniques and strategies for a 'counter' cinema. What unites film makers such as Maya Deren, Paul Sharits, Andy Warhol or Michael Snow is a concern to exploit their own difference from another ideal-type of film practice. P. Adams Sitney prefaced his edition of The Avant Garde Film (1978) with the question: 'Can there be a history of the independent cinema?':

Insofar as it calls itself independent or avant garde, admirably introducing a negative element into its epithet, it reflects back upon another cinema, itself unnamed and undefined, against the darkness of which it shines. We certainly have histories of this other cinema, narratives of technological change, industrial growth, and national enclosures embroidered with the stories of an almost monomorphic hero called alternatively Griffith, Chaplin, Melies, Eisenstein, von

Ten years later the 'unnamed' cinema can now be named - that of the classic realist text¹¹- and the past decade much critical work has been concerned to define its operations. I shall be reviewing the components of this form of textual production en passant so suffice for it here to stand as a convenient shorthand for films which offer the following: structurally coherent and often linear fictional narrative; synchronous sound; psychologically identifiable characters; editing, framing, lighting, mise en scene and the construction of perspectival film space subordinated to the demands of the narrative; suppression of the production of the fiction in favour of a transparency of the medium to the events represented. As the dominant form of cinematic consumption, 'commercial' or 'Hollywood' film is installed as the norm against which each practice defines itself. It is important for my argument at this point to stress that 'avant-garde' or 'independent' are, above all else, relative terms predicated on the concept of difference but, crucially, a norm-defined difference, which I would suggest is the primary distinction required by any film practice to be considered Modernist. It is fundamental in that it is this initial 'difference' which carves out the epistemological space that is required in order for film to be brought under Modernist legitimation by the metanarratives. In other words, the existence of the norm 'commercial cinema' defines a space in which film is able to be legitimated as either autonomous knowledge or else as emancipatory knowledge (since by circular definition commercial cinema is neither).

By this line of thinking, it is possible to make the precise

distinction that realist or 'escapist' fiction film does not belong with the Modernist paradigm. This would accord with the fact that the historical emergence of cinema at the end of the 19th century, as has been well documented¹², was not an 'aesthetic' event but essentially a mass cultural phenomenon, shown in cheap venues by initially itinerant exhibitors, dependent for its audience upon a largely uneducated working-class population and experienced as a machine for 'entertainment'. It would be possible to argue, by ignoring the national heterogeneity of early silent cinema production, that from an 'art' point of view, cinema reached no higher than an artless vulgarity of mere naturalism (the 'documentary' of the Lumière School), the low cultural adaption of theatrical dramatization (the 'illusionism' of the Méliès School¹³) and the comic shorts of music hall comedians. Since it was already inscribed in the discourses of 'popular culture', and consigned to the culturally undervalued sphere of 'entertainment', early cinema was differentiated from the aesthetic by a series of key binaries - art/entertainment, High Art/Low Culture, elite/popular, avant-garde/mainstream - of central concern to postmodernism's de-differentiations. As the norm negatively defining the legitimation concerns of the aesthetic sphere from which it is excluded, 'realist' or Hollywood film thus sets the agenda for film practices that seek the status of the aesthetic, that is, partake of the grands récits that determine what constitutes modern art. With this distinction in place, and in keeping with my aim of investigating Lyotard's theory of aesthetic legitimation, avant-garde and Modernist practices will now be examined using the metanarratives to assess their political, moral and epistemological

claims.

Abstract Formalism

'Because he was the first to criticise the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist'. So wrote Clement Greenberg and in one sentence formulated one of the most influential definitions of modernist art. His essay 'Modernist Painting' continues:

The essence of Modernism lies... in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself - not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.¹⁴

For Greenberg, this tendency towards Kantian immanent criticism was historically determined by what he felt to be a cultural void left by the decline of religious feeling during the course of the nineteenth century; he argues that this loss might have been averted had it undergone the type of self-criticism now advocated for the arts:

The arts could save themselves from this leveling (sic) down only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity.¹⁵

In pursuit of a 'more rational justification' for the arts, each would have to 'narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure'.

Hence the famous dictum:

What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general, but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself.¹⁶

This was an essentially reducing and rationalizing operation

whereby 'each art would be rendered 'pure' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence'. The abandonment of recognizable objects in favour of the non-figurative or Abstract art is therefore due to the historical pressures upon painting to define itself through its own operations, and by criteria taken from any other art. The Greenbergian paradigm can best be summarized by the term 'specificity'; 'it quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of the medium'. Thus, Greenberg declares that the one true guarantee of painting's independence as an art is 'flatness' or two-dimensional picture space. He argues that three-dimensional space, to which the presence of 'recognisable entities' (human figures, teacup) attests, is the authentic province not of painting but of sculpture. Cubism, for instance, is abstract in the sense that in the early (1910-12) Analytic period Picasso, Braque (and later, Gris) were preoccupied with pictorial space and the 'flatness' of perception of spatial planes.¹⁷ Greenberg's definition of Modernism is thus circular and self-defining - painting is and should be only what painting is.

The same impulsion towards specificity can also be found in the writings of early film makers, this being one of the chief ways that film could be taken out of 'entertainment' and brought under the Modernist metanarratives. Germaine Dulac, in 'The Avant-Garde Cinema' (1932) wrote:

We can use the term 'avant-garde' for any film whose technique, employed with a view to a renewed expressiveness of image and sound, breaks with established traditions, to search out, in the strictly visual and auditory realm, new emotional chords.¹⁸

The 'established traditions', perhaps needless to say, were those of the industrial/commercial cinema which Dulac holds responsible for denying the fact that cinema is specifically visual. To demonstrate this, Dulac separates what commercial cinema has 'borrowed' from other non-filmic art forms to show why 'from its scientific basis... cinema must address itself uniquely to sight as music addresses itself uniquely to hearing'. Dulac's article 'Visual and Anti-Visual Films' (1928)¹⁹ can be read in conjunction with Jean Epstein's earlier attempt to define the 'essence of cinema' in 1923; for the specificity Dulac sought, Epstein had coined the term 'photogenie':

The film should positively avoid any connection with the historical, educational, romantic, moral or immoral, geographical or documentary subjects. The film should become, step by step, finally exclusively cinematography that means that it should use exclusively photogenic elements.²⁰

'What are the aspects of things, of beings and of souls which are photogenic, aspects of which cinematic art has the duty of limiting itself?' Epstein's answer is the most minimal definition of the abstract (non-referential) potential of film to function as an autonomous system: the 'photogenic aspect is a construct of spatio-temporal variables' or, 'an aspect is photogenic if it changes positions and varies simultaneously in space and time'.²¹ Hans Richter posed the distinction in these terms:

The main aesthetic problem in the movies, which were invented for reproduction (of movement) is, paradoxically, the overcoming of reproduction. In other words, the question is: to what degree is the camera (film, colour, sound, etc) developed and used to reproduce (any objects which appear before the lens) or to produce (sensations not possible in any other art medium)?²²

No consensus emerged either then or since as to what exactly is the

essence of cinema though the principle of abstraction remains the same whether movement, light or optical perception is taken to be the specificity of the medium. Richter's division between film as reproduction - as the image of something profilmic - and film as production - as effects specific to itself - is a crucially important one. Firstly, because it permits a clearer understanding of the concerns of abstract film as autonomous art as formulated by Greenberg. Secondly, it provides a common ground for the some of the disparate film makers of the European avant-gardes working between the 1920's and '30's who were part of a 'conscious attempt to overcome reproduction and to arrive at the free use of the means of cinematic expression'.

The European avant-gardes concerned with abstract film in this period (not avant-garde at all but Modernists, by my reading of Burger) were chiefly artists working in France and Germany; to take but the most well documented figures, Ferdinand Léger, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and René Clair in the former, with Hans Richter, Otto Fischinger, Walter Ruttmann and the Swedish Victor Eggeling in the latter. Following Richter²³, the broad interests of these film makers can be summarized as follows:

- a) the orchestration of motion in visual rhythms;
- b) the plastic expression of an object in motion under varying light conditions;
- c) the distortion and dissection of a movement, an object or a form and its reconstitution in cinematic terms;
- d) the denaturalization of the object in any form to recreate it cinematographically with light.

A brief examination of the major films produced by these figures substantiate Richter's general principles.

Both Malcolm le Grice and Standish D. Lawder²⁴ have traced the concern with film as the analysis of flux, rhythm and movement to the painters of both Cubist and Futurist groups. Le Grice makes the distinction that in Cubism 'following directly from the late Cezanne', the 'dynamic principle is that of the flux in experience deriving from the changing stance and perception of the painter' whereas in Futurism, instead of focussing on this effect, formal devices are utilised to 'represent movement while basically maintaining the status of the observer'.²⁵ Personally, I do not find this distinction a particularly useful one though it is better when posed as the idea that Cubist film is concerned with an 'architectural' abstraction (Mondrian) while the Futurist develops film's kinetic potential (Kandinsky). Eggeling and Richter are thus more Cubist in their search for a 'logic' for the forms of abstract art but I would argue as equally kinetic in the rhythms of spatio-temporal illusion of movement created by the composition of 'pure' plastic forms. During 1918-20, Eggeling and Richter had collaborated on a series of animated Scrolls which were painted studies of what le Grice defines as forms with 'simple, definable linear characteristics combining in additive and subtractive structures with basic mirror and rotational transformations'.²⁶ Their failure to adapt successfully the animated scrolls to the technical demands of film making at UFA led to two conclusions; one, that film is governed by a different set of laws from two dimensional painting, that film is a time-based medium (making the static arrangement of form secondary to temporal considerations and

consequently, that much more simplified forms would be required to allow for the demands of frame composition, film speed and ratio of parts to the whole.²⁷

Richter's first film Film is Rhythm/Rhythmus 21 (1921) can be seen as the result of both conclusions, a study of 'rhythm in painting' - simplified rectangular black, white and grey shapes in constant flux and transformation which Lawder describes as 'perfect examples of Neo-Plasticism in action' - a work in which 'the content was essentially rhythm, the formal vocabulary was elemental geometry, the structural principle was the counterpoint of contrasting opposites, and in which space and time became independent'.²⁸ Eggeling, on the other hand, continued to exploit the sequential fact of film (frame after frame) to adapt his Scrolls animation. The resulting Diagonal Symphony (1924) is a study of 'graphic transformational logic' in which the 'emphasis is on objectively analysed movement rather than expressiveness, on the surface patterning of lines into clearly defined movements, controlled by a mechanical, almost metronomic tempo'.²⁹ The two film makers, although unknowingly, were working on the same features of Abstract Formalism that were occupying Orphists, the Suprematist Kasimir Malevitch and later, Piet Mondrian of the De Stijl School, in painting: the elemental forms of pure spatial relationships. This Mondrian-Analytical Cubist tendency, according to le Grice, can be contrasted with one dominated by the painter Wassily Kandinsky.³⁰ Both Lawder and le Grice have read the abstract work of Ruttmann and Fischinger in terms of a Kandinskian move from figuration to abstraction. For le Grice, Ruttmann's series Lichtspeil - Opus I-IV (1921-24) can be considered 'a

microcosm paralleling development of abstraction in general': the extant Opus II is dominated by 'anthropomorphic' and 'organic' forms and 'their action represents an allegorical conflict between sharp wedge-like forms which probe aggressively and rounder forms which are the subject of the rhythmic probing'; Opus III concentrates on mathematical and geometric composition of rectilineals and diagonals which suggest an 'attempt to relate more directly to the geometry of the screen and the mechanical analogies of the film medium'. Le Grice reads the fourth Opus as a culmination of the abstraction process in that parts of the film 'divide the screen so boldly or transform it so rapidly that it is the optical effect which predominates'. However, I would suggest that it is not the use of abstraction which is paramount here but rather the emotional or spiritual expressionism which underlies the experiments with film as a non-representational form that brings it within Kandinsky's domain. Ruttman and Kandinsky were both influenced by the theory of 'synaesthetic correspondences', a theory that had its origins in the nineteenth century Aestheticist's concern that all art should aspire to the condition of music. Lawder cites the German critic Bernhard Diebold who called for a new art formed from the coalition of modern art, the movement of film and the structure of music. 'Film-as-painted-music', the author suggests, sprang from a wish to 'give visible form to the emotional moods created by music... which presumed the existence of specific auditory and visual stimuli to elicit inner emotional states'.³¹ The first screening of Ruttman's stencil coloured Opus I (1921), with musical accompaniment, was reviewed in the following terms:

Some of the forms of these colours assumed were familiar to us in the restless paintings of the Cubists and expressionists - triangles, trapezoids, cubes, circles, spirals, squares, disks, crescents, ellipses - all the usual fragmentary and activist geometry. But here the writhing, shifting, interlacing, interlocking, interacting elements were fluent and alive, moving to the laws of a definite rhythm and harmony, obedient to a will and impulse... flickering and wavering in and out, over and under this revel of Klangfarbe, or sounding colour, the Leitmotif appeared in playful, undulant lines... the colour equivalents of the strong, clear finale.³²

Fischinger's later Experiments in Hand Drawn Sound (1931) which he described as 'patterns drawn on paper with pen and ink, photographed on to the margin of the film reserved for the soundtrack' was also part of the 'optical music' tradition within film abstraction which followed Fischinger into the 'commercial' sector when he moved to Hollywood under MGM (Optical Poem of 1937/8) and was commissioned by Disney to design a section for what was to become Fantasia (1940).³³ Marcel Duchamp's Rotary Demi-Sphere (Precision Optics) (1925), later incorporated into Anaemic Cinema (1927), might also be considered as part of this tradition of optical abstraction, being an attempt to produce stereoscopic film and a three-dimensional effect by orchestrating the visual effects of discs of concentric and eccentric circles with homonyms inscribed upon them. Within his predominantly Surrealist films, Man Ray too experimented with the abstract properties of filming objects rotating to reflect patterns of light, particularly in sections of Emak Bakia (1926).

The features discussed so far adhere to the notion that film specificity can be located in production as against reproduction. One must be careful to say that it is the impression of movement that occupies the foreground of experiment (the hand-drawn,

animated abstract work producing the effect of dynamic and rhythmic forms). This is not in itself specifically cinematic but to do with the projection of images at certain speeds. In other words, it might be argued that abstraction actually turns away from what makes film essentially a photographic medium - its capacity to record and reproduce images - and makes it an extension of 'painterly' concerns. Ferdinand Léger's Ballet Mécanique (1924) was intended to exploit both of these contrasting potentials by creating a 'rhythm of common objects in space and time, to present them in their plastic beauty'.³⁴ David Curtis has suggested that the film is historically significant for being the first abstract film to be photographed as opposed to drawn. Taking on abstract geometric forms, images of commonplace objects and close-ups of facial details, Léger's film is tightly constructed into sections of varying tempo and scale, featuring prismatic fracturing of semi-representational images (bottles, human legs, mechanical legs, kitchen implements, eyes, mouths) to contrast in meaning, tone and rhythm with their abstract 'equivalents'.³⁵ Commentators have pointed, however, to the section (Stills number: 188-92) in which a washer woman is seen to begin an ascent up a flight of stairs only to begin the same sequence before reaching the top. This is repeated seven times here and again a little later using loop repetition. The importance of this section has been attributed to it being the first time that film has become the subject of film; where Richter, Ruttmann and Eggeling were concerned with what is specific to the film medium (movement, rhythm, optical effect), Léger's sequence poses self-reflexive questions about the formal construction of 'units' of film meaning and about the materiality

of the means of filmic signification. This tendency will be explored in some depth in the next section on Structural/Materialist film.

Film abstraction, in the form I have outlined, is the primary example of aesthetics legitimated by the narrative of speculative spirit. The concept of a self-regulating, autonomous sphere of art, occupied by questions pertinent only to the specificities of each medium, though, requires validation as knowledge since its role in cultural life is far from self-evident. Greenberg, rather tellingly, appealed to the procedures of science for this:

That visual art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience, and make no reference to anything given in other orders of experience, is a notion whose only justification lies, notionally, in scientific consistency. Scientific method alone asks that a situation be resolved in exactly the same kind of terms as that in which it is presented.

From the 'point of view of art itself its convergence with science happens to be a mere accident' but, significantly for my discussion of delegitimation in Chapter One, he follows : 'What their convergence does show, however, is the degree to which Modernist art belongs to the same historical and cultural tendency as modern science'.³⁶ This should make it subject to the same dissolution of the grands récits as Lyotard theorized for science: if art must appeal to science for its validation, it follows therefore that it cannot 'supervise' its own 'game'. In turn, I would argue, this necessarily calls into crisis the very status of the autonomous aesthetic object it seeks to legitimate: art is truly art in so far as it is based on 'scientific' procedures and its claim to autonomy is seriously threatened.

At a more readily political level, engaging in the pursuit of

the specificity of the medium depends on a rigorous differentiation between art and social life. The 'graphic' film's rejection of realist fiction does not necessarily entail a politically motivated opposition to it but, rather, accepts (and thus supports the idea) that avant-garde art practices are only avant-garde for art.

Consider a quotation from Sitney, this time from Visionary Film (1974): 'The precise relationship of the avant-garde cinema to American commercial film is one of radical otherness. They operate in different realms with next to no significant influence on each other' (p. viii). In 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (1980), Raymond Williams (with regard to Gramsci) formulates a theory of cultural hegemony in terms of the processes and relations between three possible political cultures - dominant, emergent and residual - and makes this point:

There is a simple theoretical distinction between alternative and oppositional, that is to say between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change society in its light³⁷.

Sitney's 'radical otherness' is alternative but not oppositional in that it does not seek to transgress or transform the codes of what Noel Burch³⁸ has termed the 'institutional mode of representation' but, rather, abandons them. The status of Abstract Formalism as art is secured by its absolute separation of art from the concerns of social life, differentiating the means of representation or medium (film) from reality (social life). From a feminist perspective, abstraction is dependent on a primary exclusion of the social - within the Modernist aesthetic of Abstract Formalism, issues such as the social construction of gender in film simply

cannot appear. Léger's Ballet Mécanique is again instructive. One commentator has suggested that the incorporation of elements of female faces, legs, mouths and especially eyes, makes Léger's film the first real engagement with 'institutional' film's investment in sexual imagery. The film:

... was stylistically heterogeneous in its construction and instead of seeking to suppress such 'troublesome' items as the 'look', language and sexuality, it places them in a central position. Kiki's eyes, shown in extreme close-up, look back at the spectator from the screen, challenging his/her security as unseen voyeur...³⁹

While I do not believe that this was Léger's intention, nor that it would have been read at this time in such a way, the film does illustrate my point that, for me, feminism can only appear as an issue for film within representational or image-based practices. This makes feminism's relationship to Modernism and the concept of an avant-garde, both political and aesthetic, a complex one. I shall refrain from discussing feminist critiques of the historical avant-gardes and of the Modernist problematic which determine them until Chapter Three. Here, it is surely not insignificant that the major Arts Council 'Film as Film' forum of 1979 concluded with a withdrawal of work by the female/feminist film makers, historians, researchers and exhibitors for the way in which a 'hidden' history of women film makers of this period (Alice Guy, Germaine Dulac, Maya Deren) could only be made apparent (suppressed) within the abstract/formal film field which denied the diversity and non-homogeneity of their film practices. As my own research has shown⁴⁰, these film makers are judged and consistently downgraded for not 'fitting in' to the categories (historical and formal) already constituted by an overwhelmingly masculine apparatus of

critics, theoreticians and selection committee members.

To conclude, I summarily characterize my first film practice thus:

Modernist :

**Dominant Metanarrative : The Narrative of Speculative Spirit
 Internal Life of the Autonomous Object**

Differentiations	:	Autonomous art	v	Social life
		Abstract	v	Representation
		High Art	v	Low Culture
		Aesthetic Value	v	Entertainment

Structural and Structural/Materialist Film

The next film practice within the Modernist narrative of speculation can be seen to continue research into the 'specificity' of the film medium but extending this as far as its logical endpoint: film as its own 'material'. The concerns of 'structural/materialist' film can only be gauged by outlining the terms of its components, both the concept of 'structural' film and of 'materialism', and its relations to radical film practices.

The label 'structural' film was first used by P.A.Sitney in 1969 in an article published in Film Culture to identify a set of features that distinguished a group of films/film makers from other 'underground' non-commercial tendencies.⁴¹ The time and place of

this are significant, marking a shift away from pre-World War II Europe to late '60's America as the focus for new developments in experimental film practices. Within the American context, the advent of structural film can be used to posit a break from the post-war associative and emotive films of what Sheldon Renan has termed the Second Avant Garde (West Coast USA from approximately 1943 to 1956).⁴² This had been dominated by the Surrealist-inspired 'mythopoeic' or 'trance' films of Maya Deren - Meshes of the Afternoon (1943), the poetic narrative films of Gregory Markopoulos - Pysche/Lysis/Charmides (1947-48), the expressive qualities sought by 'psychodramas' such as Kenneth Anger's Eaux d'Artifice (1953) or the works of James Broughton and Sidney Peterson.⁴³ Renan's Third American Avant Garde includes the major film makers cited by Sitney as exemplary of the structural tendency : Tony Conrad, George Landow, Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Joyce Wieland, Ernie Gehr, Paul Sharits plus Andy Warhol. They differ from these earlier metaphorical works in that they are concerned not with the 'specificity' of the formal aspects of film but with structure 'wherein the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified'. This is not in itself sufficient to distinguish the two; a 'precise statement of the difference between form and structure must involve a sense of the working process; for the formal film is a tight nexus of content, a shape designed to explore the facets of the material'.⁴⁴ In brief, a photographed content of images is then subjected to formal narrative devices: slow and fast motion, repetition, superimposition, montage editing, transitions, focussing, double exposures, reversals, expansion and contraction of the image, or, for instance, the editing technique

of 'thought images' peculiar to Markopoulos who 'used short bursts (groups) of images - single frames taken from different scenes or parts of a scene, both repeating and anticipating events'.⁴⁵

Richter's production/reproduction distinction is again pertinent. For Sitney, 'recurrences, antithesis, and overall rhythm are the elements of the formal' so that 'reproduction', or the content of images, is retained for 'poetic', associative or semantic effect. The structural film, in contrast, devalues the representational capacity of images in favour of analysis of the 'specificity' of the visual processes of film, in order to examine film as its own subject or 'content': 'the structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline'. Sitney's much cited and debated definition follows:

Four characteristics of the structural film are a fixed camera position (fixed frame from the viewer's perspective), the flicker effect, loop printing (the immediate repetition of shots, exactly and without variation), and rephotography off of a screen.⁴⁶

Birgit Hein has taken issue with Sitney's terms of definition and proposed some more specific indicators of structural film's concern with the processes - optical, chemical and perceptual - that form the material 'substrate' of the realist film image. I have found it useful for ordering the explosion of film making activity in America during the 1960's/70's to follow Hein's division of the field into three areas: 1) the film strip; 2) projection, using intervening light; 3) the projected image.⁴² For the sake of brevity, I here present the author's categories supplemented with a few examples from film practice.

The Film Strip

Hein notes that film as physical material can be 'treated' for aesthetic purposes in different ways:

- a) in the optical process, which includes the actual photographic shot taken with the camera and the optical printing;
- b) in the chemical-development process of negative and positive material;
- c) in direct work on the surface of the film strip.

The earliest form of 'structural' work on the material of celluloid has been attributed to Man Ray's rayograms in Retour a la Raison (1923) which, by exposing objects placed onto the film surface, could directly imprint their physical characteristics without filming through a camera. The dadaist origin of direct work on the film strip has been explored more recently by Tony Conrad who has cooked film, soaked it in curry and left it to partially corrode. In 7360 Sukiyaki, Conrad has 'washed unexposed Kalvar stock, cut it up, and cooked it'; he next 'dipped the pieces of film in egg and threw them against the screen, which was illuminated by the projector, and they slowly dripped down'.⁴⁸ Conrad's activity does not interrogate photographic (reproductive) processes as such but nonetheless remains part of structural film's larger task of exploring the physical or material constituents of them. The 'structural' label covers many approaches to a perceived need to draw attention to the various aspects (light, film, movement, projection, time) founding the 'illusionism' of realist image practices in commercial cinema. Whereas Conrad abandons the filmic

image altogether, some film makers take the reproductive image potential of film as the starting point for their critiques.

Stan Brakhage renewed interest in the direct technique in one of his 'transitional' films; Mothlight (1963) is often presented as the film in which Brakhage mediated between the Second (poetic) and the Third (structural) American avant gardes. In this, Brakhage 'treated' the film strip by pasting moth wings and leaves between strips of mylar tape then running it through an optical printer. Renan quotes Brakhage as saying that the negative effect of this light collage is 'what a moth might see from birth to death if black were white'⁴⁹ - a poetic metaphor generated by work on the film strip itself. Bringing the film strip to the spectator's consciousness does not, however, have to be structural but may belong to the formal. For instance, Dog Star Man/The Art Of Vision defines Brakhage's aesthetic as one in which he:

... deliberately makes the splices visible, draws on his films, scratches and punctures them, repeats shots and turns them upside down; the image sometimes appears negative or can be over- or under-exposed or spoiled by camera shake, there can be blurred super-impositions or it can be almost invisible because there are so few frames.⁵⁰

The purpose of this is symbolic to convey inner emotional states through distortion of the film strip as metaphor for 'seeing' with what he termed in 'closed-eye vision' (cf. Vertov's 'kino-eye'). Structural film, in contrast, takes the film strip as its own subject, taking apart the processes of the film strip to illustrate the material basis of film images. George Landow's A film in which there appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, etc. (1965-66) is the most famous example of a film in which the 'content' (a 'found' image of a girl's head) is reduced to a

minimum in order to present an experience of movement solely through the visible flux of dust particles gathering in the sprocket holes. The material qualities of film stock are also explored as fundamental to the process of image formation in Ken Jacobs' Tom Tom the Piper's Son (1969) described by Hein as a primary example of a movement from 'reality of representation to the reality of the film-strip and its material constitution':

He starts with a 10 min. burlesque film of 1904 which, after one complete run-through, is analysed sequence by sequence after being refilmed from the screen. Parts are repeated at differing speeds, including slow-motion; isolated fragments are run forwards and backwards, and details grow larger and larger until the image dissolves into bright and dark spots and the film-grain becomes visible.⁵¹

Both le Grice and Hein cite Paul Sharits' Axiomatic Granularity (1973) and Apparent Motion (1975) as important for doing away with the photographic image entirely and working solely with the textural qualities of exposed film strip.

Projection

This category relates to the fact that it is only in projection that the impression of motion is conveyed. Hein suggests that there are forms of purely filmic motion and that motion in film is a 'possibility, but not a necessity, for single images on the film strip can be identical': 'for this reason duration is an integral part of film'.

Under the heading of projection, it is possible to place those films concerned with the condition of film in its temporal dimension which is often taken to be the non-reducible 'specificity' of the medium. Against the artificially condensed and

manipulated narrative time of commercial cinema, Sitney states that the fixed camera is crucial to structural film because it permits analyses of the concept of film duration. Loopprinting, as practiced by Joyce Wieland in Sailboat (1967)⁵², similarly frees the spectator from the constraints of motivated, linear narrative time by drawing attention instead to the experience of projection time itself - 'without the kinetic element of repeated loops, repetition of identifiable elements is an essential prerequisite for the establishment of systemic structure'.⁵³ Andy Warhol's early silent fixed frame films find their structure in the specificity of film duration, a concrete duration in which the material time of filming and the projection time of viewing coincide:

[Warhol] made famous the fixed frame in Sleep, in which half a dozen shots are seen for over six hours. In order to achieve that elongation he used both loopprinting of whole one hundred feet takes (2¾ minutes) and, in the end, the freezing of a still image of the sleeper's head.⁵⁴

Eat, Sleep, Kiss and Empire refuse film movement, sound or dramatic event in favour of an exploration of film duration: 'duration confronts the spectator with film itself as material and as a process of representation'.⁵⁵ It must be noted that Warhol's minimalist 'one shot' films, while analytical of film duration, depend for their effect on the spectator's acceptance of the 'presence' of the films' represented content in direct contrast to the structural work on the image base of film so far discussed. Michael Snow's Wavelength (1967) - 45 minutes of continuous zoom - also explores the 'time/movement continuum' using the 'limitation' of continuous static camera with pans and zooms (with rotation in

La Région Centrale (1971)) to examine the spatial/temporal construction of film duration.⁵⁶ In Wavelength, the 'camera and its lens maintain their status as physical tools while allowing for an interpretation as a complex model for perception':

The film begins with an act of pure recording as if the camera were a completely passive tabula rasa instrument capable of preserving without distortion the impress of the exterior world. The image shows an empty loft and sound records the street noise outside of it. When people enter the loft carrying a bookcase we hear them in synchronization. But soon after, the natural sound is suspended and replaced by an artificially generated sine wave. On the visual track flashes of pure color (sic), transitions to negative, slight superimpositions occur. Thus both the sound and picture recording instruments begin to generate their own subject matter.⁵⁷

The Perceived Image

From the motion implied by projection through after-image and stroboscopic effect, in feature films there is no creative difference except movement between each frame and the film strip whereas in structural film the perception of a single-frame film is not the same as appears on the film strip.

Robert Breer's experiments with a 'frame by frame collision of totally disparate images' in Recreation (1956) and later in Blazes (1961) in which 'a hundred basic images switching position for four thousand times'⁵⁸ illustrate the 'conditions of illusion' of filmic movement. These are clearly indebted to the kinetic work of Richter but make more extensive analysis of the single-frame as unit of film signification: 'one of Breer's discoveries was the simple fact that two different images on consecutive frames give the effect of a single super-imposition; the chain of different images means the eye has to chose what it wants to see'.⁵⁹ The

'perceptual' film has been characterized by le Grice as film which works upon the spectator at a 'pre-conscious' rather than 'psycho-interpretive level'.⁶⁰ Guided by the concept of retinal retention, 'flicker' films utilize rapid sequential contrasts to elicit an 'autonomic nervous response'. Tony Conrad's eponymous The Flicker (1966) offers a 'simple progression from twenty four flashes a second (camera speed) to four flashes and back to twenty-four in the space of thirty minutes'.⁶¹ Peter Kubelka has thus been regarded as one the progenitors of the structural film's concern with film perception; his Arnulf Rainer (1957, Austria) is by his own description a study in 'harmonic measurement in time and light' composed of four strips - 'one composed of completely transparent film leader, then a strip of completely black film, and then two strips of magnetic sound, one completely empty, no signal, and the other, continuous sound'.⁶² Without using a camera or editing, Kubelka then cut the strips to a rigorously predefined 'score' to form a tonal perceptual structure of light in metric patternings. Paul Sharits concentrated on the colour 'flicker' film - (Ray Gun Virus 1966) - 'wherein clusters of differentiated single frames of solid colour can appear to almost blend or, each frame insisting on its discreteness, can appear aggressively to vibrate'.⁶³

From Hein's categories, it is evident that the project of dismantling the complex of processes which constitute realist or representational film requires the spectator's consciousness and cognitive perception. The spectator has to this point been given as an unproblematic subject capable of attaining full self-knowledge through viewing structural film de-constructions. This has provided a sharp focus for Peter Gidal's writings and film

making⁶⁴ which are highly charged polemical attacks on 'dominant cinema', and his overtly antagonistic stance marks a shift from structural film's concern with what Peter Wollen has argued is the pursuit of a film 'ontology'⁶⁵ (material as irreducible specificity, an aesthetic concern for purity) towards a politically materialist mode of cultural production under capitalism. The 'bringing to consciousness' of the processes that realist film denies or represses is the central core of Peter Gidal's formulation of film as both structural and 'materialist'; the more abstract concerns of structural film are brought within a conceptual framework that foregrounds the issue of spectatorial positioning in order to 'negate' the dominant experience of viewing.⁶⁶ Thus Gidal's 'materialism' is not solely the reduction of film as material to its physical photo-chemical 'substrate' but also 'materialism' as synonym for Marxist cultural politics: Gidal's aesthetic conflates the two senses: 'true' materialist critique of bourgeois social relations can be made only through the experience of the processes of film as material since all other (representational) forms are in some way complicit with bourgeois oppression. He is concerned to 'produce' a viewing subject through process rather than the passive spectator of the 'cinema of consumption'. Gidal isolates three primary mechanisms by which dominant cinema secures passive spectators: illusionist representation, narrative and identification. While each aspect has some degree of functional autonomy - identification is 'inseparable from the procedures of narrative, though not covered by it'⁶⁷ - they form a complex network of 'repressive' processes which re-present a finished content transparent for an untroubled

consuming viewer. He thus equates dominant cinema with representation (the capacity of film to register an image of something profilmic, to proffer itself as a record of 'reality') and rejects both as deeply complicit with the exploitative relations and ideological formation of the capitalist mode of production. Narrative is an 'illusionist procedure, manipulatory, mystificatory' and the conditions of its functioning are for Gidal wholly repressive: of space - the 'distance between the viewer and the object, a repression of real space in favour of the illusionist space'; of time - the 'implied lengths of time suffer compressions formed by certain technical devices which operate in a codified manner, under specific laws, to repress (material time), and of the discontinuity of film frames - the repression of in-film spaces, 'those perfectly constructed continuities'.⁶⁸ Hence his strident rejection of any 'so-called' Leftist film practice that attempts a politically radical critique by subverting narrative though still retaining a representational image base: an 'avant-garde film defined by its development towards increased materialism and materialist function does not represent, or document, anything'.⁶⁹ For Gidal, the representation of 'content' or of 'people' are primary conditions for the reproductive and non-productive processes of identification. The 'mechanism of identification demands a passive audience, a passive mental posture in the face of a life unlived, a series of representations, a phantasy identified with for the sake of 90 minutes' illusion'.⁷⁰ In brief, radical film practice must by definition provide the means for viewing without the ideological and psychoanalytical implications of identification as:

... that force which impels a movement from one's position in a social space of social meanings or a political space - to and into a different human residence another body or another figure - where the phantasms and fantasies, the realities of one's projections, are enacted.⁷¹

Against narrative, illusionism and identification, he posits structural/materialist film, 'at once object and process', in which 'the real content is the form, form become content. Form is meant as formal operation, not as composition'.⁷² Gidal is not content with the type of reflexivity that permits film procedures to be represented instead of presented in process since it confirms the spectator as consuming and not producing:

The assertion of film as material is, in fact, predicated upon representation, in as much as 'pure' empty acetate running through the projector gate without image (for example) merely sets off another level of abstract (or non-abstract associations). Those associations, when instigated by such a device are no more materialist or non-illusionist than any other associations.⁷³

Rather, the viewing of a structural/materialist film is 'at once viewing a film and viewing the 'coming into presence' of the film i.e. the system of consciousness that produces the work, that is produced by and in it'.⁷⁴ Gidal seeks a film practice in which a 'materialist reading at one with the inscription of the work (which is the work) is enabled or forced' - the construction of the work is coterminous with its deconstruction and the relation of film to 'reality' is not of consequence. The text:

... itself is elaborated and constituted in such a way that the whole work process of reading the marks necessitates a reading of differences and a dialecticisation of the material procedures which produce the marking one is confronted with. The subject of the work is not the invisible artist symbolically inferred through the work's presence, but rather the whole foreground fabric of the complex system of markings itself.⁷⁵

Thus Deke Dusinberre writes of Gidal's Room Film (1973):

The erratic and often unfocused use of the camera effectively yields a camera uninterested (or, at least, disinterested) in the objects it scans. The camera movement is not mechanical, as is the editing procedure, but appears almost random or arbitrary. So that the film privileges the very process of configuration of the image on the part of the recording apparatus and on the part of the viewer; by making the perception of an image on the screen difficult and by rendering those images banal and almost 'meaningless', the film rigorously reduces the semantic element and forces the spectator back on to her/his own capacities for meaning-making.⁷⁶

For Gidal, the 'structuring aspects and the attempts to decipher the structure/reconstruct it, to clarify and analyse the production-process of the specific image at any specific moment' define film as structural/materialist. Again:

Through usage of specific filmic devices such as repetition within duration one is forced to attempt to decipher both the film's material and the film's construct, and to decipher the precise transformations that each co/incidence of cinematic techniques produces.

The activity or 'work' of the viewer in this guarantees that the experience does not degenerate into the meaningless tautology of 'mechanically formalistic' representations of film solely as film, but a dialectical process that results in spectatorial knowledge. Here, in the epistemological space of the perceiving subject, the two metanarratives converge to produce a Modernist politics of anti-representation. The structural film evidently extends (or displaces) the paradigmatic autonomy sanctioning Abstract Formalism and, as such, belongs with the narrative of speculation as the aesthetic legitimation of knowledge of the internal conditions of the medium. However, matters become more complex with Gidal's attempt to inflect structural film within a 'materialist' context, given that materialist philosophy (Marxism) necessarily appeals to

the narrative of liberty. Gidal is thus a hybrid Modernist in appealing to both - knowledge of the internal functioning of film is 'produced' as a kind of antidote to the seduction of, and consequent social oppression by, a popular mass cultural experience of a largely representational cinema. In the name of anti-identification, Gidal articulates quite neatly what from a postmodernist perspective is by now a commonplace: that Left-radical politics have been affiliated with a form of Modernism which makes its art/political avant-gardes responsible for the production of 'knowledge' so as to resist the ideological work done by capitalism in the course of a 'reproduction of the relations of production'. I shall explore this configuration more specifically under the rubric of the narrative of liberty.

To sum up, structural film is centripetal in both its content (film as film) and in the constitution of its marginal aesthetic domain. From a desire to produce more politically conscious social subjects, though, structural/materialist film draws upon the narrative of emancipation. The didactic enterprise of 'producing' anti-capitalist knowledge is thus underwritten by the narrative of speculation which differentiates the Modernist sphere of the aesthetic through a rigorous separation of specialized art practice from 'everyday' life experience - the radical political aesthetic, as discussed above, is afforded only at the cost of this differentiation. Schematically represented:

Modernist:

Dominant Metanarrative: The Narrative of Speculative Spirit

Supplementary : The Narrative of Liberty

Radical Autonomy as Social Critique

Differentiations	:	Knowledge	v	Ideology
		Production	v	Consumption
		Work	v	Pleasure

It has been argued so far that for film to be Modernist it must be brought under the legitimation of the metanarratives which define it as knowledge and, in support of my thesis, I have cited examples of film practice which draw largely upon the narrative of speculation. However, Lyotard's thesis on the epistemological resources which validate modernist knowledge is a useful one to apply to film; for Lyotard, Modernism is construed according to the legitimation claims of two metanarratives which allows a greater flexibility for determining the conditions under which film has been construed as Modernist.

I wish now to pursue how the other grand récit, the narrative of liberty, has equally determined the history and nature of Modernist film making.

Anti-illusionism

It has been suggested that the primary Modernist differentiation, the space of art as knowledge, can be secured only by exclusion from the mass popular consumption of entertainment/illusionist/representational cinema which functions as the norm and sets the agendas for various 'aesthetic' programmes. The logic of this would be to argue that the definition of Modernism thus necessarily excludes the majority of film production/consumption. But there is something dissonant with this conclusion which arises from attempting to balance a historical awareness with a 'purely' theoretical description. From an 'art' point of view, commercial cinema cannot be Modernist being neither autonomous nor emancipatory. However, this conclusion amounts to a very partial grasp of the concept of Modernism; modernism was not solely (nor primarily) an aesthetic phenomenon but the dominant cultural experience of a historical period (c. 1870-1939) of social, economic and technological transformations within industrial capitalist societies. It is the period that Marshall Berman, after Karl Marx, has famously documented as one in which 'all that is solid melts into air'.⁷⁸ The 'maelstrom of modern life' is the result of a complex network of interrelating social, economic and demographic factors: the central contradiction of modern life in the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century is embodied by the figure of Faust - a simultaneous affirmation of the power and human potential of science and technology and a concomitant experience of the destruction of 'traditional' (rural, agricultural) social organization and values. Berman outlines a few of the most

important factors:

... the great discoveries in the physical sciences - changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle; immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurtling them half-way across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and societies... bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market.⁷⁹

Modernism, then, should be regarded as a particular set of cultural rather than, as has become customary to understand, narrowly artistic responses to the social (industrial, economic) processes of modernization. The historico-economic 'base' of Modernism can become obscured when concentrating solely on an atemporal sphere of the aesthetic and it is clear that the very social existence of cinema testifies to the dominance of an industrialised and urban experience for large numbers of the population. Indeed, early cinema has become the privileged signifier of Modernist culture of the Machine Age⁸⁰, fusing science and innovation in a technology for exhibition and consumption on a historically unprecedented mass scale. This raises a seeming paradox: the emergence of the institution of mass cinema may belong with the historical Modernist period but its dominant 'products' (narrative/ illusionist film) cannot be theorized as Modernist according to the terms of definition so far presented. To resolve this, one must shift perspective from the concern with film as autonomous knowledge (as specified by the narrative of speculation) to grasp that from its inception cinema was also subject to legitimation by the narrative

of liberty and that this specifies avant-garde projects under its aegis quite differently.

The key historical text here is, of course, Walter Benjamin's highly influential 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), which theorizes a break from the viewer's absorbed contemplation of art to the 'distracted' but politicized spectator of the new mass media.⁸¹ The most salient points he makes concern the capacity of photography to transform the traditional concept of a work of art by negating its sustaining Romantic concepts: creativity, genius, eternal value, beauty and mystery. Instead, the industrial capacity for the mechanical reproduction of visual imagery works against such 'pre-Modern' notions of artistic production, and devalues the ritual-based 'aura' or ('self-presence') of the artist's 'authentic' art work. Hence, the technique of reproducing exact copies of an art work 'detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition' and, for Benjamin, opens up a whole new conception of the function of art: for 'the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual': from a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; 'to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense'. Benjamin argues that the 'instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice - politics'.⁸² It is not only the repetition of serial reproduction that he sees as the historical uniqueness of the modern epoch. Benjamin also argues that film is a progressive proletarian art medium per se,

providing a 'simultaneous collective experience' of representations of the world not tied to previously realist or naturalist forms (utilizing close-ups, distortions, selections of detail⁸³) and expanding the spectator's sense of the observable 'real' world. Benjamin's essay has been subject to much attention in within recent debates on the shift from modernism to 'post-aesthetic' or 'post-auratic' postmodernism; while I would agree that it certainly marks a fault line between quite different ways of conceiving the 'work' of art, according to my reading of the metanarratives, his thesis is a quintessentially Modernist one in that it defines the emancipatory project of film 'at the service' of liberty for the People (as specified in Marxist dialectical materialism). His concept of the film spectator is of paramount importance to many formulations of the means by which film can be employed for liberational purposes. Consider the following: 'Distraction and concentration form polar opposites which may be stated as follows: A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it', in contrast, 'the distracted mass absorbs the work of art':

The distracted person... can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become solvable by apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses. Today it does so in the film. Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception half way. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.⁸⁴

As a mass proletarian art form, the political function of film derives from the possibility of exploiting this gap between apperception in a state of distraction and the generation of shock effects by anti-naturalistic techniques. This is nowhere more clearly defined than in the work of the 'other' Modernism of which Peter Wollen speaks⁸⁵ - originating in the intellectual upheaval and optimism of post-Revolutionary Russia (1917-30) and later developed in a second (potentially) revolutionary 'moment' - May 1968 in France.

Dziga Vertov and other experimental film workers in the twenties shared the belief that the film medium is inherently revolutionary. It is 'born' Modernist in the sense that its techniques and procedures could be utilized to challenge the dominant bourgeois traditions of Aristotelian theatrical representation, understood as mystificatory and alienating 'opium for the masses'. For nascent socialism, cinema could be invaluable to give knowledge of social reality in unique and formally innovative ways. As Sylvia Harvey points out, Vertov shared with Lenin the view that art should provide 'an account of reality from the point of view of a particular world outlook (Marxism) deployed in the service of a particular social class (the proletariat): there is 'no cinema above classes, no cinema above class struggle: also we know that the cinema is a secondary task and our programme is very simple: to see and show the world in the name of the world proletarian revolution'.⁸⁶ This quotation from Vertov, as Harvey suggests in a footnote, is subject to several readings; a statement of an 'instrumental' approach to film meaning, in which the content

or 'representation' is primary and film form is secondary, or else as a statement on the need to produce new film form in order to 'show' the world anew. Vertov's Kinoks⁸⁷ were concerned to emphasize, with the Constructivists and Futurists⁸⁸, the technological machinery of the new art medium in order to oppose the illusionism of contemporary cinema in the West which ordinarily concealed the 'artifice' of its making. This led to two developments.

Firstly, the idea of film as production; the concept of film as 'work' or 'practice' (as against 'artistic creation' and 'genius') in the post-revolutionary period was shared by other 'workers' in 'cultural production'⁸⁹ and should not be taken as a merely ritualistic concession to Marxist dogma. It is possible to propose, with Robert Stam and Annette Michelson, that Vertov's The Man With A Movie Camera (1929) 'systematically juxtaposes virtually every aspect of cinematographic activity with work as it is conventionally conceived'. Thus he makes a series of analogies: editing=sewing, cleaning film=cleaning streets, film industry=textile industry, turning reel of projector=turning spools of thread. He includes many shots of the camera, screen and projection apparatus to present the socialist message that cinematographers are engaged in collective production equivalent to industrial production while simultaneously foregrounding the film as 'artifice'.⁹⁰

Secondly, the concern with the machinery of filming led Vertov to his theories of Kino-Eye and to the formulation of a radical break with former modes of perception. Within Marxist thinking,

true or 'socialist reality' cannot be found on the surface level of everyday appearances (because alienated, reified and 'ideological'). So too with film: it is 'necessary to get out of the circle of ordinary human vision; reality must be recorded not by imitating it, but by broadening the circle ordinarily encompassed by the human eye'⁹¹:

I, am machine, am showing you a world, the likes of which only I can see... I free myself from today and forever from human immobility, I am in constant movement, I approach and draw away from objects, I crawl under them... This is I, apparatus, manoeuvring (sic) in the chaos of movements, recording one movement after the another in the most complex of combinations... Thus, I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you.⁹²

Condensation of time (through cutting and slow, fast and reverse motion), proximity of spatially disparate phenomena (through montage, superimposition and multiple exposure) and the camera's capacity to select details unconscious to the human eye might be used to break 'with the laws and customs of the construction of the cine-thing'.⁹³

Vertov's formal experiments have been compared to those being undertaken by the Russian group OPOYAZ who were engaged in a radical critique of bourgeois 'realist' literature.⁹⁴ The engagement of Marxist literary aesthetics with the work of the Russian group has been widely acknowledged and with the publication of Herbert Eagle's study of Russian Formalist film theory, it has been possible to assess more effectively the revolutionary theoretical context shared with them by Vertov and other film maker/theoreticians such as Eisenstein, Kuleshov and Pudovkin.⁹⁵ In 1926, Boris Ejxenbaum edited and published a volume of articles

on film theory, Poetics of Cinema, by Tynjanov, Piotrovskij and Kazanskij. Also amongst these was Viktor Sklovskij who had earlier presented his thesis of 'defamiliarization' in the 1919 article 'Art as Device'. The core elements of Russian film Formalism can be summarized as follows:

- a) cinema can only be approached scientifically by bracketing out anything not specific to the medium in order to identify the workings of its 'immanent' signifying procedures;
- b) cinema's representation of people, places and objects must be understood not as the reproduction of reality but as 'material', 'material which was already constructed, through various devices, into a signifying system';
- c) the function of all art is to renew perceptions of social life that have become habitual and automatic.

The 'conventional' structures and 'devices' of art thus become the central focus of film meaning rather than the 'content' of a transparent representation of 'reality'.⁹⁶ I am here confined to acknowledging the Formalist's critique of realistic and naturalistic film practice in which, it is argued, through imperceptible editing techniques and theatrical representation, the viewer is rarely made aware of the 'devices' or 'construction' of film meaning; this is 'bourgeois' and hence politically regressive because the viewer is denied the emotional/aesthetic experience of ostranenie ('making strange') and/or zatrudnenie ('making difficult') achieved through 'laying bare the device'. The 'transformational process' applied to 'life' by 'art'⁹⁷ typifies the anti-illusionist project(s) of Modernist film brought under the narrative of liberty in the equation of aesthetic formal innovation with political avant-gardism. But having said this, wishing to

'lay bare the device' poses some prickly problems for defining the degree of abstractness that the calculation of the estrangement effect might require. For instance, revolutionary work on film form led Ejzenbaum to the theory that film defamiliarizes perception because of its capacity for 'trans-sense' or sensual 'expressivity'⁹⁸ (which parallels Delluc, Epstein and Dulac's concept of 'photogenie'), while Tynjanov's study of the 'laws of production' of film led him to declare that 'cinema is an abstract art' which he developed in his article 'On the Foundations of Cinema'. As Eagle notes, Tynjanov is concerned with the ways in which film is unlike reality, being two dimensional and planar, with its 'restriction to black and white, the absence of natural sound, the boundedness of the film frame, and the restriction to a single point of view in a given shot'.⁹⁹ One must be careful not to allow what is particular to the emancipatory project to fall back under the narrative of speculative spirit as discussed above. How far, then, can the abstract 'devices' or conventional structures of the film as medium subsume representational 'content' before we are returned to the realm of autonomous art and to those differentiations which are anathema to innovation in film form for the purpose of liberating the People?

The question is^a useful one to precede an assessment of Sergei Eisenstein since his theoretical corpus can be understood as evolving a 'materialist' film practice from knowledge of the specificities of the 'devices' of the film medium. Jacques Aumont has recently approached Eisenstein's work in similar terms, offering two major 'categories' of his theory: firstly, those

concepts concerned specifically with the medium qua medium and, secondly, those engaging with the broader social/ideological role of cinema and its political effect on the spectator.¹⁰⁰ Within the former, it is the idea of the vertical fragment that, strictly speaking, comes before the more widely known (and frequently condemned) concept of 'intellectual' montage in that it refers to the constitution of film meaning below the level of the single image. The 'physical' characteristics of film instead become the basic units of montage processes. Eisenstein dismantles the image to utilise various aspects of its semantic potential against the 'horizontal' force of succession and offers a series of filmic fragments which can enter into meaningful relationships or 'contrasts' with other fragments or 'stimuli'.¹⁰¹ In his essay, 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form' (1929), Eisenstein outlines the possible sources of meaningful 'spatial-pictorial contrasts' or, more dialectically, 'conflicts' which may be generated within and between frames - contrasts of linear direction, of planes, of volumes, spatial arrangements, of light, of tone, of camera angle (suggesting conflict between matter and viewpoint), of lens distortion (suggesting conflict between matter and space), of film speed (suggesting conflict between matter and temporality) and between the 'optical complex' and 'acoustical experience' of film viewing. Hence Eisenstein's dictum: 'The shot (frame) is by no means an element of montage. The shot is a montage cell (or molecule)'.¹⁰² Accordingly, 'The Filmic Fourth Dimension' (1929) argues against 'orthodox' montage (that in which 'two shots side by side produces one or another conflicting interrelation') in favour

of an 'overtonal' montage system of 'visual counterpoint' analogous with the orchestration of a musical score: 'in place of an 'aristocracy' of individualistic dominants... a method of 'democratic' rights for all provocations, or stimuli, regarding them as a summary, a complex'.¹⁰³ Eisenstein's schema offers a potentially infinite number of conflicts and contrasts; this is not to suggest that these fragments of meaning can be understood outside of the context of any particular film but that each unit should be determined by the calculated organic unity of the whole film.¹⁰⁴ Eisenstein also theorized in 'Methods of Montage' (1929)¹⁰⁵ the larger units or sequences above the level of the individual shot that could be exploited for the purpose of conflict:

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Temporal montage | - a) metric; mechanical beat of cutting length of shots
b) rhythmic; pattern of movement established when metric pattern is broken at key points; |
| Tonal montage | - patterns of 'emotional tone' e.g. light/dark, sharp/soft or hazy/luminous; |
| Overtonal montage | - the sum total of impressions of the 'collective calculation of all the piece's appeals'; |
| Intellectual montage | - used to make direct intellectual points through metaphorical association of semantically disparate but filmically juxtaposed images e.g. killing of workers/slaughter of bull in <u>Strike</u> (1924); Kerensky/vanity of peacock in <u>October</u> (1927-8). |

What must not be forgotten in this account is that Eisenstein was concerned not simply with the abstract properties of filmic signification but was concerned to orchestrate representational images to maximize meaning-effect at an immediately political level. Whereas Peter Gidal's 'materialism' was shown to be predicated upon a total refusal of representation, as negative 'work' on the consumption of identificatory film, Eisenstein is concerned to exploit the spectating subject in order to provoke a positive response to the articulation of a representational image base through montage procedures. This takes discussion to the second 'category' of Eisenstein's theoretical corpus which addresses the 'psycho-physiological' effect upon the viewer.

As with the concept of montage, several stages of Eisenstein's thinking about the calculation of 'effect' can be traced at different points in his theoretical writings. Firstly, the concept of 'attraction' formally defined by Eisenstein in a manifesto in Lef (1923):

Attraction (from the point of view of the theatre) is every aggressive moment of the theatre performance, that is, every element subjecting the spectator to a sensory or psychic action verified by means of experiment and mathematically calculated to produce in the spectator certain emotional shocks which, in turn, once they have been united, alone determine the possibility of perceiving the ideological aspect of the performance given, its final ideological conclusion.¹⁰⁶

Given that Eisenstein's concept of attraction in cinema develops from earlier theatrical work/performances, it is right that several commentators should have pointed out that this quotation also defines 'epic' theatre and the concept of 'distantiation' or verfremdungseffekt as formulated by Bertholt Brecht. Martin Walsh, in his volume The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema (1981), makes

explicit that the anti-illusionist practices of Eisenstein and Brecht owe a large debt to Meyerhold's theory of 'agit attractions' in which the spectator is refused the comfort of identification through the interposition of elements drawn from non-naturalistic performances such as the circus or music hall.¹⁰⁷ The 'principle of attraction' in cinema is exemplified for Aumont in Battleship Potemkin (1925) by:

- a) the close-up of vermin which precedes the medical officer's dive into the sea;
- b) the allegorical monument which serves as an introduction to the Odessa of the tyrants;
- c) the awakening of the lion-people.

Aumont shows that while 'attraction' does not always work so metaphorically, these shots produce the required spectatorial shock (or 'estrangement') initially because of their autonomy with regard to the theme of the section in which they are embedded, and then by the 'associations' to which they give rise - 'by the concatenation with other attractions, the whole chain being what makes it possible to transmit this 'theme' to the spectator'.¹⁰⁸ It is clear that Eisenstein's use of the concept of 'attraction' is very much part of the Pavlovian scientificity of 'reflexology', based on an action - reaction model of human responses to external stimuli which, in his system, are held to be calculable for the purposes of political (socialist) effect.

Again, Aumont is most instructive in pointing to a major tension in the use of 'attraction' for forcing the spectator into political consciousness, a contradiction 'between its

aggressiveness, its surprise aspect (its Proletkult aspect), and its efficacy, its utilitarianism (its Leninist aspect, so to speak)'.¹⁰⁹ In other words, shock attraction alone ('the rap on the skull', 'the kino-fist') cannot guarantee that the spectator will be 'moulded' in a politically/ ideologically 'correct' way. The ensuing shift in Eisenstein's theory of film efficacy can be understood through the double-sided nature of its goal (both ideological and subjective) and the:

... progressive effacing of the first determination, or, rather, its reabsorption into a more and more stereotyped and invalid 'political discourse', in favour of a development, even a hypertrophy of the action exerted upon the spectator as a source of 'energy'.¹¹⁰

The more refined concept of 'pathos' replaces the crudity of political effect upon the spectator in shock attraction or 'dialectical' conflict; in turn, pathos (a new 'offensive psychologism' aimed at 'pumping up', 'recharging' and heightening the spectator's consciousness) is replaced by a politicized form of 'ecstasy' (taken from the Greek ek-stasis, to move one out of oneself) in which the subjective experience rather than political consciousness of the spectator is exploited for ideological ends. However, for all of Eisenstein's attempt to refine the original Proletkult theory of attraction, it nonetheless remains apparent that 'attraction', 'pathos' and 'ecstasy' share the aim of directing the spectator along pre-given paths of meaning, based on the assumption of correspondence between formal techniques, psychological reception and concomitant political effect. Since this is the primary principle of any film to be formulated under the narrative of liberty as anti-illusionist, it is not surprising

to find that later work on political/revolutionary film form by Jean-Luc Godard (and contemporaries in the aptly-named Dziga Vertov Group) is formulated within this reference frame.

Robert Stam, Sylvia Harvey, Colin MacCabe, Peter Wollen and Kirsten Thompson have each in varying ways proposed that Godard's radical film practice rests upon what I term a dis-articulation of naturalism/illusionism, or, an adaptation and development of Brechtian distantiation for film.¹¹¹ In Wollen's words:

For Godard, conflict becomes not simply collision through juxtaposition, as in Eisenstein's model, but an act of negativity, a splitting apart of an apparently natural unity, a disjunction. Godard's view of bourgeois communication is one of a discourse gaining power from its apparent naturalness, the impression of necessity that seems to bind a signifier to a signified, a sound to an image, in order to provide a convincing representation of the world.¹¹²

The means by which Godard accomplishes the 'deconstruction' of the illusionist narrative film are numerous and spread widely across his film production. For illustrative purposes only, I offer a few primary examples of Godardian techniques. Thompson, in her Chapter 'Sawing Through the Bough: Tout va Bien as a Brechtian Film',¹¹³ identifies three ways in which Godard applies Brecht's idea of defamiliarization through the 'separation of elements' - isolating and working upon the various components of the medium to draw attention to the constructed nature of illusionist film and to involve the spectator in a productive rather than consumptive relation to the experience of viewing.

Firstly, interruption, which is the 'insertion of material that breaks up a smooth, logical chain of narrative causes and effects' that 'serve in some way as a critique or illustration of

the position put forth in the scene' - e.g. the interview between Susan and Georgette (a factory worker) starts with the camera on the back of a woman worker and is intercut by shots of her now facing the camera and reciting a radical song as commentary on the working conditions that necessitate the interview. Similarly, graphic titles or printed material may be interposed to summarize in advance the concerns of the narrative, or the dominant action may be counterpointed with contradictory images or activities.¹¹⁴

Secondly, contradiction, the 'joining of stylistic techniques in a discontinuous manner, which breaks down classical norms'.¹¹⁵

Robert Stam concords with the view that Godard engages in a 'series of guerilla raids on orthodox continuity'. For him, Pierrot le Fou (1965) and Tout va Bien (1972), for instance, 'foreground the primordial discontinuity of film itself'¹¹⁶: the continuities of clothing and characterization are tampered with, actor positioning, sequence of actions and movements (duplicated and/or out of conventional order) contravene Hollywood realist codes, eye line matches are ignored, scene changes are abrupt and unmotivated by theme or narrative, and scenes are fragmented by the famous 'jump cuts'. Stam argues that, through these, Godard continually draws attention to the fact that realist film is constructed through the splicing and sequencing of static images in such a way as to appear a natural representation of reality. It is for this reason that Godard also makes the discontinuity between sound-track and image-track functional for his political aesthetic: opposing lip-synch and 'naturalized' (but not natural) studio sound which is usually subordinated to the demands of narrative and dramatic codes, Godard exploits the unsettling effects of sound through

mismatches between sound and image. For instance, in Masculine/Feminine (1966), obtrusive ambient noise drowning out the lovers' conversation draws attention to the way in which Hollywood film usually restricts audial information to dialogue, authenticating background sound and incidental music. Godard uses voice-over at odds with the character on-screen or will have characters comment off-screen to produce a spectator aware of the discontinuity between the sound and image 'elements' of film signification.

Thirdly, refraction, which is the 'mediation between the events depicted and the spectator's perception of those events'. Thompson suggests that Godard's foregrounding of film making itself in Tout va Bien procures the necessary distance between spectator and events 'represented' - the opening and closing discussions: possible film scenarios, box office takes, making of the film and expenditure upon it, need for stars, etc. In Stam's terms, the film highlights a series of issues around production and consumption: the 'working class as producers and consumers of goods; artists and intellectuals as producers and consumers of information; filmmakers and audiences as the producers and consumers of film'. In short, the film 'unmasks the alienated nature of cultural work in class society' by 'reminding us of cinema's economic base and institutional superstructure'.¹¹⁷ Or, the play with Susan's monologue (excess of verbal/written information and false English/French/English translations) further emphasizes the need for the spectator's distance from the fiction in order to recognize the 'critical découpage of social existence'.

Stam similarly argues, in terms so close to those of Eisenstein, that 'technique in Tout va Bien is not something that exists in the service of the political message - it is the political message'.¹¹⁸ In short, the political purpose of such techniques is to 'estrangle' in such a way as to bring the active spectator into a relation of knowledge. MacCabe, in his article 'The Politics of Separation', defines the purpose of anti-illusionism thus:

What is important, therefore, is that in the separation of the elements the spectator gets separated out of this unity and homogeneity - this passivity - in order to enter into an active appropriation of the scenes presented to him. This active appropriation is the aim of epic theatre - it is the production of knowledge.¹¹⁹

Later in this work, I shall reconsider more fully the assumption that the 'separation of elements' is in itself estranging and hence politically progressive.

To draw this section to a provisional close, the chief proposals of Anti-illusionist film as specified by the narrative of liberty (from the Left/radical problematic metonymically represented here by Vertov, Eisenstein, Brecht, Godard) can be summarized as follows:

- a) a primary distinction must be established between films that 'interrogate' the illusionist codes of narrative realism and those that are anti-representational, which refuse the analogical capacity of cinematography altogether - Eisenstein, Vertov and Godard each retain a recognizable representational image base either to exploit the semantic potential of conflicting images 'of', or to subvert from within the seeming 'naturalness' of illusionism;
- b) film as a representational system is posed as discrete from social reality, not as a wholly autonomous system, but one that is capable of giving dialectical knowledge of that reality;
- c) the political effect of the gap between film as representation and real relations of social reality is experienced by the spectator as 'distantiation' which produces knowledge of the ideological constitution of representational systems;
- d) that knowledge of reality through demystification is in itself emancipatory.

The differentiations outlined for the emancipatory component of Structural/Materialist film also pertain here though representation and reality are posed quite differently, becoming interactive and mutually determining. To some degree the centripetal force of autonomous knowledge (of the specificities of the film medium) entailed by the narrative of speculative spirit is present but this is of secondary concern to the major task of producing emancipatory knowledge:

Dominant Metanarrative:	The Narrative of Liberty		
Supplementary:	The Narrative of Speculative Spirit		
	Representation as Social Critique		
Differentiations:	Estrangement	v	Identification
	Knowledge	v	Ideology
	Reality	v	Representation
	Production	v	Consumption

Surrealism

It was concluded above that Anti-illusionist projects under the narrative of liberty specified the terms 'representation' and 'reality' on the capacity of film (as cultural representation) to distance the viewer, and hence produce knowledge of the real (class) conditions of social existence; in other words, that there exists a 'real' outside of representation of which knowledge may be gained.

A second related set of arguments were put forward about the degree of investment made by the different Modernist practices in the realist/representational qualities of the film image. It was suggested that Anti-illusionism did not necessarily entail anti-representationalism since anti-representationalism was found to be the defining characteristic of Abstract Formalist, Structural and Structural/Materialist film making. Any Anti-illusionist project must then, I would maintain, necessarily retain a representational image base and those conventions which ordinarily constitute the 'illusion of reality' either to use verisimilitude in order to calculate politically motivated readings, or to subvert and transgress that system of representation ('intervention' and work 'within' rather than abandonment and work 'elsewhere'). On the basis of these findings, it is possible to hazard the following: where film making is legitimated by the narrative of speculative spirit, it will forsake representation so as to examine the internal conditions of the medium; where it is legitimated by the narrative of liberty, it will exploit the spectator's recognition of 'reality' either for the political effects of montage or for the

didactic 'deconstruction' of cinematic form, the realism of film being used for knowledge of 'social reality'. Turning to Surrealist film theory and practice, however, it emerges that 'representation' and 'reality' can enter wholly different relations (which recast the terms of the above hypothesis by refusing to grant the distinctions that permit knowledge of reality at all) but still remain within the narrative of liberty. There are two main components of Surrealist film thought; the profound influence of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical model for the Surrealist production of art in general and of film as 'dream' in particular, and a consequent challenge to the epistemological schema entailed by the notion of film as representation of reality.

Stemming from Dada's earlier political rejection of bourgeois culture (especially art) for its collusion with the same 'morality' that produced the futile carnage and slaughter of the First World War, Breton's 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924) contains a utopian plea for the imagination:

The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, then there is every reason to seize them - first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason.¹²⁰

It would be difficult to overemphasize the degree of influence exerted upon the theoretical origins of Surrealism by Freud's formulation of the structure and functioning of the human mind. His two-tier model of psychic apparatus comprised of primary processes - the dreams, fantasies and drives of the unconscious, governed by forces of desire (sexual/death drives), and secondary processes - the waking thought and memories of the conscious,

governed by the reality principle (social/normative). Freud's work on the 'disturbances' of the 'psychopathology of everyday life' led him to theorize the relations between unconscious demands for satisfaction of desires and conscious prohibition of its fulfilment in terms of an incessant dynamic of conflict, resistance, reconciliation and repression. The practice of psychoanalysis, the 'talking cure', aims to gain access to the unconscious but can do so only through its representation thus the dream could be interpreted as primary representation of the workings of the unconscious. Freud's analyses of dream-work became crucially important to Surrealist artists as model for the manner in which psychic desires and wish-fulfilments are refused free reign by the interdictory forces of the rational conscious mind. The 1924 Manifesto makes explicit Surrealist debt to Freud's 'discovery' of the unconscious, and how this unconscious is equated with the 'pure' freedom of imagination, in the putative dictionary definition offered by Breton:

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.¹²¹

In the 'absence of control exercised by reason', Surrealist action centred upon ways of allowing the free transmission of preconscious

mental processes: 'periode des sommeils' (self-induced hypnotic sleep), the 'free association' of automatic writing and drawings, the random construction of collages from undirected selection of everyday materials, the exhibition of 'found' objects, frottage and grattage techniques in painting.¹²² On both political and artistic grounds, the Surrealist 'state of mind' opposed the rationality inherent in contemporary moral and artistic intention, seeking instead the accidental and contingent as the most effective means for the dual purpose of loosening control by conscious thought and of gaining access to unconscious processes. Early Surrealist attention to cinema was marked by attempts to thwart the rationality enforced upon the spectator by breaking with usual conventions of viewing. J. H. Matthews' study Surrealism and Film (1971) begins with the oft-cited account of how, during the First World War, Andre Breton and Jacques Vaché would rush to view part of a commercial film until boredom would force them on to another cinema and to another film segment and so on. Hence Breton's view of cinema: 'I think what we valued most in it, to the point of taking no interest in anything else, was its power to disorient (son pouvoir de dépaysement)'.¹²³ Arbitrarily 'selecting' images no longer bound by narrative conventions or thematic organisation offered the possibility of mentally juxtaposing those images in extra-ordinary because logically unmotivated combinations. For Breton, 'dépaysement' or disorientation is defined as 'a discordance, deliberately as wide as possible, between the "lesson" the film teaches and the manner in which the person receiving it disposes of it' which leads Matthews to suggest that, for the Surrealist:

Interpretation becomes a more creative act than an evaluative one; or rather, evaluation is identified with creation in a manner proving beyond doubt that surrealism is less a style or method than a state of mind which the film provides the occasion for externalising.¹²⁴

The concept of a reality superior to that presented to rational thought by surface appearance challenges the anteriority of an ontologically distinct realm of an empirical 'real' and instates prelogical human desire as a constructive agent in a newly subjectivised sense of the real. The experience of Surrealism demands a participant-spectator for whom 'poetic effect' derives from the pleasure/stimulation of the loosening of reality's grip on perception. Surreality, as Weightman and Matthews agree, should thus be understood with the semantic value of super-reality, that is, reality intensified to a new level of meaning by the acknowledgement of the repressed psychic dimension of human existence.¹²⁵ It is for this reason that one development of later Surrealists was to give precedence to the spectator's capacity to achieve the heightened effect of 'depaysement' through viewing the most banal of films. Salvador Dalí had formulated this 'critical paranoia' as a 'spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations'.¹²⁶ Through a process of 'enlargement', Joseph von Sternberg's Shanghai Express (1936) could be read not at surface level but interpreted 'irrationally' to reach a latent level of content not available to the viewer who simply responds to the rationality/reality of the representation.¹²⁷ The analogy with Freud's latent/manifest model of interpretation is clear but the abstract facility of any

spectator to experience 'visual, mental and emotional dislocation' has little to say on how specific film techniques, rather than cinema in general, may engender the desired disorientation.

Dawn Ades¹²⁸ notes that Breton's earlier 'dictionary' definition was not primarily concerned with painting or even the visual in general but rather with attacking 'instrumental' language in favour of writing as 'poetic effect' and, with Linda Williams, it can be argued that an appropriately filmic formulation of Surrealism also derives not from painting but from language and the workings of the verbal sign. Breton describes how he and Phillipe Soupault came to a theoretical understanding of Surrealism and to the automatic production of poetry as 'pure expression' through statements made by the poet Pierre Reverdy:

The image is a pure creation of the mind.

It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities.

The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be - the greater its emotional power and poetic reality.¹²⁹

In Part One of her excellent work Figures of Desire (1980), Williams supplements the Manifesto with further statements by Reverdy taken from his 1918 article 'L'Image':

The emotion thus provoked is poetically pure because it is born outside of all imitation, all evocation, all comparison.

One can create... a powerful image, new to the mind, by bringing together two distant realities whose relationship the mind alone has grasped.¹³⁰

Reverdy's concept of poetic language as the juxtaposition of 'two distant realities' calls forth Lautremont's frequently cited image 'as beautiful as the chance encounter on a dissecting-table of a sewing machine and an umbrella'. Applying the same concept to film, however, draws attention to the very different conditions of language and cinematography. Reverdy can be claimed as a leading precursor of a specifically Surrealist understanding of the film medium though his awareness of the potential for disorientation caused to the spectator by the splicing together of disparate images but that awareness, it must be added, is limited. Williams makes the important point that the act of combining distant realities may well produce poetic emotion in verbal language (given that this contravenes the rules governing normal language use) but the effect is severely reduced in film because juxtaposition (or montage) is the actual - normal - mode of procedure or condition of filmic expression. Narrative conventions already in place by 1918 would thus deny the viewer any real sense of surprise when confronted, in Reverdy's example, with a shot of a woman looking out of a window followed by one of a cloudy sky. Similarly, Soupault's attempt to generate surprise effect by exploiting film's capacity to 'upset the natural laws of space and time' through special effects and cutting (a woman sits down and stands up as a man who sits down as a child etc.) is not fully Surrealist in that the surprise 'exists only in relation to the laws of the real world', that is, the spectator is confirmed in the reality of those laws and surprised only at the unreality of the film images in relation to them.¹³¹

Drawing from the conclusion that the surprise of 'dépaysement'

can rarely be derived from the montage juxtaposition of 'distant' realist images (though Eisenstein's theory of shock attractions might dispute this), Surrealist thinking began to consider how film's unique ability to offer the spectator what seems to be a direct representation of reality might be exploited in ways which could radically redefine the effect of that illusion. In short, Surrealism maximizes the strength of film's reality effect for non-realistic - surrealist/superrealistic - purposes by setting the realism of the image against the unreality of what is represented thus loosening the bond between film reality and a reality given as preexistent. Whereas Anti-illusionism renounces film realism in favour of an external reality, in Surrealism the principle of an external 'real reality' has little force since the film is 'born outside of all imitation, all evocation, all comparison':

... the Surrealist artistic image only pretends to create the illusion of real space, no matter how meticulously drawn (Magritte) or even photographed (Man Ray) the objects in it might be... the image is simply the space of an encounter and never the illusion of a previously existing place.¹³²

Jacques Brunius makes explicit how the Surrealist comprehends the relationship between film and reality through its 'incomparable facility for passing over the bridge in both directions'; the 'extraordinary and sumptuous solidity it contributes to the creations of the mind, objectifying them in the most convincing fashion' while making 'exterior reality submit in the opposite direction to subjectization'.¹³³ The terms of Surrealist dislocation of the conceptual relations of representation/reality can be fully gauged from Brunius' statement that 'what is admirable

in realism is that there is no more real, there is only the fantastic', and from Breton's 1924 rejoinder that 'what is admirable in the fantastic is that there is no more fantastic; there is only the real'.¹³⁴ Surrealism does away with the order and logic that divides reality from fantasy and in its place appeals to the dream as a system of representation that utilizes a 'disinterested play of thought... exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern' to express the unconscious desires.

The dream as model has been closely examined by Linda Williams who argues that the specificity of Surrealist film practice can only be approached through a distinction between dream form and dream content, between the structure of latent drives and manifest content. For Freud, the dream is a special case in that it allows unconscious primary processes a form of expression or representation; the process of transforming the latent thoughts into the manifest content of a dream - the dream-work - necessarily entails forms of distortion that present an apparent chaos of visual symbols:

... each separate impulse seeks satisfaction independently of the rest; they proceed uninfluenced by one another; contradictions are completely inoperative... associations of ideas proceed along lines without any regard to logic; similarities are treated as identities, negatives are equated with positives... these objects to which conative trends are attached in the unconscious are extraordinarily changeable - one may be replaced along a whole chain of associations that have no rational basis.¹³⁵

Manifest content is not therefore meaningful in itself.¹³⁶ Still, despite the chaotic illogicality of dream events, one of the chief features of the dreaming experience is the strong sense of its own

reality, its internal conditions of normality, even though waking thought proves inadequate to the task of recounting extraordinary dream events. Bunuel's L'Age d'or (1930) and (with Dali) Un Chien andalou (1929) are Surrealist not simply because of the absurdity of what is represented to the spectator but because, Williams argues, they approximate the form of a dream with a visual style that corresponds to the way the workings of the unconscious is experienced 'rather than the way it appears to the logical mind'.

Surrealist film imitates the dream experience firstly by attempting to 'approximate as closely as possible to the dreamer's belief in the reality of the signifier, a signifier that the dreamer thinks is perceived but is really only imagined'.¹³⁷ Hence the use of realism, which draws attention away from the level of the signifier and towards the perception of the signified content, the avoidance of cinematic distortions which would disrupt the spectator's identification with the screen image and disturb profilmic vraisemblance, and of any symbolic filmic representation of dream content which must remain at the surface level of the strangeness of the manifest. Williams proceeds to scrutinize L'Age d'or, Un Chien andalou and Bunuel's later That Obscure Object of Desire¹³⁸ in terms of how they 'elaborate a structure of opposition which expresses not so much the desire for an object as the psychic process of desire itself',¹³⁹ which leads to the second means available to film for the imitation of dream states (derived from Freud's theory that dream distortion 'works' but, importantly, 'does not think'): the processes of condensation and displacement. In his The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), Freud outlined

a) the metaphoric mechanism of condensation which explains the principle of omission/selection by which 'only a few elements from the dream-thoughts find their way into the [manifest] dream-content'; and b) the metonymic mechanism of displacement by which 'the dream content is differently centred from the dream thoughts - its content has different elements from its central point'.¹⁴⁰ For instance, in Un Chien andalou, the manifest thematic groups of mutilation/cutting, fascination of body parts and the context of male/female relations are shown to be (as in Freud's interpretative schema) overdetermined, here, by a castration anxiety and counterwish for plenitude in the form of clothing as fetish object: the 'prologue metaphor of cutting posits a gap-split-absence, which the metonymy of the fetish garments attempts to disavow':

The desire expressed... cannot be directly named or diegetically presented: it can only be generated by a hidden discourse, which like the discourse of the unconscious in dreams, Freudian slips, or bungled actions disturbs and rearranges the memory traces, logical speech, and action of our daily lives.¹⁴¹

William's analyses are heavily informed by Lacan's re-reading of Freud's tiered model; it is, however, important for my argument on postmodernism that these later theoretical perspectives are kept apart from early Surrealist film makers' use of Freud for reasons I will demonstrate. Nonetheless, I do find Williams very useful in the task of defining the real/representation relations in Surrealist films especially in conjunction with Christian Metz's development of Lacan's revaluation of condensation and displacement in view of Benveniste/Jakobson's work on linguistic figuration. Metz proposes a four-part 'logic' or taxonomy of visual (rather

than verbal) tropes - metaphor and metonymy in relations of both 'contiguity' and 'similarity' - as a mode of operation common to both dream-work and film signification. 'Every figural operation in a text corresponds to mental paths that can be laid down in the minds of the creator or spectator'¹⁴²; in Part IV of Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier (1982), Metz contends that film and dream figuration share their use of the poles of metaphor and metonymy but notes that film Surrealism is exceptional in its manipulation of referential and discursive relations within the figural operations:

It does of course happen, especially (but not only) in more or less non-representational contexts (this is partly what defines them), that metaphorical juxtapositions - 'ideas', sparks, incongruous encounters... invade the surface fabric of the text and are responsible for a large proportion of the final contiguities, which is to say most of the work as such. But in these cases metaphor is creating not metonymy but the syntagma. It does not serve to fabricate or underline relations of proximity in the world, or in the diegesis... but to activate relations between elements coexisting in the discourse, and ultimately (although this limit is never reached) to exclude any juxtapositions coming from elsewhere.¹⁴³

Following this, rather than treating metaphor/metonymy as 'poetic' figures distinct from the 'realistic' narrative in which they are embedded, Williams agrees that Surrealist film dissolves the distinction and refuses the spectator a diegetic reality in relation to which a metaphor or metonymy may function. Rather than working as individual rhetorical tropes, metonymy and metaphor form a 'figural complex' and, in imitation of the dream-work, it is desire which is the 'cause' that 'figures' the whole film.

One must be careful to retain a historical perspective and

observe that the Surrealist movement's understanding of Freud cannot be made to support the rigour of this form of psychoanalytical exegesis for at least one good reason. For Breton, Ernst, Buñuel and Dalí, Freud's 'discovery' of the unconscious validated their wish to escape from the rationality and constriction of conscious social life and into the free expression of human desire. Freud's psychoanalysis, on the other hand, was largely concerned with the process of curing psychic disturbances to facilitate the patient's return to a 'normal' existence, and not with encouraging the free play of unconscious processes in the name of the liberation of the imagination. This distinction is of profound importance for assessing the political purpose of Surrealism, a purpose which may be lost through concentrating solely on psychoanalysis and forgetting 'dépaysement'. The political consequence of artistic 'dépaysement', or spectatorial disorientation, sought by Surrealist film makers, cannot be recuperated in Brechtian terms. Ben Brewster in his article 'From Shklovsky to Brecht: A Reply' makes the point that Surrealism does not retain a distance or margin from which reality may be perceived:

Brecht talked of a 'return from alienation' to distinguish his own position from that of the historical avant-gardes: 'Dadaism and surrealism use alienation effects of the most extreme kind. Their objects do not return from alienation'. Their use of the A-effect was primitive 'because the function of this art is paralysed from the social point of view, so that here art no longer functions. As far as its effect is concerned, it ends in amusement.¹⁴⁴

Breton, in a lecture in 1934, spoke of the disjunction between Surrealist political and artistic activity:

In reality two problems exist: one is the problem of knowledge raised, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the relations between the conscious and the unconscious. We Surrealists seemed chosen for this problem: we were the first to apply to its solution a special method, which still appears to us among the most suitable and capable of perfection: we see no reason to renounce it. The other problem which presents itself to us is that of the social action to be adopted - action which, according to us, has its proper method in dialectical materialism, action which we cannot forego in as much as we hold that the liberation of mankind is the first condition for the liberation of the spirit, and that this liberation of mankind can only be expected from the proletarian revolution.¹⁴⁵

Enlisting art in the project of emancipating individuals from the constraints of conscious thought and conventional morality must place Surrealism under the Modernist narrative of liberty. But the effect of that 'revolution' cannot be understood in orthodox political terms, that is, it is difficult to reconcile the libertarian end point of Surrealism with the dictates of Marxist philosophy since liberation is not determined in relation to the organization of social 'reality'. Even an orthodox Freudian reading provides interpretative logic and structure to films in which the Surrealists had disintegrated coherence and causality in pursuit of a 'depaysement' effect without explicable sense. For this reason, it is not possible to plot differentiations for Surrealism as either autonomous or socially useful knowledge, nor place its mode of film signification along the real/representation divide. This is not, I would suggest, without significance, and I shall return in Chapter Five to question the implications for a definition of postmodernism of the fact that Surrealism does not fit easily with Lyotard's Modernist grands récits.

Avant Garde :

Dominant Metanarrative : **The Narrative of Liberty**
 : **Radical Critique of Real/**
 Representation divide

Differentiations : **Desire v Rationality**
 Unconscious v Conscious
 Imagination v Reason
 Automatism v Creativity

NOTES: CHAPTER TWO

1. ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Postmodernism and Its Discontents (1988), p. 2.

2. It would take discussion beyond the confines of this Chapter to pursue analogous developments in European painting; broadly speaking, this could be seen as the shift from rule-governed principles of mimesis to Platonic 'inspired madness' as the dominant means of grasping transcendental universals in pictorial art. For an excellent summary of this shift, and on later developments towards Abstract Expressionism, see 'A Differance' by Simon Morley, Art & Design Special Issue 4: 3/4 (1988), pp. 27-32. who places Derrida, somewhat surprisingly, as the last in a line of 'metaphysical' thinkers who have understood artistic expression in terms of creative subjectivity.

3. For a general discussion of Postmodernist trends in painting, see the Special Issue of Art & design above: also, Kroker & Cook The Postmodernist Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics (1988), and Charles Jencks (1986).

4. See my comments and footnote in the Introduction to this study for bibliographical references.

Autonomy and Modernist Differentiation

5. Theodore Adorno, Aesthetic Theory (1970). Citations: p.2, p.9, p. 9-10, and p. 213. In this context, see especially Chapter 1, 'Art, society, aesthetics', pp. 1-22; Chapter 6, 'Illusion and expression', pp. 148-72; Chapter 10, 'Thoughts on a theory of the art work', pp. 252-84, and Chapter 12, 'Society', pp. 320-69.

6. Thomas Dumm, 'The Politics of Post-Modern Aesthetics', Political Theory, 16: 2 (1988), pp. 209-28 (p. 212). See also Jay A. Bernstein's 'Aesthetic Alienation: Heidegger, Adorno, and Truth at the End of Art', in ed. J. Fekete, Life After Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture (1988), pp. 86-119. Elizabeth Wright also stresses this when discussing Adorno's theoretical position vis-à-vis Brecht, Benjamin and Lukács in her Postmodern Brecht: A Re-presentation (1989), esp. pp. 68-89.

7. For an exposition of the central figures (Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno) and ideas of the Frankfurt School, see Goran Therborn, 'The Frankfurt School', New Left Review, 63 (1970), pp. 65-96.

8. Andreas Huyssen, New German Critique 22: 4 (1981), pp. 23-40, (p. 26). See also Anthony Giddens' essay 'Modernism and Postmodernism', pp. 15-18, and Peter Bürger's contribution 'Avant-garde and Contemporary Aesthetics: A Reply to Jürgen Habermas', pp. 19-22, in the same volume for further debate on the concept of the avant-garde and its complex relationships with various notions of modernism.

9. Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde (1984).
10. ed. P. Adams Sitney, The Avant Garde Film (1978), p. v.
11. Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', Screen, 15: 2 (1974), pp. 7-27. See also his 'Principles of Realism and Pleasure', Screen, 17: 3 (1976), pp. 7-28.
12. See Thorold Dickinson, A Discovery of Cinema (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Barry Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis (London: Starword, 1983) and more recently, John Wyver's The Moving Image (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), esp. pp. 5-34.
13. The terms are Siegfried Kracauer's, taken from his Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality (1960) collected in Mast and Cohen, Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings (1974), pp. 7-21.

Abstract Formalism

14. Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painters' (1965), in eds. F. Francina & C. Harrison, Modern Art and Modernism (1982), pp. 5-10 (p. 5). My emphasis.
15. *ibid.* p. 5.
16. *ibid.* p. 5.
17. For a theoretical assessment of Analytical Cubism, see John Golding's chapter in ed. Nick Stangos, Concepts of Modern Art (London. Thames and Hudson: 1981 edition), pp. 50-77, or Chapter Three of Herbert Read's A Concise History of Modern Painting (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980 edition), pp. 67-104.
18. Germaine Dulac, in ed. Sitney, The Avant Garde Film (1978), pp. 43-48 (p. 43).
19. Germaine Dulac, in ed. Sitney (1978), pp. 31-35.
20. Jean Epstein, cited by Hans Richter (1955), p. 18.
21. Jean Epstein, 'The Essence of Cinema' (1923), in ed. Sitney (1978), pp. 24-5 (p. 25). See also his 'For a New Avant-Garde' in the same volume, pp. 26-30.
22. Hans Richter, 'The Film as an Original Art Form' (1955) in ed. Sitney Film Culture Reader (1970), pp. 15-20 (p. 15).
23. Compiled from Richter's 1955 article already cited.

24. Malcolm le Grice, 'German Abstract Film in the Twenties' in the Arts Council's Film as Film collection (1979), pp. 31-35, and more extensively in his Abstract Film and Beyond (1977). Standish D. Lawder, The Cubist Cinema (1975).

25. Le Grice (1979), p. 31. See also Lawder's second Chapter 'Film as Modern Art: Picasso, Survage, Kandinsky, Schonberg', pp. 20-34.

26. Le Grice (1979), p. 34. Compare with Lawder's informative Chapter 'The Abstract Film: Richter, Eggeling, and Ruttman', pp. 34-64.

27. See also Sitney's Introduction to The Avant Garde Film where he cites Richter's enlargement of Survage's position: A static abstract form is still not expressive enough. Whether round or pointed, oblong or square, simple or complex, it only produces an extremely confused sensation: it is only a simple graphic notation. Only when set in motion, undergoing change, entering into relations with other forms, is it able to evoke a feeling. (p. xi)

28. Lawder (1975), p. 52.

29. Lawder (1975), p. 54.

30. For a general analysis of the art and architecture of De Stijl, see Kenneth Frampton's chapter in ed. Stangos (1981), pp. 141-59; Aaron Scharf on Suprematism, pp. 138-40 and, on Kandinsky, Norbert Lynton's Chapter 'Expressionism', pp. 30-49 in the same volume.

31. Lawder (1975), p. 56.

32. Herman Scheffauer (1924), cited by Lawder (1975), p. 60-61.

33. In the context of later developments in the American avant-garde, Fischinger's Hollywood career is discussed by David Curtis in his Experimental Cinema (1971), p. 53-54.

34. Curtis (1971), p. 19.

35. Lawder's work contains an extensive and detailed shot analysis of Ballet Mécanique, see esp. Chapter 7, pp. 117-67 and Appendix.

36. Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painters' (1965) all citations: p. 8.

37. Raymond Williams in his Problems of Materialism and Culture (1980), pp. 31-49 (p. 41-42). Janet Bergstrom and Constance Penley make a similar point in 'The Avant-Garde - Histories and Theories', Screen, 19: 3 (1978), pp. 113-27: '... avant-garde does not mean 'in advance of' a developing film tradition; it is taken to mean rather apart from the commercial cinema' (p. 120).

38. Noel Burch, 'Narrative/Diagnosis - Thresholds, Limits', Screen, 23: 2 (1982), pp. 16-33.

39. Ian Christie, 'French Avant-garde Film in the Twenties: from 'Specificity' to Surrealism' in the Arts Council's Film as Film (1979), pp. 37-45 (p. 42).

40. Germaine Dulac is subjected to some peculiar criticism, for instance - Lawder: 'For Dulac never really believed in non-objective art and, moreover, she clearly lacked a feeling for the purely graphic rhythms that distinguish Rhythm 21 and Ballet Mécanique' (p. 174). Then why judge her work according to the 'purity' of abstract film? See also Curtis' castigation for attempting to apply musical time to film time: he brings in Resnais to confirm that this was a 'disaster' (p. 21) - any number of film makers experimenting with synaesthetic principles at this time could have been 'accused' of the same.

Structural and Structural/Materialist Film

41. 'Structural Film' in his edition, Film Culture Reader (1971), pp. 326-349, including a tabulated version of George Macumias' critique of Sitney's categories; rewritten for his Visionary Film (1974), pp. 407-35.

42. Renan (1967), pp. 83-97.

43. For critical analysis of Deren, Anger and Markoupolos, see Sitney's Visionary Film (1974) esp. 'The Magus', pp. 93-135; 'From Trance to Myth', pp. 136-73; 'The Lyrical Film', pp. 174-210, and 'Major Mythopoeia', pp. 211-65. Sidney Peterson's 'Cine Dance' with 'Two Notes', pp. 74-79 and James Broughton's 'Two Notes on Mother's Day', pp. 80-82 are reprinted in Sitney's edition of The Avant Garde Film (1978).

44. Sitney, 'Structural Film' (1971), p. 327.

45. Curtis (1971), p. 129.

46. Sitney, 'Structural Film' (1971), p. 327.

47. Birgit Hein, 'The Structural Film' in the Arts Council's Film as Film (1979), pp. 92-106. See also her exposition of her own film work with Wilhelm Hein 'On Structural Studies' in Structural Film Anthology (1976), pp. 114-19.

48. Cited in Hein (1979), p. 99.

49. Renan (1967) in his review of Brakhage's life and work pp. 118-29 (p. 122). For Brakhage's concept of 'closed-eye vision', see extracts from his Metaphors on Vision in ed. P.A. Sitney, (1978), pp. 120-28.

50. Cited by Hein (1979), p. 94.
51. Hein (1979), p. 98.
52. See Regine Cornwell's 'Wieland's Sailboat and 1933' in Structural Film Anthology (1976), pp. 139-40.
53. Le Grice (1979), p. 110.
54. Steven Koch, citing Sitney in his article 'Andy Warhol's Silence', pp. 160-71, in ed. P.A. Sitney, The Avant Garde Reader (1978), pp. 162-63. He suggests Warhol's 'profligacy of footage' offers an immediate aesthetic contrast to Brakhage's 'never waste a frame' ethic.
55. From Michael O'Pray, 'Warhol's Early Films: Realism and Psychoanalysis', pp. 170-7, in his edition of Andy Warhol: Film Factory (1989). See also Gregory Battock's 'Four Films by Andy Warhol' in this volume, pp. 42-53.
56. See Annette Michelson's interpretation of Snow's work in terms of metaphors of consciousness in her 'Toward Snow', in ed. P. A. Sitney, (1978), pp. 172-83.
57. Sitney's Introduction to The Avant-Garde Film Reader (1978), pp. xxxiv-xxxv.
58. Cited in Curtis (1971), p. 155. For an extended analysis of Breer and Kubelka's work, see Sitney's chapter 'The Graphic Cinema: European Perspectives', in Visionary Film (1974), pp. 313-42.
59. Cited in Curtis (1971), p. 155.
60. Le Grice (1977), p. 106.
61. See 'On The Flicker' by le Grice in the Structural Film Anthology (1976), pp. 135-6.
62. Peter Kubleka, 'The Theory of Metrical Film', in ed. P.A. Sitney, (1978), pp. 139-59 (p. 155).
63. See Paul Sharits, 'Hearing: Seeing', pp. 255-60 and extracts from 'Words per Page', pp. 261-63 in the volume cited above. Not all structural work begins with the image track. He says of Ray Gun Virus:
The sprocket soundtrack... works towards establishing an accurate representation of technological modularity, framing - and thereby noting - the ultimate matrix of 16mm film's capability for visual re-presentation (there being one sprocket hole for each frame of image along the film strip (pp. 256-7)).

64. Gidal's main theoretical propositions can be gauged from 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film' in Structural Film Anthology (1976), pp. 1-21; 'The Anti-Narrative', Screen 20; 2 (1979), pp. 73-99; and, more recently and with the 'structural' label notably absent, in his Materialist Film (1989). I have respected Gidal's preferred label 'structural/materialist' for his film theory and practice even though this is grammatically inaccurate and either 'structuralist/materialist' or 'structural/materialism' would be more appropriate. See note 71 below.

65. Peter Wollen, '"Ontology" and "Materialism" in Film', Screen 17: 1 (1976), pp. 7-23.

66. Laura Mulvey has addressed the concept of negation in 'Feminism, Film and the Avant Garde' (1979):

An important aspect of avant garde aesthetics is negation: a work is formed, or driven to adopt a particular position, by the very code itself of the dominant tradition that is being opposed. These works have then to be read, achieve meaning, in the reflected light of the aesthetics they negate. (p. 191-2).

67. Gidal, 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film' (1976), p. 4.

68. Gidal (1976), p. 4.

69. Gidal (1976), p. 1.

70. Gidal (1976), p. 4

71. Gidal, 'The Anti-Narrative' (1979), p. 82. In his article on Gidal's 'theoretical strategy', Deke Dusinberre claims to find a founding trope structuring both Gidal's theoretical work and his film making. Dusinberre's textual analysis suggests that the trope of oxymoron unites Gidal with the work of Samuel Beckett in that both are engaged in articulating a 'disintegration of the unified subject through contradiction, repetition, hyperstress' (p. 82). That Gidal writes 'badly' by grammatical standards, Dusinberre takes as further evidence that Gidal- 'primarily a film-maker (and only secondarily a theoretician') - re-presents the concerns of his film practice through the linguistic/textual operations of his writings. In Screen 18: 2 (1977) pp. 79-88.

72. Gidal, 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film' (1976), p. 2.

73. Gidal (1976), p. 2.

74. Gidal (1976), p. 2.

75. Gidal (1976), p. 7.

76. Deke Dusinberre, 'The Ascetic Task: Peter Gidal's Room Film 1973', in Structural Film Anthology (1976), pp. 103-113 (p. 113).

77. Gidal (1976), p. 1.

Anti-illusionist Film

78. Marshall Berman, All That Is Solid Melts Into Air (1983); the title is taken from Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Communist Manifesto first published in English in 1850.

79. Berman (1983), p. 16.

80. This refers to the first Machine Age (c. 1900-1930) as documented by Rayner Banham in Theory and Practice in The First Machine Age (1960) who espouses the optimism and dynamism of Futurist 'irrationality' as more truly definitive of Modernism than the 'rationalist' imperatives of Constructivism.

81. 'The Work Of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (first published 1936), in ed. John Hanhardt Video Culture (1986), pp. 27-52.

82. Benjamin (1936), p. 33.

83. Hence Benjamin's analogy:

Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality under film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art. (ibid. p. 40).

84. Benjamin (1936), pp. 44-5.

85. Peter Wollen, 'The Two Avant-Gardes', in his Readings and Writings (1982), pp. 92-104.

86. Cited in Sylvia Harvey, May '68 and Film Culture (1978), p. 57.

87. The historical and political background to the emergence of Vertov's Kinoks, and publication of Kinopravda, in the NEP period of 'reconstruction' (1921-3) is well documented in Jay Leyda's Kino (1983).

88. For Futurist theories of Dynamism, see Umberto Apollonio, Futurist Manifestos, (trans Robert Brian, London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) esp. Bruno Corra, 'Abstract Cinema - Chromatic Music 1912', pp. 66-70.

89. The chapter 'Notions of Cultural Production' in Harvey (1978), pp. 45-86, provides an excellent account of earliest Marxist appropriations of industrial terminology for artistic productivity, rightly indicating the influence of Benjamin's essay 'The Author as Producer' in theorizing this shift in conception of the sphere of culture in relation to the economic 'base'. Found in Benjamin, Understanding Brecht (1973), pp. 85-103.

90. Robert Stam, Reflexivity in Film and Literature (1985), p. 80-82; see also Annette Michelson who writes:

If the filmmaker is, like the magician, a manufacturer of illusions, he can, unlike the prestidigitator and in the interests of instruction of a heightening of consciousness, destroy illusion by that other transcendently magical procedure, the reversal of time by the inversion of action. He can develop, as it were, 'the negative of time' for 'the communist decoding of reality'. This thematic interplay of magic, illusion, labor, and filmic techniques and strategy, articulating a theory of film as epistemological inquiry is the complex central core around which Vertov's greatest work develops.

From Michelson, The Man With the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist (1972), cited by John Hanhardt, Video Culture (1986) p. 13. David Curtis goes as far as to suggest that the film is entirely concerned with the technical apparatus of filming and that it 'contains no political message as such' Experimental Cinema (1971) (p. 32). See, though, Stephen Crofts and Olivia Rose, 'An Essay Towards Man With A Movie Camera', Screen, 18: 1 (1977), pp. 9-58 for a Marxist interpretation of Vertov's film.

91. Dziga Vertov, 'Selected Writings', in ed. P. Sitney The Avant Garde Film (1978), pp. 1-13.

92. Vertov, *ibid.* p. 5.

93. Vertov, *ibid.* p. 11. See esp. 'Kino-Eye Lecture II'.

94. For a critical appraisal of the relationship between Formalist and Marxist on literature, see Tony Bennett's volume of that title (1979); Victor Erlich, Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine (Mouton: The Hague, 1955) and eds. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska, Readings in Russian Poetics (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

95. Herbert Eagle, Russian Formalist Film Theory (1981); see esp. Boris Ejxenbaum, 'Problems of Cinema Stylistics', pp. 55-80, and Juri Tynjanov, 'On the Foundations of Cinema', pp. 81-100. Of related interest, see ed. Richard Sherwood, 'Documents from Lef', pp. 256-89, and ed. Ben Brewster, 'Documents from Novy Lef' in Screen Reader: Cinema/Politics/Ideology (1977). Also Stanley Mitchell 'From Shklovsky to Brecht', Screen 15: 2 (1974), pp. 74-80 and Ben Brewster's 'Reply' in the same volume, pp. 81-102; Masha Enzenberger, 'Osip Brik, Selected Writings of the Novy Lef Period' Screen 15: 3 (1974), pp. 35-118.

96. Much of Russian Formalist thinking on filmic signification seems to preempt Saussurean terminology (sign = signifier/signified) but this may be as much due to the contemporaneity of the translator's awareness of Saussure's work.

97. Eagle (1981), p. 4.

98. Ejzenbaum bases his theory of art as expressivity on a 'biological' need for human beings to 'discharge those of its 'energies' which are excluded from ordinary life or which act in it only partially'. He continues :

This basis, in essence playful and not linked to precisely expressed 'sense', is embodied in those 'trans-sense' and 'self-directed' tendencies which shine through in every art form and constitute its organic ferment. By using this ferment and transforming it into 'expressiveness', art becomes organised as a social phenomenon, as a special kind of 'language'. These 'self-directed' tendencies are often laid bare, becoming the basis for evolutionary slogans; thus we speak of 'trans-sense poetry', 'absolute music', etc. The constant gap between 'trans-sense-ness' and 'language' is indeed the internal antimony of art, governing its development. 'Problems of Cinema Stylistics' (p. 57).

99. Eagle (1981), p. 6.

100. Jacques Aumont, Montage Eisenstein (1978); see esp. his chapters 'Eisensteinian Concepts', pp. 26-72 and 'Montage in Question', pp. 145-99. I have found Aumont's to be the most interesting and informative analysis which avoids the more usual presentation of Eisenstein as a poor theoretician but great film maker (e.g. Andrew Tudor in Theories of Film (1974), pp. 48-49). Aumont's work includes a very useful detailed bibliography of Eisenstein's writings which demonstrates what a small (and perhaps unrepresentative) proportion are well-known to Western readers.

101. It is possible to argue that for Eisenstein profilmic 'reality' is a 'fragment' because the film director has already begun the process of selecting and 'foregrounding' significant features of what is being shot before further intensifying the selected elements through editing - framing is, then, a special case of montage.

102. 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form' in Film Form (1949) trans. Jay Leyda (1949), pp. 45-63. Against the Kuleshov/Pudovkin concept of montage on which Eisenstein comments:

To determine the nature of montage is to solve the specific problem of cinema. The earliest conscious film-makers, and our first film theoreticians, regarded montage as a means of description by placing single shots one after the other like building blocks. The movement within these building-block shots, and the consequent length of the component

pieces, was then considered as rhythm. A completely false concept! (ibid. p. 48).

103. 'The Filmic Fourth Dimension' in Film Form (1949), pp. 64-71 (p. 66). Eisenstein's use of the music model and the 'synaesthetic' view of contrapuntal sound and image is further developed in 'Synchronization of Senses' in The Film Sense (1943) trans. Jay Leyda (1968), pp. 60-91.

104. According to Aumont, the concept of organicity became extremely important in Eisenstein's later theory. The concept of ecstasy is given its political charge by Eisenstein's adaption of Engel's view that nature is ruled not by evolution but by transformation through 'leaps and bounds'. Organicism correlates the spectator as the subject of ecstasy ('the leap outside of oneself') with the formal dialectics of montage and 'guarantees that both of them are in conformity with the laws of nature'. The 'laws of thought' and the 'laws of form' thus cohere in dialectical nature (pp. 63-5).

105. Eisenstein, 'Methods of Montage' in Film Form (1949), pp. 72-83.

106. Cited in Aumont (1987), p. 47.

107. See Wollen (1969), esp. Chapter One.

108. Aumont (1987), p. 43.

109. Aumont (1987), p. 47. He also states that this tension 'at the level of Soviet society as a whole, quickly turned... into absolute incompatibility' but finally favouring socialist realism as the preferred method of educating and influencing the spectator (the triumph of traditional Lukácsian content over form, transparent 'reality' over formal 'modernist' experimentation). For parallel debates on literature, see Ernst Bloch et al. Aesthetics and Politics (1977).

110. Aumont, (1987) p. 58.

111. Robert Stam, Relexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean Luc Godard (1985); Sylvia Harvey, May '68 and Film Culture (1980); Colin MacCabe, Godard: Sound, Images, Politics (1980); Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter-Cinema: Vent d'Est', pp. 79-91, 'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film', pp. 189-207 and 'The Two Avant-Gardes', pp. 92-104 in his Readings and Writings (1982); Kirsten Thompson, Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis (1988).

112. Wollen, 'The Two Avant-Gardes', p. 99.

113. Thompson, (1988), pp. 110-131. See also 'Godard's Unknown Country: Sauve qui peut (la vie)' in the same volume, pp. 263-88.

114. Thompson (1988), pp. 115-7.

115. Thompson (1988), pp. 118-9.

116. Stam (1985), p. 259. In the Appendix to this work, 'Reflexivity and the Specifically Cinematic', the author specifies the various ways in which Godard 'contradicts' image/sound consonance not only at the level of the moving image or phonetic sound track (as for Metz) but also through anti-conventional (non-narrative) uses of music (see esp pp. 255-66).

117. Stam (1985), p. 216.

118. Stam (1985), p. 219.

119. McCabe (1975), p. 49.

Surrealism

120. Andre Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1977), pp. 3-47, (p. 10).

121. Andre Breton (1977), p. 26.

122. Herbert Read (1980) and Dawn Ades (1974) concur that the degree of adherence to the philosophy of automatism among Surrealist artists was varied. The 'Sleep Period', from 1922,:
... brought out a tension always inherent in Surrealism, between the idea of artists or poets as unconscious transmitters, 'modest recording devices', of images, and that of their status as conscious creators with a predetermined sense of what is beautiful.

(Ades, 1974, p. 32).

123. Cited in J. Matthews, Surrealism and Film (1971), pp. 1-2.

124. Matthews (1971), p. 2.

125. See John Weightman (1973), Chapter 7 : 'Surrealism and Super-realism', pp. 134-42.

126. Matthews (1971), p. 50.

127. Matthews (1971) discusses 'enlargement' on pp. 49-50, and his following Chapter, pp. 51-76 (assessing the Surrealist film scripts of Robert Desnos and Antonin Artaud) makes clear the anti-literary tendency of their embrace of film as 'a valuable disruptive force to be turned to account in devaluing a literary genre' (p. 53). This can partly be attributed to Artaud's attempt to escape from the constraints of verbal language through immediate images: 'So nothing interposes itself any longer between the work and the spectator. Above all cinema is like an innocuous and direct poison, a subcutaneous injection of morphine'. Cited in L. Williams (1980), p. 21.

128. Ades (1974), p. 33.
129. Breton (1977), p. 20.
130. Linda Williams, Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film (1980), p. 3.
131. Soupault's enthusiasm for cinema in 1918 is interesting in view of Vertov's:
Already the richness of this new art appears to those who can see. Its strength is impressive since it reverses natural laws: it ignores space and time, upsets gravity, ballistics, biology, etc... Its eye is more patient, sharper, more precise. It is therefore the creator's job, the poet's to use this hitherto neglected strength and enrichment, for a new servant is at the disposal of his imagination.
Cited in Matthews, (1970), p. 52.
132. L. Williams (1980), p. 12.
133. Matthews (1971), p. 3.
134. Matthews (1971), p. 4.
135. James Strachey's Introductory essay to the Pelican edition of Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams (1900).
136. Thus the paradox of the pictorial representation of dreams in Surrealist painting; these static 'hand-painted dream pictures' or 'trompe l'oeil fixation of dream images' might be regarded as equivalents to cinematic attempts to represent the content of subjective states - e.g Expressionism - in that they do not approximate dream form.
137. L. Williams (1980), p. 48.
138. I have not included my own analyses of these few authentic Surrealist films for this is not my purpose and this has been accomplished elsewhere: for instance, Phillip Drummond's 'Textual Space in Un Chien andalou', Screen 18: 3 (1977), pp. 55-119, can be read in conjunction with Matthews and Williams, while Michael Gould's assessment of the film as a 'riotously funny depiction of the battle of the sexes' in Surrealism and the Cinema: Open Eyed Screening (1976) serves as a counterpoint to all three.
139. L. Williams (1980), p. xv.
140. See especially Part IV: The Dream Work, pp. 383-651.
141. L. Williams (1980), p. 85-6.
142. Christian Metz, Psychoanalysis and the Cinema (1982), p.
143. Metz (1982), p. 201.

144. Ben Brewster, Screen 15: 2 (1974), pp. 81-102, (p.)
145. Cited in Herbert Read (1980), p. 134. .

CHAPTER THREE

POSTMODERNISM AND DELEGITIMATION:

THE NARRATIVE OF SPECULATION

My understanding of Lyotard's thesis was earlier advanced in order to provide firm epistemological grounds for defining the historical and theoretical conditions of Modernist film practices. Having appropriated Lyotard's claim made more generally for the production of scientific knowledge and assessing its validity for the sphere of the aesthetic and specifically for the area of film, I would suggest that Lyotard's theory of modern scientific knowledge has also been extremely fruitful for making the conceptual parameters of film Modernism explicit. From the four types of film practice identified, it is possible to suggest that the metanarratives of liberty and speculation do indeed legitimate film practices as Modernist and this permits a more precise understanding of the meaning of Modernism construed as artistic practice 'governed' by the grands récits. But, before pursuing Lyotard's model to the point at which it may frame a definition of postmodernism as a post-narrative condition consequent on the delegitimation of the grands récits, it is important to make explicit what has been implicit in my exposition of the metanarratives so far. Film Modernism must be grasped as constituted epistemologically by both metanarratives which together define the necessary conditions under which film is instituted as Modernist knowledge. From the point of view of understanding the

consequences of postmodernist delegitimation, it is important to note not only that Modernism comes to be defined by two divergent forms of legitimation, but also to identify precisely what it is about the metanarratives that allows films produced under the narratives of emancipation and speculation to unify rather than divide a Modernist 'condition'. Accordingly, I wish to argue that the Modernism of both speculative and emancipatory films derives from the fact that they are both underwritten by implicit appeal to that which I would term rationality imperatives. The imperative towards legitimating art practice as rational 'knowledge', it must be observed, is manifested quite differently by each grand récit; the considerable divergences in artistic form, 'content' and social/political intention which I have used to separate speculative from emancipatory film practices can, in some measure, be attributed to a more fundamental division at the level of the form that the rationality imperative takes. Summarily, the distinction can be represented as follows:

Speculative knowledge of film is sanctioned by a rationalizing imperative:

- a) the Kantian/Greenbergian process of 'rationalization' must be given full weight here in determining that true or authentic Modernism is synonymous with Abstraction-Minimalism as medium-specific knowledge. This is founded upon a philosophical and quasi-historical narrative which culminates in the fulfilment of aesthetic internal 'self-criticism';
- b) the 'hero' of the narrative is a sublimated imperative to reduce the function and 'content' of art to its radical constituents (using the words 'reduce' and 'radical' in the mathematical sense of logical root);¹

- c) speculative film posits an autonomous spectator, external to the formal investigation of film-as-material, or else proposes that the goal of speculative knowledge is rational consciousness through apperception and cognition of material processes.

Emancipatory knowledge of film is sanctioned by an instrumental imperative

- a) the project of liberty is founded on the analysis of the role of film as mass cultural medium in creating and sustaining conditions of social inequality. Emancipatory discourse, however, retains a functional role for film by making it a potential resource for producing critical knowledge of those conditions;
- b) the 'hero' of the narrative of liberty is the sublimated imperative whose historical telos is completed by the production of film which is socially just and non-oppressive;
- c) emancipatory film reduces the margin between text and spectator by incorporating strategies of defamiliarization and distantiation to stimulate critical (rather than emotional) spectatorship towards the goal of social liberty.

Given, then, that Modernism is legitimated by two grands récits, and, given that the metanarratives specify the meaning of Modernist rationality differently, it is possible to arrive at two quite distinct readings of the cultural condition of postmodernism depending on which narrative one believes we are 'post'. The concept of post-narrativity highlights different issues for each metanarrative: for speculation, what happens to the larger social relations of Modernism between the avant-garde, autonomous art and mass culture; for liberty, how does the loss of the metanarrative challenge that Modernism which makes art the source of radical critique of 'dominant' culture, and how does postmodernist thinking respond to Modernism's political 'use' of aesthetics? Answering these questions, however, is not as straightforward as it might

first appear and I shall endeavour to unravel some of the complexities that are produced by thinking of postmodernism and film within Lyotard's theory.

To complicate matters a little further, it is very important to state at this point that the design drawn so far has intentionally misrepresented film Modernism. My discussion of how the metanarratives have defined the conceptual parameters by which film is legitimated as Modernist has been framed in a deliberately gender 'neutral' way, centring on predominantly male film makers and theorists. This has resulted in a highly selective and partial picture of what is at issue in thinking of postmodernism as a post-narrative condition since feminism's relation to Modernism and the avant-garde has been withheld. I have to this point kept feminism out of the central course of this analysis and have done this for several reasons. Firstly, the processes by which the Modernist metanarratives lose their validating authority must not be regarded as an epistemological matter alone but as stemming from historically and culturally determined pressures or 'interventions': it is important to recognize that it is feminism which makes explicit the problematic relations between Modernist notions of art and cultural politics in a more radical way than my analysis of Modernism to date might specify. Secondly, because it is feminism which renders most visible the political consequences inherent in thinking of postmodernism within Lyotard's framework; and, thirdly, from a post-narrative point of view, some forms of feminism have uncertain status within the modernism/postmodernism divide. The chief point I wish to establish here is that the emergence of feminist avant-garde practices actively contest the

Modernist differentiations upon which speculative aesthetic knowledge is based but some forms of feminist avant-gardism are clearly governed by the epistemological determinations of the emancipatory metanarrative. I have, though, found comparatively little sustained theoretical work on the relations between feminism, film Modernism and the avant-garde (compared with feminist analysis of mainstream cinema) so that most of what follows must be read as a tentative attempt to 'map' the politics of gender in order to cast a different light upon the meanings of the terms 'avant-garde' and Modernism. Similarly, the historical and conceptual emergence of feminism throws up a series of problems that are absent from the political concerns of previous emancipatory film which render Lyotard's theory of delegitimation highly contentious. To pre-empt my findings a little, I have encountered a real difficulty in attempting to reconcile two divergent readings of postmodernism as consequent upon the 'crisis of metanarratives': one which is compatible with recent feminist film theory and politics, and one which would deny feminist claims for intervention in the sphere of the aesthetic at all. It thus remains to be assessed whether feminism is implicated in the bankruptcy of emancipatory aesthetic knowledge that Lyotard's schema would suggest is properly definitive of a postmodernist condition. I shall go on to question where feminism is situated in Lyotard's analysis (which is far from clear at this stage), and ask whether forms of feminist film theory can move beyond the impasse of Modernist epistemology into the domain of the postmodern without losing their claims to political effectivity. However, my first task in this Chapter is (in a necessarily schematic way) to ask why

and under what conditions feminism conjoins with the Modernist problematic to demonstrate its key role in delegitimizing the narrative of speculation.

Feminism and the Avant-Garde

It is a notoriously difficult task to pose definitive relations between feminism and cinema. B. Ruby Rich is right to argue that the sheer range of phrases used to define this relationship - 'films by women', 'feminist film', 'images of women in film' or 'women's films' - is symptomatic of a series of confusions as to what specifically feminist film theory and practice should refer.² I shall defer offering my own analysis of this until later as it bears very heavily on the question of whether postmodernism is simply another 'name' for feminist film theory/practice. To facilitate discussion, however, a working definition of one half of the relationship is required and provisionally I concur with Annette Kuhn's much-cited formulation of the political project of feminism as:

... a set of political practices founded in analyses of the social/historical position of women as subordinated, oppressed or exploited either within dominant modes of production (such as capitalism) and/or by the set of social relations of patriarchy or male domination.³

Kuhn's definition is useful in that it is general enough to encompass several major tendencies within Anglo-American feminist thinking. Patriarchy and capitalism can be understood as mutually supporting structures of domination as for Marxist/socialist

feminisms which hold patriarchy to be a highly oppressive though secondary system produced by the primary inequalities of the economic structure of society. At the same time, it allows for radical/separatist critiques of gender and sexual relations which owe little to Marxist analysis of economic or class hierarchies but which stress instead the historical/global endurance of patriarchy despite wholly diverse social and economic systems.⁴ Despite these major theoretical differences, it is fair to say that all forms of feminism address themselves to the subordination of women through the mechanisms and operations of patriarchal power which, in this instance, relates to the production, exhibition and consumption of cinema. As a primary site of the cultural construction, reproduction and maintenance of sexual inequality, both the institution of cinema and its products, films, provide a host of possible avenues for analysis; my concern at present is strictly limited to outlining the conditions under which feminism can be brought under the Modernist metanarratives.

Good political reasons for why some feminist film practices have come to have an 'objective alliance' with the radical avant-garde⁵ can be traced to the beginnings of Second Wave feminism in the late 1960s/70s when critique centred on the increasingly sexist and oppressive nature of dominant representations of women in mainstream cinema (for instance Molly Haskell's seminal historical/sociological study From Reverence to Rape (1975) and Marjorie Rosen's Popcorn Venus (1973)). Haskell and Rosen belong with the initial formulation of a feminist 'cultural politics' which sought to engage with mass media (rather than fine art or literary) representations and challenge them as influential sites

of the cultural enforcement of patriarchy. The 'negative' or counter work of 'Images' film criticism called attention to the manner in which mainstream characters and roles for women were circumscribed by patriarchal values (whore, vamp, mother, sex-goddess, victim) and stimulated demands for more 'realistic' and less idealized, stereotypical and often brutalized public imagery.⁶ Linda Artel and Susan Wengraf, amongst many others, argued for alternative 'positive' images and films that provide non-sexist role models, attitudes and behaviour on subjects ranging from family relations, single parenthood, the workplace, abortion, childcare, sexuality and biographies from women's history for consciousness raising.⁷ This broadly sociological approach to film was soon challenged for its the assumption that films can be gauged solely according to the truthfulness of their content measured against socially predetermined status and experience of real existing women. Claire Johnson's highly influential Notes on Women's Cinema (1973) offers an early critique of stereotypical or 'Images of Women' film criticism. Drawing on Erwin Panofsky's analysis of iconography as a simplifying code for understanding early film narrative, and on Roland Barthes' theory that icons are part of 'mythological' operations which work to 'naturalize' ideology, Johnson argues that images of women cannot be judged by a direct correspondence between real women's roles under patriarchy and the use made of women's image (as 'sign') in film:

In rejecting a sociological analysis of woman in the cinema we reject any view in terms of realism, for this would involve an acceptance of the apparent natural denotation of the sign and would involve a denial of the reality of myth in operation.

The call for direct changes in the represented content of films

fails to consider the prior cultural and filmic processes at work in producing and constructing those images:

Within a sexist ideology and male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man... despite the enormous emphasis placed on women as spectacle in the cinema, woman as woman is largely absent.

The central thrust of this criticism must, of course, be placed in the context of a widespread political rejection of realism in feminist film theory at this time:

Any revolutionary strategy must challenge the depiction of reality; it is not enough to discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film; the language of the cinema/depiction of reality must also be interrogated so that a break between ideology and text is effected.⁸

The turn away from the 'what?' of content to the 'how?' of film meaning in feminist thinking was also precipitated by another source - the failure to discover a credible 'authentic' feminist film aesthetic in the work of female directors.⁹ Kuhn has made the important point that feminist work within the avant-garde was preceded by a great deal of historical research into what was hoped to be a lost or repressed history of female involvement in the dominant studio-based productions systems of Hollywood. Restoring that history has to date yielded a disappointing but unsurprising picture of a few exceptions to the rule that female employment in commercial film making before late 1960-70s was confined to areas such as costume, set design, makeup, continuity, acting and, occasionally, editing but very rarely, in directorial and production roles. Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino, 'literally the only women to direct films in Hollywood until the 1970s' are joined by a few European female directors - Fascist documentarian Leni Riefenstahl, Leontine Sagan and later, Mai Zetterling and Agnes

Varda.¹⁰ The failure to glean a consistent and positively feminist film aesthetic from these few led to several related conclusions:

- a) films by women are not automatically feminist films: simply exchanging female for male creative personnel cannot guarantee film content that is useful for the political/social goals of challenging patriarchal definitions of sexual difference;
- b) looking to the director for the origin of film meaning imports a series of humanist assumptions not conducive to feminist film making and political criticism: the source of meaning is 'outside' the film in the person of the director, that is, individually rather than socially derived; the spectator's meaning-making activity is subordinate to directorial intention; the role of criticism is to construct and evaluate a canon of Great Directors (and/or auteurs) so that personal 'vision' is valued above political reception (which also denies the co-operative nature of film production);
- c) it is the visual language of mainstream cinema and not just directorial intention that produces oppressive representations of women: cinematic conventions of realism, narrative, genre, and spectatorial identification together with codes of lighting, camera angle, editing and frame composition must also be understood as constitutive of meaning.

Together, these signal a shift in critical concern away from the 'image' or 'message' level of content to the processes of meaning production/reception. This first phase in feminist cultural politics offered two divergent paths for theoretical attention: the analysis of the mechanisms of textual production within mainstream 'popular' commercial cinema and/or its wholesale rejection in favour of work within the avant-garde, which, it should be clear, was similarly preoccupied with articulating alternative film form. It is the second option that I wish to pursue here by looking at the possibilities of conjunction between Modernism and feminist film practice-theory that are open from the point of view of the metanarratives.

From a theoretical perspective, it is most interesting to begin mapping feminism's relation to Modernism from the point of view of speculation rather than the narrative of liberty. This may at first seem an odd way to proceed given that feminism is broadly concerned with analysing and redressing cultural, social, economic and political inequality within patriarchy/capitalism which might propose that the narrative of liberty would be more appropriate for legitimating feminist film under Modernism. However, the tensions arising from attempts to utilize speculative film for feminist ends are essential for understanding one half of the process of delegitimation.

From a historical perspective, it is also pertinent to place feminism within the context of the speculative narrative since this has major consequences for a) placing feminism in relation to a Modernism/postmodernism divide, and b) defining postmodernism. For instance, equating Modernism with the narrative of the reduction of each medium to its material 'support' allows a simple chronological definition of post-Modernism as those socially orientated filmmaking practices which historically 'come after' centripetal, autonomous film. Noel Carroll's contribution to The Postmodern Moment is germane.¹¹ His answer to the question 'what is postmodernism?' is primarily a chronological one; Carroll identifies 'authentic' Modernism with structural film which dominated the American avant-garde scene during the late 1960s/early 70s and then defines post-Modernism by the largely feminist-inspired reactions to the reduction of film to structural fundamentals. While this might be a temporally accurate description of succession, it fails to address the conceptual terms upon which feminism firstly conjoins

with speculative film practice and subsequently supplies the impetus for its historical demise and the dissolution of its properly epistemological differentiations. Having already stated my objection that radically autonomous Abstract Formalism sui generis does not permit feminism (or any other political/social concern) to be articulated, it is possible to move forward to consider feminism and formal film, and feminism and structural film.

Feminism and Structural Film

It is clear that structural film emerged within a highly politicized environment combining a 'sense of unified oppositional movement' - Vietnam and student protest, black, gay and women's rights - to produce a 'language of criticism, quasi-theory, and appreciation... that invited everyone to board the train of film history and ride into a bountiful future'.¹² Specifically formulated against commercial cinema, the male-dominated structuralist avant-garde film makers in both Europe and the USA of the 1960s must also be seen as challenging the preceding mythopoetic psychodramas and music/dance formal films of the late 1940s/50s. Structural film's rejection of formal film is an important one for charting feminist engagement with Modernist avant-gardism for, amongst its male practitioners (Curtis Harrington, Kenneth Anger), the formal avant-garde also included the earliest female film makers to use avant-garde practices to

explore issues related to feminism and film - Sarah Arledge, Germane Dulac, Maya Deren and Shirley Clark.¹³ Formal film, as outlined in Chapter Two, is set apart from structural film because it is 'reproductive' in Richter's sense; a largely associative and poetic use of a recognizable image-base is subjected to temporal and spatial distortion but the representational function of images is retained for the exploration of subject matter and content. E. Ann Kaplan suggests that 'women attracted to the experimental film were often searching for an outlet for their inner experiences, sensations, feelings, thoughts'.¹⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that they should choose to work in a richly symbolic, expressionist and often surrealistic vein that would allow the cinematic exploration and expression of the 'personal'. These may be regarded as initial attempts to articulate a different cinema outside dominant realist representations of women which were 'mystified, made at once a lynchpin of visual pleasure and the affirmation of male dominance' and 'hitherto rendered invisible by means of the sexualized female fantasy form'.¹⁵ Both Sandy Flitterman-Lewis and Genette Vincendeau¹⁶ grant Dulac the title of first feminist film maker for her film The Smiling Madame Beudet (1923) though Kaplan is equivocal: while the film 'serves the important function of exposing the positionality of women in patriarchy' by using filmic distortions to 'present the inner pain and wish-fulfillment fantasies of a wife suffocating in a provincial marriage' and (uniquely for the time) from the point of view of the female protagonist, she nonetheless 'has no sense of alternatives'.¹⁷ It is arguable whether the works should qualify

as feminist in any strong sense on other grounds; for early female experimental film makers film making is essentially regarded as a means of subjective personal expression without broader political or collective claims beyond those of the individual artist. Such commitment to a 19th century Romantic view of the unique expressive artist can be gauged in the pedagogical efforts of Maya Deren to create an alternative film culture of production, exhibition and distribution based on individual creativity during the 1940s and 50s which had been highly influential in defining the terms of avant-garde rejection of studio-based commercial cinema:

Cameras do not make films; film-makers make films. Improve your films not by adding more equipment and personnel but by using what you have to the fullest capacity. The most important part of your equipment is yourself: your mobile body, your imaginative mind, and your freedom to use both.¹⁸

This is a pertinent distinction. One of the primary economic and ideological distinctions dividing Modernist from dominant film is that the former is grounded in a 'craft' or 'artisanal' ethic - unique films of personal expression created by 'artists' with full control over materials - while the latter mass produces a standardized product wholly controlled by the financial constraints of commercial cinema industries (film maker v. director).¹⁹

Annette Kuhn has noted that for feminist film makers this division may 'embody a certain contradiction' not experienced by male avant-garde practitioners: 'between on the one hand the individualism inherent in the concept of self-expression and on the other the social character of feminist politics'.²⁰ Nonetheless, whatever feminist 'message' can be drawn from the work of Clarke, Deren and

Dulac derives from an expressive model of film meaning which permits the use of representational qualities of film imagery for personal exploration.

It is noteworthy, then, that the advent of structural film in the 1960s/70s is accompanied by a break with the literary-poetic idea that film should express at all. In pursuit of filmic specificity, structural film sheds the 'theatrical' remnants of the formal film's mode of representation - dance as drama, personal metaphor as narrative - and, from a feminist point of view, an important means for symbolic, expressionistic examinations of personal female subjectivity. Some forms of structural film move far beyond the abolition of represented content; Carroll's definition of structural film is similar to mine though he stresses the importance of the systemic approach to film structure (e.g. Frampton's Zorn's Lemma (1970)) and J.J. Murphy's Print Generation (1973)), and of computer-generated serial systems in defining the structural aesthetic:

... like the minimalists in their reaction to the psychodramatic and mythic pretensions of abstract expressionism, these new filmmakers adopted strategies to depersonalize, distance and 'cool out' their medium. Thus they came to adopt generative strategies that removed a great deal of moment-to-moment decision making, and, therefore, expressivity from their work.²¹

This is an interesting theoretical turn. The development of structural film towards minimalist reduction is the extreme outcome of the progress of speculation towards medium-specific aesthetic knowledge: non-representational, 'author-less' and militantly divorced from dominant social experience of cinema. Of what possible value could a 'depersonalized' and 'content-less' film

aesthetic be to feminism which is defined by a highly politicized understanding of the 'personal' as the fundamental site of patriarchal definitions of the gendered self and ultimately concerned with challenging the cultural representation of women? This is not to suggest that feminist attempts to appropriate structural film's examination of the material constituents of the illusionist image-base - film, light, projection, time - have not been made. Annabel Nicholson's Reel Time (1973) addresses a relationship between the projector and a sewing machine, 'running loops of film of herself sewing film through the sewing-machine, then the projector, until the film tears and starts to slip'. In Handtinting (1967), Joyce Wieland draws a parallel between film making and embroidery 'puncturing the strip with needles and dyeing the celluloid'.²² While both pieces explore material filmic processes, they also comment upon women's relationship to the production of meaning, and to the culturally determined meaning of production.²³ Traditionally not defined as art, women's domestic production is made relevant to the practice of film making which, until the 1960s/70s brought relatively greater access to comparatively inexpensive film technology, had also traditionally excluded women as creators. While these are important considerations, revealing the unarguable male dominance of both commercial and experimental film making, the point of simply juxtaposing domestic with aesthetic production is a rather limited one of value mainly to a previously politicized audience drawn from experimental film making circles within the avant-garde. This raises a further set of issues which complicate the political strategies of speculative feminism:

- a) investigation of the internal specificity of film largely works against the broader purport of social critique: in terms of my analysis, the autonomous imperative to reduce film to its perceptual 'base' which underwrites the Modernism of structural film ensures that it remains irreducibly centripetal;
- b) feminist film makers working within the avant-garde declare a tactical refusal to engage with realist film making which, by definition, denies access both to the dominant means of representation and to its broader non-specialist audience.

I stated in Chapter two that the dominant concept of Modernism was that of autonomy. From Peter Bürger's Theory of the Avant-Garde (1984), however, it is evidently important to distinguish two distinct but interrelated levels of analysis when using the concept of autonomy:

- a) the broadest level of the cultural constitution of art defined as a specialized category of perception and/or knowledge;
- b) the more particular level of the effects of that constitution on the political import of formal techniques specifically available to film.

The first level concerns what may be termed art's structural autonomy which predetermines the purpose, production and reception of any 'aesthetic' object in bourgeois society (indeed, which defines it as art per se). The second relates more directly to an increasing tendency away from represented or recognizable content towards immanent specificity. Under the narrative of speculation, of course, the two are inextricable. If it is true that the 'function of cultural objectifications is institutionally determined' then I would suggest that structural film is a truly Modernist example of Bürger's theory that the 'apartness from the

praxis of life that had always constituted the institutional status of art in bourgeois society now becomes the content of works. Institutional frame and content coincide' and 'social ineffectuality stands revealed as the essence of art'.²⁴ The questions raised are large ones: isn't there a contradiction in terms in arguing that autonomous art is also functional for political objectives if in its strongest sense speculative art is confined to the specificity of aesthetic knowledge - the proper subject of art is art - to which questions of social utility do not apply? Similarly, does not the fact that speculative film is essentially an avant-garde practice also necessarily set limits on a broadly based political effectivity? In view of my analysis, attempts to reorientate structural film towards political (rather than 'purely' filmic) concerns most clearly illustrate the tension arising from pressing speculative film into the service of political - feminist - emancipation.

At this point it is illuminating to return to Lyotard's contention that the narrative of speculation contains within it the seeds of its own delegitimation. It will be recalled that the Enlightenment pursuit of autonomous bodies of speculative knowledge determines that 'true knowledge' is 'always indirect knowledge: it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy' (PC, p. 35). It might be argued that feminism is similarly engaged in the long-term goal of producing knowledges that will effectively 'add up' to just such an epistemological totality: feminist cultural theory, feminist science, feminist art, feminist jurisprudence, feminist political science etc. The primary

justification for speculative knowledge is that it should contribute to a larger 'project of totalization' (PC, p. 34). But it must be remembered that speculative knowledge is legitimated as disinterested knowledge, knowledge for 'its own sake': the process of delegitimation relates to the inability of this grand récit to integrate its knowledges; the 'weave of the encyclopaedic net' that binds the relatively independent knowledges together is loosened to the point where the original raison d'être of narrative knowledge is lost. Put simply, the specialization of knowledges that both Habermas and Lyotard identify with Enlightenment modernity and, more specifically with the Modernist period, intensifies to the (post-narrative) point at which each sphere of enquiry is 'set free' to define its nature and purpose according solely to its own internal conditions (whether speaking of ethics, science or aesthetics). Without the metanarrative to 'supervise' them, specialized knowledges are no longer speculative in the sense defined in Chapter One, but language games with their own rules with 'no special calling to supervise the game of praxis' (PC, p. 40). The political 'supervisory' claims of feminism thus bring into play the 'language game' specified by the narrative of liberty. In Lyotard's schema, this produces a 'major conflict reminiscent of the split introduced by the Kantian critique between knowing and willing':

... it is a conflict between a language-game made of denotations answerable only to the criterion of truth, and a language game governing ethical, social and political practice which necessarily involves decisions and obligations, in other words, utterances expected to be just rather than true and which in the final analysis lie outside the realm of scientific knowledge.

(PC, p. 32).

As film practice under the narrative of speculation is predicated on the principle of autonomy, it carries with it concomitant differentiations between filmic specificity/representation, avant-garde/popular culture, aesthetic value/entertainment. This would suggest that feminist engagement with immanent knowledge cannot be sustained without confronting the very conditions which constitute the sphere of the aesthetic as autonomous, that is, without questioning those Modernist differentiations that permit the aesthetic to be carved out as a specialized sphere concerned with art-specific knowledge.

With the preceding discussion in mind, it becomes possible to understand the proliferation of discrete post-structural film making practices which appeared during the 1970s and early '80s as evidence of delegitimation. Noel Carroll suggests a 'fledgling taxonomy' to order a variety of emergent forms - Deconstructionist, New Talkie, Punk, New Psychodramas and New Symbolism. The accuracy of Carroll's labels is not an important consideration. However, the terms of disengagement are and it is the irreconcilable nature of the Kantian conflict above which I suggest is at the core of the de-differentiating process of post-speculative postmodernism.

To support an initial reading of post-speculative and post-autonomous feminist avant-garde practices during the 1970s/80s as post-Modernist, it is necessary to set their chronological emergence within a more general background of theoretical change. New film forms such as feminist Deconstructionist and New Talkie cannot be appreciated without acknowledging the 'immense

theoretical revolution' that accompanies and separates them from the theoretical presuppositions of structural film. The 'post-'68' critical climate which emerged out of various configurations of Althusserian Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and linguistic semiotics, as Carroll notes, clearly marks a break with the 'preferred rhetoric' of much structural film - 'phenomenology, cognitive psychology, math and natural science'.²⁵ The theoretical dominance of critical methodologies derived from Marxist, structuralist, post-structuralist and psychoanalytical theory during the '70s needs to be established but it is not my purpose here to explore these individually. Rather, to illustrate the process of delegitimation more precisely, I shall limit discussion to the radical change in conceptual status of the viewing subject and use seminal 'moments' to substantiate my claim that 'post-structural' film forms are predicated on two crucial de-differentiations of speculative Modernism: a) the 'end' of the category of aesthetic 'purity'; and b) the 'death' of autonomous knowledge. Again, this is best approached through the focus of feminist theory and I shall begin by returning to structural/materialism.

Delegitimation: The Narrative of Speculation

The British materialist branch of structural film makers (the London Film-makers Co-operative, especially Gidal) offer cogent

arguments against the apolitical effects of structural film that Gidal contends makes it 'merely another aesthetic mode... without important functional meaning outside its mere differentiation per se from previous modes'.²⁶ Experienced as autonomous art within the confines of exclusionary gallery/art-house environments, structural film's 'film as film' message is destined to be passively consumed as pure formalism without political consequence despite feminist intentions to reorientate structural film towards the production of social knowledge. But this does not spell the end of feminist alliance with speculative film. Indeed, Gidal's objection can be seen to provide more substantial ground for articulating feminist critique within the narrative of speculation which centres on the the shift in epistemological importance from the film maker to the film viewer, and to the politicization of the experience of spectatorship. The important 'functional meaning' absent from Wieland and Nicholson's films (which 'document[s] the film making techniques via what we are given to see by the illusionist capacities of the photochemical recording device (film)') derives from the lack of the 'materialist' part of the equation. The 'materialism' of film practice must produce instead 'film's abstract, a filmic real in which process is instituted as a process, not the documentation of a process'.²⁷ Gidal's rejection of films of pure structure in favour of the experience of material process is inextricable from his Althusserian concern to circumvent modes of identification that bind the spectator through representational practices to bourgeois ideologies. Thus identificatory mechanisms, he argues, are not restricted to

identifications 'with' characters on screen but are active at more fundamental levels; for instance, the abstract colour-field films of Paul Sharits have a 'grainy, perspectively deep illusionism' within which the 'documentary truth of the represented film grain becomes the dominant factor, the narrative even'.²⁸ Even this will 'foster imaginary identities' that need to be resisted by the active viewer, identities which in conventional narrative are produced through character, story, plot, camera angle and distance, frame composition and editing. That these are also necessarily sites of the reproduction of patriarchal ideologies offers a persuasive model for feminist film makers within the avant-garde. It is the investment of dominant realist cinema in regimes of spectatorial identification that leads Gidal to argue that only 'radical' feminists have grasped the true significance of wholly negatory action against bourgeois/patriarchal illusionism:

We must learn to manage without the reproduction of identifications through, for example, familial structures, without the reproduction of identification through structures of representation, familial orientation and biologism being merely the birthplace of such modes for the individuated self.²⁹

Hence the 'purely' aesthetic concerns of structural film are supposedly countered by Gidal's claims for a politically emancipatory didacticism:

A film can inculcate positions which force attempts - moment to moment attempts - at knowledge, attempts at delineating precisely the perception of distance between perception and (absent) knowledge. The apprehension of the functioning of that distance is a position in knowledge.³⁰

If its underlying epistemological model can be formulated in this way: the experience of filmic process = experience of subjectivity = consciousness = knowledge = reality, then aesthetic experience

is thus finally rational experience resulting in knowledge of the 'real' outside filmic representation (as process). It is the final appeal to the viewing subject's consciousness (as a 'position in knowledge') which provides the starting point for delegitimation by feminist questioning of the kind of spectator it proposes.

Constance Penley is particularly sharp in her analysis of structural/materialist film and suggests that its epistemological assumptions determine that its political project is untenable.³¹ To support her argument, Penley draws upon several highly influential sources which inform a 'metapsychological' account of the functioning of cinema spectatorship.

Firstly, Jacques Lacan's work on the Imaginary constitution of the subject based on the notion that subjectivity is founded on a primarily visual investment of the scopic drive. For Lacan, subjectivity is profoundly illusory in that it is instituted by the mis-recognition of one's own unity in an Other's image: the Mirror Stage constitutes the 'registration of the totality of a body previously lived as fragmented'.³² As a 'structuring function' and not a positive relationship between self and others, Imaginary identification (before entry through language to the Symbolic spaces of 'I' defined in familial/social/sexual terms) 'prefigures the whole dialectic between alienation and subjectivity', that is, all ensuing relations of self to Other.

Secondly, Christian Metz's Lacanian-based theory that the primary constitution of the cinematic signifier is also a psychoanalytic one, founded on the play between the perception and Imaginary of presence/absence:

The spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object, but only some objects which are there without him. In this sense the screen is not a mirror. This time the perceived is entirely on the side of the object, and there is no longer any equivalent of the own image, of that unique mix of perceived and subject (of other and I) which was precisely the figure necessary to disengage the one from the other. At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am all-perceiving... absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it, the constitutive instance, in other words, of the cinema signifier.³³

Metz continues that what is 'characteristic of the cinema is not the imaginary that it may happen to represent, it is the imaginary which it is from the start': the imaginary constitution of the cinematic signifier demands that the 'spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, anterior to every there is'.³⁴ Penley argues that primary identification with images qua cinematic images ensures that 'what the images depict (even what film processes they represent) do not have that much to do with the identification which establishes the spectator as transcendental subject'.³⁵ Several interrelated points follow from this analysis. Structural/materialist attempts to thwart the spectator's 'imaginary relation' to film by disavowing representation, narrative and fiction signally fail to grasp the 'most fundamental identification', the 'subject's own activity of looking', which precedes any form of cinematic spectating; it might then be argued that structural/materialism cannot escape from (but actually intensifies) the primary 'condition of illusion' it seeks to thwart

by promoting the 'construction of a conscious subject, unified and affirmed as the place of synthesis of all perceptions (a 'materialist' transcendental subject)'.³⁶ Indeed, if cinematic spectatorship of any sort of film form is predicated on the primary act of identification, it is neither theoretically nor politically useful to construct a model of spectatorship which posits an epistemological space 'beyond' that. The spectator proposed by Gidal and his anti-identification stress on the rational and conscious passage of the spectator to political awareness and knowledge - 'watching oneself watching' - fails to acknowledge that viewing film is always already determined by a primary unconscious identification with the camera. The very act of spectating, when tied to the desire to know and 'investigate', produces a powerful subject-effect which in an extreme form slides from 'epistemology into epistemophilia (the concept denoting the power to know)':

This perversion comprises the attempted mastery of knowledge and the demonstration of the all-powerfulness of the subject. Attempted mastery of knowledge (or of desire) traps the subject in an imaginary relation, an endless circle of trying to know, and since the object of all knowing is a knowledge of desire, there is no end and no way out; especially if the subject's aim is full knowledge.³⁷

Consequently, from a feminist point of view, while it is possible to ally with structural/materialism's wish to eliminate the reproduction of oppressive bourgeois and/or patriarchal practices, the construction of a 'transcendental' viewing subject amounts to a conscious perceiving self that is by definition outside of historical and social determination. Negatory practices cannot but fail to address the wholly cultural and historical conditions which have led to the endemic sexual oppressiveness of dominant forms of

cinematic representation.

It is, of course, quite possible to read structural/materialism in a non-epistemological way. Consider the terms of Stephen Heath's psycho-textual analysis of spectator/text relations in Gidal's film practice. Structural/materialism 'has no place for the look, ceaselessly displaced, outphased, a problem of seeing: it is anti-voyeuristic'. For instance, the use of repetition:

In Condition of Illusion, which involves the instability of possibilities of recognition (speed of camera movement, use of focus, proximity, angle, etc., leaving only a few objects and places in the room identifiable according to the norms of photographic reproduction), the repetition suggests a possibility of 'catching up', 'making sure', 'verifying' which in fact remains unexploitable, ineffective (one never sees 'more'), resistant in the very literalness of the repetition (no variation, modulation, no 'new angle').³⁸

This is important for the decentred concept of subjectivity it embodies. Heath continues:

What is intended, what the practice addresses, is not a spectator as unified subject, timed by a narrative action, making the relations the film makes to be made, coming in the pleasure of the mastery of those relations, of the positioned view they offer, but a spectator, a spectating activity, at the limit of any fixed subjectivity, materially inconsistent, dispersed in process, beyond the accommodation of reality and pleasure principles. 'Boredom' is a word that is sometimes assumed by the film-makers with regard to their films, the boredom which is the loss of the imaginary unity of the subject-ego and the very grain of drive against that coherent fiction, the boredom which Barthes sees close to jouissance ('it is jouissance seen from the shores of pleasure').³⁹

Even though it is not easy to square the negatory terms of Heath's analysis with an epistemological project (which may circumvent Penley's objection), I would nonetheless insist that a film form which results in instability, displacement, and loss of coherence and unity is difficult to appropriate for properly feminist aims.

In short, feminist relations with structuralist/materialist film are troubled by both Gidal's and Heath's accounts:

- a) the epistemophilic desire for a 'scientific' investigation of the controlling perceiving self has little in common with a specifically feminist understanding of what 'coming-to-consciousness' should produce i.e. knowledge of the entirely social/cultural conditions of cinema's techniques of oppression;
- b) the production of a fragmented subject 'dispersed in process' cannot then be recuperated for a positive politics of feminist emancipation; one would have to demonstrate that 'jouissance' is gender-specific which Heath's analysis does not.

The strength of the case for defining certain post-structural film forms as post-Modernist can be gauged in the distance between, on one side, negatory anti-identification as it is manifested in structural/materialist film and, on the other, feminist deconstructionist theories of filmic subjectivity. Feminist deconstruction rejects both the supra-epistemological spectator of speculative film for what I understand as its Modernist non-gendered foundations, and the theory/practice of radically decentred subjectivity for arguing specifically female or even feminist subjectivity out of theoretical existence. Consequently, feminist deconstructive practices are primarily defined by their negotiation of a new understanding of subjectivity which can be appreciated most clearly as challenging the legitimization binaries of speculative film.

This must be referred back to the theoretical 'problematic', mainly disseminated in Britain through the pages of Screen, which separates post-structural avant-garde forms of the 1970s from the

cognitive-perceptual-phenomenological bases of 1960s structural film. Anthony Easthope's review of 'The Trajectory of Screen 1971-79' provides a useful summary of a critical 'conjuncture' formed from the 'encounter of Marxism and psychoanalysis on the terrain of semiotics'.⁴⁰ For my purposes, what is highly significant about this period is the reconceptualization of film as a triply determined 'specific signifying practice':

... 'signifying' is the recognition of a language as a systematic articulation of meanings; 'practice' refers to the process of this articulation, to the work of the production of meanings, and in doing so brings into the argument the problem of the subject within that work; 'specific' gives the necessity for the analysis of a particular signifying practice in its specific formations (which is not a commitment to some 'purity').⁴¹

The concept of film as a 'specific signifying practice' explicitly rejects the category of 'purity' which differentiates autonomous art from popular cultural film. Considered in semiological terms as a 'specific' language or 'systematic' process of articulation, it becomes conceptually important to grasp what is specific to film signification sui generis and thus to jettison the notion that there is a substantive distinction to be made between particular 'formations' or configurations of film signification. Louis Althusser's reformulation of Marx's concept of ideology provided a powerful tool in the process of de-differentiating Modernism's split between High Art and Low Culture by repudiating the existence of the 'aesthetic' as the a-historical, transcendent and essentially derived category of previous autonomous (bourgeois) epistemology. Broadly, as Tony Bennett argues in Formalism and Marxism (1979), to ask the 'eternal' question of what art (or in this instance, film) 'is' cannot be part of a materialist

philosophy which is predicated on the historicity of conceptual apparatuses. Rather, the question becomes what does art 'do', that is, how does it function in particular historical conjunctures. Bennett argues for a historically materialist analysis of literature (but without the 'epistemological ballast' he finds in both Althusser's formulation of ideology and Macherey's theory of literary production and the idealism inherent in thinking of both as 'invariant structures').⁴² I cite Bennett's work as a clear statement of the anti-essentialist/anti-purity position which also underpins the break from structural film epistemology which had investigated the 'essence' of film and the 'nature' of spectatorial perception in the experience of 'apperceptive reflexivity'.⁴³ An 'epistemological break' such as this would suggest is manifested in the formulation of the field of film as cultural production, a model of film meaning constructed without recourse to the art/popular culture divide, or to qualitative judgements about aesthetic value. Thus 'instances' of film signification - realist, documentary, generic, avant-garde - are not differentiated along the speculative Modernist axis of art/popular culture but rather theoretically demarcated by analysis of the particular configuration of systemic filmic signification and/or of the ideological operations they might perform - disruptive, confirmatory or 'fissured'. This is not to say that qualitative judgements dropped out of critical discourse but rather that their foundations shifted. Indeed, the institutional legitimation of academic discourses on popular forms of communication during the 1970s (Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Communication and Media

Studies) also testifies to the dissolution of speculative Modernism's value-laden separation of realms.⁴⁴ For feminists, the legitimation of popular culture as object of academic analysis is inextricable from its irreversible politicization. The Modernist speculative differentiations which equate art with autonomy and with 'specifically aesthetic' knowledge are no longer functional within a critical discourse that constructs its object of knowledge (cinematic 'institution', filmic 'texts') through radically incommensurate theories of signification and language, theories of ideology and apparatus, and theories of subjectivity and psychoanalysis. Two major consequences can be observed from the rejection of the rationalizing imperative sustaining speculative Modernism. On one side, the newly expanded field brings popular cultural productions within the scope of feminist/politically informed analysis and spawns some very influential '(re)readings for ideology' which contest the blanket assumption that popular texts are automatically 'affirmative' in the sense understood by previous Marxist philosophers of the Frankfurt School (and one could cite in this respect, for instance, Claire Johnson's work on Dorothy Arzner, textual analyses of the film noir genre, Douglas Sirk's melodrama, or individual readings of films such as Coma or Klute⁴⁵). On the other, the reduced margin between art and popular cultural fictions that this shift embodies fundamentally recasts the terms of avant-garde film practices and the political claims that can be made for them.

The weakening of speculative legitimation, which permits the expanded field of cultural production rather than aesthetic reduction and politicizes popular film as a primary site of

ideological (mis)representation, is simultaneously matched by avant-garde practices which are intimately related to the experience of popular cultural film forms in a way that previous speculative film is not. Noel Carroll states:

To deconstruct in film is always of necessity to deconstruct something, something else, something other than the deconstruction itself. That object is usually of the nature of a familiar cultural artifact - a preexisting film, genre, TV program, ad, a traditional compositional schema, traditional iconography, or even the conventions of narration.⁴⁶

Another major symptom of post-speculative post-Modernism might be isolated here in that the avant-garde agenda is now set according to a politics of 'intervention' rather than autonomous alternative:

If deconstructive cinema thus defines itself in relation to dominant cinema, it is not a static entity, because its character at any moment is always shaped, in an inverse manner, by dominant cinema... always, so to speak, casting a sideways glance at dominant cinema.⁴⁷

Similarly, Mary Ann Doane suggests 'contemporary film making addresses itself to the activity of uncoding, de-coding, deconstructing the given images'.⁴⁸ Avant-gardism in this mode operates within a much reduced distance between dominant and counter-cinema since its aim is to expose the functionings of culturally pre-given artifices which can be achieved only by using its structures and strategies. Hence the political necessity for rejecting the purity aesthetic of structural film and 'returning' to content, narrative, personal expression and, in a crude sense, to meaning and content. But it should be evident that parallels with earlier female makers of pre-structural formal film cannot be pressed given that the theoretical underpinnings are so radically dissimilar. Nor do I think this is quite enough to distinguish feminist deconstructionist film from old-style Brechtian formal

techniques of distancing already identified as the mainstay of Godardian anti-illusionism. Feminist deconstruction begins with a concern for:

... the textual operations and modes of address characteristic of dominant cinema, the aim being to provoke spectators into an awareness of the actual existence and effectivity of dominant codes, and consequently to engender a critical attitude towards these codes.⁴⁹

Hence the more properly formal techniques of alienation are not directed at film artifice per se but involve a process of re-orientating or diverting culturally established expectations towards specifically feminist readings/meanings. Feminist deconstruction is distinctive because of its shift from what I have argued is a speculative Modernist differentiation which considers 'the film text as an autonomous set of formal strategies' (and by extension, the spectator as an autonomous entity), and 'towards a notion of the interaction between spectator and text'.⁵⁰ The kind of 'interaction' that post-speculative film theory offers, however, must be placed in the context of the current theoretical bases of film as a 'signifying practice' - language, ideology, psychoanalysis:

- a) the systemic structure of language determines that 'language is not a function of the speaker'; the individual does not pre-exist the system and cannot, in Saussure's terms, 'create or modify it by himself';
- b) the Unconscious is 'structured like a language'; the Lacanian psychoanalytic Imaginary subject is constituted as 'I' in the 'misrecognition' of illusory unity which permits entry to Symbolic identifications through positional categories of language;
- c) the function of ideology and its 'misrepresentation of the real relations of production' chiefly operates through the interpellation or 'hailing' of the subject as individual.

Taking all three together, the conceptual distance between spectator and text is greatly reduced; subjectivity does not 'belong' to the self-possessed and external individual but becomes a function of the systems by which it is 'spoken': 'questions of signification cannot be divided from the processes by which viewing subjects are caught up in, formed by, and construct meanings'.⁵¹ Within this schema the 'specificity' of film, as against other cultural practices, can be located in its dependence on psycho-textual orderings of the scopic drive which 'suture' the subject into its representation. Metz's analysis of Hollywood illusionism provided the basis for a model based on the spectator's 'gaze':

... the spectator is absent from the screen as perceived, but he is also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even all-present as a perceiver. At every moment I am in the film by my look's caress. This presence often remains diffuse, geographically undifferentiated, evenly distributed over the whole surface of the screen; or more precisely hovering, like the psychoanalyst's listening ready to catch on preferentially to some motif in the film, according to my own fantasies as a spectator, without the cinematic code itself intervening to govern this anchorage and impose it on the whole audience. But in other cases, certain articles of the cinematic code or sub-codes... are made responsible for suggesting to the spectator the vector along which his permanent identification with his own look should be extended temporarily inside the film (the perceived) itself.⁵²

However, it is difficult to overstate the importance of theoretical feminism in concentrating critical attention on the ways in which filmic texts operate to constitute or construct subject positions for its intended audience. The most influential in this respect is Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytically-derived theory, outlined in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), that the textual economy of dominant narrative illusionist cinema, based on

fetishism and voyeurism, is at the same time a patriarchal sexual economy which works to split the gaze (and with it, desire and pleasure) along the axis of active male/passive female. For Mulvey, the filmic system of Hollywood illusionism is inevitably concerned with channelling visual pleasure so that its male/female audience can only identify with a male gaze through which women are objectified, that is, signified by their 'to be looked at-ness'. Thus Metz's 'articles of the cinematic code or sub-codes' are not neutral cinematic means but means of constructing and reinforcing patriarchal values in the field of the visual. Shot-reverse shot patterns, subjective shots, 'suture', point of view shots, narrative closure, visual signification through lighting, framing and costume conspire to deny women access to the power of a non-castrating/ed image, and to insist on their acquiescence in identifying with the male protagonist/male viewer's objectification. Mulvey's essay has had profound consequences for feminist analyses of mainstream dominant cinema but at present I cite her essay as a pivotal moment in the development of post-structural avant-garde practices. Though specifically addressed to mainstream Hollywood, Mulvey's analysis concludes with some thoughts on the kind of counter-cinema that might challenge its oppressive specular regime and offer a specifically feminist film making practice:

The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions... is to free the look of the camera from its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the 'invisible guest', and highlights how film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms.⁵³

Crucially, the 'distinguishing mark' of feminist deconstruction, 'as against other non-dominant and anti-dominant forms', is its 'recruitment of the spectator's active relation to the signification process for certain signifieds, or areas of substantive concern'.⁵⁴ Mulvey thus advocates film forms which re-negotiate subject positioning as produced in dominant cinema but nonetheless acknowledges the largely negatory and dis-pleasing position this sets upon the strategies of the avant-garde.

Because feminist deconstruction is both an aim and a process, it is not reducible to a set of formal techniques and hence the range of possibilities for deconstructive practices is as large as the field of cultural film production itself - culturally dominant narrative structures, genres, visual significations of the female body, structures of the gaze. Even a few exemplary texts should demonstrate that such strategic heterogeneity frustrates any attempt to recuperate feminist deconstruction for an avant-garde form and, in several ways, it is difficult to find a common link beyond the shared intention to 'interrogate' the desire-pleasure mechanisms of dominant film.

Sally Potter's recasting of the narrative of Puccini's 'La Boheme' (a High Cultural artifact) in Thriller (1979), for instance, is:

... structured around a rearrangement of narrative discourse in dominant cinema by the instatement of a woman's questioning voice as the film's organising principle. By its recruitment of investigatory narrative structure and first-person voice-over, Thriller at once draws upon, parodies, challenges and transforms the narrative and cinematic codes of the Hollywood film noir.⁵⁵

This intention might be easy to reconcile with Carroll's contention that 'deconstruction might be thought of as the autodestruction of the film itself through the staged collision of the elements within it'.⁵⁶ However, the Eisensteinian flavour of such analysis certainly reduces another cited example, Michelle Citron's Daughter Rite (1978), to non-gendered verfremdungseffekt. It is true that Daughter Rite shares with anti-illusionism a play upon the discrepancy between visual representation and verbal commentary (sound/image disjunction). But by mixing two distinct modes - the confessional (which deals with mother/daughter relations) set against 'sequences - marked cinematically as 'direct' documentary - in which two sisters act out their relationships with one another and with their absent mother',⁵⁷ Citron's work is thus more interesting for the ways in which cinematic modes of address are deconstructed. In particular, the conflict between the modes works to reveal that both film documentary and autobiography are complicit with placing and containing female discourses on familial relationships. E. Ann Kaplan writes:

The use of home movies and old photographs is crucial as a device that establishes continuity through time and reflects the fiction making that, as Metz and Heath have shown, pervades even the documentary. Used as unproblematic representations, the past images function to seal individual change instead of providing evidence of the way women and their bodies are constructed by the signifying practices of both the social and psychological institutions in which they are embedded... this construction makes a main theme in... Daughter Rite (1978) where the slowing down of home movies enables us to see that the representations are far from an 'innocent recording', that the process of making the movies itself functions to construct the place for the female child.⁵⁸

And Kuhn comments that the structure of spectatorial engagement cannot be attributed to textual deconstruction alone:

The distancing, if such it is, is not that of the critical spectator of the Brechtian film. The subject matter and the intimacy of address... draw the spectator closely into the representation, in effect replicating the pain and ambivalence of our hostile and loving feelings towards those to whom we are closest, our mothers in particular... Moreover, if only by virtue of the kinds of issues it deals with, the film constructs an address which acknowledges sexual difference as crucial to the signifying process. Male and female will surely read this film differently. At the same time, the representation clearly constructs no unitary subjectivity for spectators of either gender. Daughter Rite appears to offer a relationship of spectator and text in which distancing does not necessarily ensue from gaps between discourses, although an actively critical perspective might.⁵⁹

In a wholly different way, McCall, Pajackowska, Tyndall and Weinstock's Sigmund Freud's Dora (1979) is a sophisticated film which is partly structured around encounters between Freud and his case study Dora which are used to argue that Freudian psychoanalysis is a power discourse which 'accounts' for female sexuality and desire in heterosexual and phallocentric terms. Kaplan suggests that this critique is carried through on many levels. The opening sequence uses an extreme close-up of a female mouth to discuss women's relationship to the discourse of psychoanalysis:

The Talking Lips argue against their lover's belief that psycho-analysis is a discourse that offers reality; for the woman, it is rather a discourse shot through with bourgeois, capitalist ideology that looks at the individual outside of real history and of real struggle, and is ultimately more like a sophisticated language game which was never innocent.⁶⁰

At another level, contemporary visual objectifications of the female image (advertising images and porn clips) are used to counterpoint the various stages in the course of Dora's psychoanalysis to which Kaplan rightly ascribes a comic function though serious in their illustration of phallocentric

'commonalities' in the images. More broadly, Dora's rejection of Freud's interpretation of her 'hysterical' symptoms in terms of repressed desire for her father/Freud himself is mirrored by the unsuccessful closure of films's overall 'romance' narrative structure (female submission after temporary resistance). The four-part structure of Sigmund Freud's Dora offers an interpretative key to the founding absence which can be seen to structure the film's questioning of how women are forced to identify with phallogentric objectifications of their own image: the absence of the Mother-figure as a positive term in Freudian psychoanalysis is highlighted in the last section of the film. Through the use of letters written/spoken off-camera both by Dora's 'mother' (and by an abstract Mother), the film returns to pose questions of the repression of pre-Oedipal female-female identification in the Freudian narrative of the 'family romance'; the Mother-figure becomes symbolic of a potential 'space' outside of a phallogentric order which demands her disavowal.⁶¹

A fourth example of deconstructionist film form unites a series of films that Carroll terms New Talkies which share an overriding concern with the psychoanalytical-ideological importance of the ways in which language and film narrative construct sexual difference and predetermine subject positioning. The locus classicus of the New Talkie, Laura Mulvey/Peter Wollen's Riddles of the Sphinx (1976), carries through Mulvey's argument for a film politics of 'passionate detachment' by explicitly incorporating theoretical propositions drawn from current debates on female subjectivity, psychoanalysis and patriarchal ideology. Again, debts to Godard and Straub/Huillet are profound in terms of formal

techniques - fragmented sequence shots, intertitles, 360° pans, direct address, and self-reflexive inclusion of film makers. But the purpose of dislocation is made more complex by the film's declared aim of attempting to 'speak' for women outside of patriarchal symbolic codes.

Mary Ann Doane has taken up these issues in her article 'Women's Stake: Filming the Female Body' which addresses the enormous difficulty facing filmmakers attempting to 'elaborate a new syntax, thus "speaking" the female body differently, even haltingly or inarticulately from the perspective of a classical syntax'.⁶² The Anti-illusionist techniques of distantiation are simply not available to feminists who understand cinema to be wholly imbricated with the psycho-social functionings of individual subjectivity under patriarchy:

A machine for the production of images and sounds, the cinema generates and guarantees pleasure by a corroboration of the spectator's identity. Because that identity is bound up with that of the voyeur and the fetish, because it requires for its support the attributes of the 'non-castrated', the potential for illusory mastery of the signifier, it is not accessible to the female spectator, who, in buying her ticket, must deny her sex.⁶³

At a more profound level, Doane argues that representing the female body outside of these terms is, in a sense, an 'impossibility'. Doane addresses Michelle Montrelay's Lacanian description of the different trajectories through the Oedipus complex, which produces sexed identities on the basis of absence/presence (articulated upon the privileged signifier of the 'third term', the 'phallus'). For the male child, desire, as the perpetually deferred search for the 'original' illusory 'plenitude' experienced in terms of the relation of oneness with the Mother, is brought into play at the

moment of recognition of the loss of this unity through the entry of the Father: paternal prohibition against incest forces a split between desire and the object of desire, and male desire is constituted as an endlessly deferred pursuit of lost unity. Male renunciation of pre-Oedipal identification with the Mother, and identification with the interdictory authority of the Father, must be forced: there must be something at 'stake' in order to secure the male identification with the Law of Father. In Elizabeth Lyon's terms, 'neither subject, man or woman, can have the phallus; it represents lack for both sexes'.⁶⁴ For the male child, the 'stake' is symbolized by the penis which functions to 'represent the lack' at the heart of the loss of original plenitude: identification with the interdictory authority of the Father is founded on the threat of loss or castration which the female in turn comes to signify. The male child is thus positioned as a privileged and powerful 'owner' of the means to symbolic power and identification with the Father follows from the recognition that the penis-phallus offers a new form of plenitude, a 'comforting and recuperative presence'⁶⁵ standing against the potentially castrating perception of female 'lack'. Doane's reading of Montrelay argues that the constitution of masculine/feminine also produces quite different male/female relations to representation itself. In terms of language, the originating structure of sexual difference 'sets in motion the organized relay of differences which constitute language and so the human subject'; male entry into the realm of the Symbolic (culture, language, representation) is guaranteed by the phallus as primary signifier which is the

condition of differentially-defined signification itself. The origination of female identity in Lacanian terms insists that women 'lack the lack' which permits entry into the Symbolic order of language and representation, and the image of woman must always entail the threat of castration. From this scenario, Montrelay concludes that, because females do not have the means for symbolizing the phallus, their relationship to language can only be a negative one. Female desire cannot be known, cannot be thought in positive terms, since the condition of entry into language and representation is predicated on 'female' as 'absence'. However, the political value of Lacanian theory for theorists such as Montrelay and Doane and for a politics of film making derives primarily from his insistence on the lack of absolute fixity in subjective positioning. Kate Linker argues that it is important to keep in mind that language (here, film language) can construct other positions if Lacan's insistence on the non-foundational character of subjectivity is observed. A positive programme for a new politics of difference can be founded by returning:

... to the subject's circling around this fantasy of unity, emphasizing the subject's divided and uncohesive status, its fundamental dependency on the signifier. And its inherent instability, for Lacan stresses that this subject is in process, produced in and through the modalities of language: if it is constituted through the formative stages that underly the acquisition of language, this structuring is not definitive, the subject is constantly formed and re-formed, positioned and re-positioned in every speech act. This flux in the subject has important implications for ideology, which aims to produce the appearance of a unified subject, masking or covering division... [and for] the role played by specularity, and to the look as guarantee of imaginary self-coherence.⁶⁶

Riddles of the Sphinx thus attempts to break with patriarchal modes

of visual language in order to shatter the illusions of unified and cohesive subject positions (male active/female passive) demanded for dominant representation to 'take place' (actually, to 'take the place of'). But whereas Heath's jouissance makes no claims for the gendering of this destruction of unity, Riddles does. The purpose of de-unifying 'feminine' subjectivity is part of an attempt to 'speak' from the margins of repressed female discourse. Riddles, as with Sigmund Freud's Dora, is particularly concerned positively to reevaluate the patriarchal repression of the Mother construed as castrated Other (mirrored in phallogentric psychoanalytic accounts). A photograph of Greta Garbo as the Sphinx is used as a guiding metaphor for the manner in which patriarchy simultaneously idealizes and objectifies cultural images of women and assigns them an absent 'space', at the margins of an Oedipal/phallogentric constitution of social and psychical order. The Sphinx image is symbolic of this exclusion and 'represents, not the voice of truth, not an answering voice, but its opposite: a questioning voice, a voice asking a riddle': the Sphinx is 'outside the city gates, she challenges the culture of the city, with its order of kinship and its order of knowledge, a culture and a political system which assigns women a subordinate place' (Laura Mulvey's direct address).⁶⁷ Thus the formal destruction of conventional modes of address which are dependent on the 'illusory mastery' of the cinematic signifier are integral to a dislocation of patriarchal inscriptions of the meaning of the female body as Mother. This is figured quite literally during the initial 360° pan of Louise and baby:

The words on the sound track during the pan are deliberately scrambled, emerging as word associations and not as coherent associations and not as coherent, ordered sentences. They present the contradictory feelings of mothering: its burdensome nature, with endless routines, and the warm, cosy feelings of closeness and sheltering that also exist. Presumably, ordered sentences would express only male notions of mothering, and if women are to assert their own discourse, it must take a new form.⁶⁸

I shall return to consider some of the political consequences of this position in relation to the post-structuralist deconstruction of subjectivity shortly. At present, I wish to continue with my application of Lyotard's delegitimation theory which has immediate bearing on defining postmodernism.

From these few examples it would be tempting to conclude that 'postmodernist' best defines the political and theoretical aims and objectives of feminist deconstructionist film. In some respects, these films do indeed exhibit certain features which have also been taken to be definitive of the emergence of postmodernism in other fields, such as painting and sculpture.

Firstly, one can identify the incorporation of alien material - language, theory, writing, mass media imagery - which clearly signals a rejection of the 'purity' of speculative Modernism. For Craig Owens:

The eruption of language into the aesthetic field... is coincident with, if not the definitive index of, the emergence of postmodernism. This 'catastrophe' disrupted the stability of modernist partitioning of the aesthetic field into discrete areas of specific competence; one of its most deeply felt shocks dislodged literary activity from the enclaves into which it had settled only to stagnate - poetry, the novel, the essay... - and dispersed it across the entire spectrum of aesthetic activity.⁶⁹

However, Hal Foster is right to criticize Owens for reducing Modernism to late Modernist (speculative) minimalism in order to

define postmodernism by the importation of 'impure' language into medium-specific art. My own analysis of Eisenstein and Godard shows clearly that the 'eruption of language' into film discourse is actually present within Modernism, if Modernism is understood more complexly as construed by both metanarratives.

Secondly, the generic collision or dis-location of dominant codes of signification and narrative structure which destroy the notion of aesthetic autonomy in favour of opening up filmic discourse to the space of Barthesian cultural textuality, 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash'.⁷⁰ Using letters, photographs, 'found' film, home movies, advertising images, spoken narration and generic quotations from previous film modes, the deconstructive film text thus beomes a matter of intertextual, or 'allegorical' reading.

For Foster:

Contingent, this art exists in (or as) a web of references, not necessarily located in any one form, medium, or site. As the object is destructured, so is the subject (viewer), and the modernist order of the arts decentred. Such art is 'allegorical' in nature. Temporal and spatial at once, it dissolves the old order; so too it opposes the 'pure sign' of late-modernist art and plays, instead, on the 'distance which separates signifier from signified, sign from meaning'.⁷¹

Thirdly, by questioning the visual operations of patriarchy at work in dominant cinema, Mulvey/Wollen, Citron, Potter draw attention to the manner in which dominant structures of representation function to exclude and 'silence' 'feminine' or feminist voices and positions. In these respects, I agree that the films do represent a fundamental and irreparable fracturing of autonomous and aesthetic speculative Modernism. Again, in Owen's terms:

In the modern period the authority of the work of art, its claim to represent some authentic vision of the world, did not reside in its uniqueness or singularity, as is often said; rather that authority was based on the universality modern aesthetics attributed to the forms utilized for the representation of vision, over and above differences in content due to the production of works in concrete historical circumstances... Not only does the postmodernist work claim no such authority, it⁷² also actively seeks to undermine all such claims.

However, one cannot pass too quickly over the assertion that feminism and postmodernism are interchangeable. Contesting the monolithic unified masculine viewer, dominant forms of cinematic 'reality' and structures of desire in order to take apart patriarchal cinematic 'language', feminist deconstructionist film is an important response to the notion that for those marginalized by dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and social relations of power (rather than a sense of identity as a reflection of an inner 'essence') has always been present.⁷³ Accordingly, I have much sympathy with Waugh's contention that labelling feminist cultural theory and practice 'postmodernist' can elide very real political differences between feminist and other theorists (who understand language and representation in terms of decentring, free play, aporia and 'gaming'). For instance, as I shall proceed to argue, Lyotard's postmodernist 'agenda' is a problematic one for feminism, and to equate them uncritically runs a high risk of effacing feminism's 'stake' in debates on the meaning of postmodernist subjectivity and identity. It is worth recalling Adrienne Rich's warning that 'naming' is in itself a political act:

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is mis-named as something else, made difficult to come by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying

language - this will become not merely unspoken but unspeakable.⁷⁴

More importantly, Waugh's resistance to the act of appropriation or 'mis-naming' performed by sliding feminism under the postmodernist label is founded on a refusal to cede the position that it is feminism which recognizes the political - rather than simply theoretical - implications of the extent to which 'subjectivity is constructed through the institutional dispositions of relations of power as well as those of fictional convention'.⁷⁵

For feminist, as much as for leftist/Marxist critics, the rejection of the autonomous space of 'purely' aesthetic knowledge which is entailed by the imperative to 'rationalize' artistic knowledge, is largely an enabling one, providing the conceptual distance for revealing the extent to which the speculative narrative constructs its 'object' through historico-epistemological exclusions in order to permit film to be art, that is, to be Modernist. Instead, from the point of view of cultural production, film as visual signification is theorized as social, economic, ideological and psychical practice wholly inscribed and embedded within dominant relations of power and oppression. Feminism, I have argued, is historically and theoretically instrumental in delegitimizing the Modernist narrative which reduces art to the pursuit of medium-specificity. But it would be a mistake, when seen from Lyotard's perspective, to rest a definition of postmodernism on the politicization of cultural production which accompanies feminist delegitimation of the grand récit of speculation. Even if it is granted that feminism does effectively put an end to the Modernist claims of speculative knowledge, it

might well be objected that post-speculative feminism simply rejoins the other Modernist metanarrative, that of emancipation. Clearly, within Lyotard's framework, such appeal to the grand récit of emancipation cannot be justified since postmodernism must be understood without the epistemological certainties derived from that narrative as well. Thus, having outlined the conditions under which the narrative of speculation is rendered 'bankrupt', my next task is to investigate how the process of delegitimation contests the Modernist notion of film as legitimated by the narrative of emancipation.

For feminism, this is by far the more problematic line of enquiry set in motion by the central thesis of The Postmodern Condition. But to understand why the narrative of liberty can no longer be justified as a model for emancipatory aesthetics, and why feminism must take its delegitimation seriously, the epistemological foundations of the emancipatory metanarrative need to be established more fully. Accordingly, the next Chapter will address the 'rationality imperative' sustaining avant-garde knowledge as the 'instrument' of liberty, and establish its relationship to Modernist constructions of the 'social bond'. This should serve to locate a consideration of the consequences of Lyotard's theory of postmodernism as a condition of multiplicity and fragmentation for the epistemological models of the social bond underlying feminist theories of avant-garde practice. From these issues, I would suggest, the question emerges most urgently: does the loss of metanarrative models of the social bond necessarily entail the loss of the means to emancipation?

NOTES: CHAPTER THREE

1. Christine Lindey's study of the rise of American Abstractionism from initially oppositional critique of consumer capitalism to High Art 'official avant-garde' provides an interesting parallel to the ideological consequences of identifying 'radical' in the mathematical sense with 'radical' in the sense of political critique. My point is that the pursuit of 'specificity' and the political function of critique should not be conflated when they actually imply quite distinct meanings for the term 'avant-garde' under the narrative of speculation: the two senses of 'radical' should not, therefore, be automatically conjoined. See Lindey, Art in the Cold War: from Vladivostock to Kalamazoo 1945-62 (London: The Herbert Press, 1990).

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2. B. Ruby Rich, 'In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism', Jump Cut, 19 (1979), in ed. P. Steven, Jump Cut Anthology (1985), pp. 209-30.

3. Annette Kuhn, Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema (1982), p. 4. The major theoretical issues raised by attempts to reconcile feminist with Marxist thought can be found in Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production co-edited by Kuhn & Wolpe (London: RKP, 1978) and the special edition of Feminist Review on Socialist Feminism (1984). See also Michelle Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: (London: Verso, 1980) and Coward & Ellis, Language and Materialism (1977). Similarly, radical separatist positions can be found in eds. Koedt/Levine/Rapone, Radical Feminism, (New York: Quadrangle Bookes, 1973); Adrienne Rich 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' in eds. Snitow/Stansell/Thompson, Desire: The Politics of Sexuality (London: Virago, 1983); and Sheila Jefferies, Anti-Climax (London: Women's Press, 1990). I have intentionally restricted definition at this stage to the Anglo-American feminist 'tradition' derived from liberal-humanism at the expense (amongst others) of French feminism as propounded by Hélène Cixious, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva (concerned with language, semiotics and textuality rather than political reformism and social change): I have some difficulty in establishing much common ground between the two groups, on both theoretical and political counts. A useful English language introduction to French feminism is edited by Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron New French Feminisms (New York: Harvester, 1981). See Toril Moi's Sexual/Textual Politics (1985) for an examination of this issue.

5. The term 'objective alliance' is taken from Laura Mulvey's article 'Feminism, Film and the 'Avant-Garde'', originally published in Framework, 10 (1979), pp. 3-10 and reprinted in ed. M. Jacobus, Women Writing, Writing About Women (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 177-95.

6. See Griselda Pollock, 'What's Wrong with Images of Women?', Screen Education, 24: Autumn (1977), pp. 25-33, and Elizabeth Cowie, 'Women, Representation and the Image', Screen Education, 23: Summer (1977), pp. 15-23. 'Images' criticism in literary studies provides a methodological parallel in analysing how female characters were represented in male-authored texts in terms of stereotypes subjected to the exercise of male power. Seminal texts here are Mary Ellman's Thinking About Women (New York: Harcourt, 1968) and Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (London: Virago, 1977).

7. See 'Positive Images: Screening Women's Films', a revised edition of the introduction to Artel and Wengraf's Positive Images: Non Sexist Films for Young People (San Francisco: Bootlegger Press, 1976). See also Diane Waldman's critique of this work 'There's More to a Positive Image than Meets the Eye', both reprinted in ed. P. Steven (1985), pp. 199-202 and 202-08.

8. Claire Johnston Notes on Women's Cinema (1973), p. 29. Partially reprinted in Nichols, Movies and Methods (1976) as 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema', pp. 208-17. Preceding citations both Nichols, p. 211. The need for feminists to move away from merely representing or expressing the 'personal' to exploring the relationship between film and consciousness was succinctly expressed in Camera Obscura's first edition:

It is important to know where to locate ideology and patriarchy within the mode of representation in order to intervene and transform society, to define a praxis for change. Crucial to the feminist struggle is an awareness that any theory of how to change consciousness requires a notion of how consciousness is formed, of what change is and how it occurs.

Cited in Kuhn (1979), p. 187.

9. Again, the parallels with feminist literary history are strong; Elaine Showalter's formulation of 'gynocriticism' in A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977) shares the two-fold aim of rediscovering 'lost' literary texts (those wilfully neglected by the male apparatus of authors/critics/teachers), and of evaluating women-authored texts as necessarily 'authentic' representations of female experience. Both aims are underpinned by the assumption of a form of 'biologism' that argues for a correspondence between the gender of author/director and the meaning of texts produced. Claire Johnston and Pam Cook's work on Dorothy Arzner, Ida Lupino and Nelly Kaplan is heavily informed by this model though they are more sophisticated in their appreciation of the textual and institutional constraints operating on the production of an authentic feminine 'voice' within films by women. The notion of a specifically feminist 'progressive classical text' which is 'ruptured', 'split' or 'dislocated' in terms of the closure of patriarchal ideology is, however, closely identified with exemplary female directors and arguably does constitute a 'mainstream' feminist aesthetic. See also Janet Bergstrom's 'Rereading the Work of Claire Johnston', Camera Obscura 3/4 (1979), pp. 21-31.

10. Mulvey (1979), p. 180. Mulvey suggests that women's exclusion from directorial roles accompanied the concentration of film production away from relatively independent small producers of one-reelers and towards the formation of the large studios. The establishment of studio control over production, distribution and exhibition during the late 1920's involved massive financial backing from Wall Street and the electronics industry especially during experimentation with sound technologies. Mulvey implies that women could not be trusted with overall artistic control under such enormous financial responsibility. For a detailed study of the industrial/commercial background to the financing of sound film within the studio system, see J. Douglas Gomery's 'Writing the History of the American Film Industry: Warner Bros and Sound', Screen, 17: 1 (1976), pp. 40-53.

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11. Trachtenberg, The Postmodern Moment (1985), pp. 101-31.

12. Noel Carroll (1985), p. 101.

13. See The Women's Companion to International Film for entries giving detailed filmographies and biographical data on Deren, Dulac and Clarke.

14. Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera (1983) p. 88-89.

15. Mulvey (1979), p. 186.

16. See Genette Vincendeau's entry in The Women's Companion to International Film pp. 126-27.

17. Kaplan (1983), p. 88.

18. Maya Deren, 'Amateur Versus Professional', Film Culture, 39 Winter (1965), cited in Renan (1967), p. 41.

19. Michelle Citron's personal account of her early work within the avant-garde stresses the importance of the film maker/producer-director labels for identifying types of creative activity: 'each word implies not only a particular relationship to the product and defines a different degree of control and power, but an ideology as well' from 'Women's Film Production: Going Mainstream' in ed. E. Pribram, (1988), pp. 45-63, (p.46).

20. Kuhn (1982), p. 186.

21. Noel Carroll, (1985) p. 104. Malcolm le Grice has recently exhibited contemporary computer-generated serial programmes incorporating video and rephotography techniques at the National Society for Art and Design Education Conference, Brighton Dec. 1991. My correspondence with him yielded the text of his (unpublished) paper 'Implications of Digital Systems for Aspects of Film Theory'; it raises some interesting questions around the issue of whether his work constitutes a postmodernist aesthetic, or if it continues his earlier work which I have defined as Modernist.

22. Mulvey (1979), p. 193.

23. The phrase is adapted from the title of Chapter 9 of Kuhn's Women's Pictures (1982), pp. 178-96. Here, the author outlines the institutional and financial structures (of production, exhibition and distribution) confronting counter-cultural film makers. She cites the availability of synchronous 16mm sound cameras since the early 1970s as a pivotal development for feminist film makers (e.g. London Women's Film Group, circa 1972-5) especially for documentary and 'consciousness raising'. Kuhn also addresses the rather more pragmatic relationship between feminism and the 'artisanal' mode of production: it is cheap, available and relatively easy to use.

24. Burger (1984), p. 28.

25. Noel Carroll (1985), p. 112.

Delegitimation: The Narrative of Speculation

26. Gidal, 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film' (1976), p. 15.

27. Gidal, Materialist Film (1989), p. 73.

28. Gidal (1989), p. 14.

29. Gidal, 'The Anti-Narrative' (1979), p. 73. Author's emphasis.

30. Gidal (1979), p. 78.

31. Constance Penley, 'The Avant-Garde and Its Imaginary', Camera Obscura, 2 (1977), pp. 3-33.

32. See Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (1977) and Ecrits (1977). Secondary works on Lacan are abundant; for the most lucid exposition of Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, see Anika Lemaire, Jacques Lacan (1977) esp. Parts 3-7, pp. 67-211 (my citation p. 78). The Editorial of New Left Review, 'Introduction to Jacques Lacan', NLR51: Sept/Oct (1968), pp. 63-70 is also useful and is followed by Lacan's 'The Mirror-Phase as formative of the Function of the I' (1949), pp. 71-78. For a clear outline of the terms upon which Lacan's theory of the constitution of subjectivity has been appropriated for non-psychoanalytical purposes, see Steve Burniston & Chris Weedon, 'Ideology, Subjectivity and the Artistic Text' in Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 10 (1977), pp. 199-229. Specifically feminist uses of Lacan in film theory will be cited below.

33. Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', Screen, 16: 2 (1975), pp. 14-76 (pp. 50-51); also included within Metz's expanded volume Psychoanalysis and the Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier (1982).

34. Metz (1975), p. 51.
35. Penley (1977), p. 12.
36. Penley (1977), p. 18. The question is raised more specifically:
Is presenting an image of a filmic process, even the process of the 'coming into presence' of the very film we are watching, a way of making that process, the image of that process, more 'there', less imaginary (because truly 'present'), more directly apprehendable by perception? If the cinematic signifier shares the characteristic structuration of the Imaginary, then to insist on the presence, the 'materiality' of the image, would that not be to simultaneously (unconsciously) insist on its absence, would it not risk moving the imaginary quotient up yet another notch? (pp. 10-11).
- Peter Gidal (1979) offers the following defence:
... some have claimed my films suppress a knowledge of the imaginary of the image by asserting the objectivity of the images and the rationality of our relationship to them... Those who think this way do not realize that one is in ideology and one does ideological combat. One can know of being in process, one can know of constructions operative in image formation/transformation: one does not know, one 'misses' or 'misrecognizes' one's position, one's relation, one's bindings/fractures against that. ('It' is where I 'am' not.) (p. 78).
37. Penley (1977), p. 17-8. Author's emphasis.
38. Stephen Heath, 'Repetition Time' in his Questions of Cinema (1981), pp. 165-75 (p. 171 and p. 169).
39. Heath (1981), p. 167. Barthes' seminal distinction between texts of pleasure and texts of jouissance can be found in The Pleasure of the Text (trans. R. Miller, London: Johnathan Cape, 1975).
40. Anthony Easthope, collected in ed. F. Barker, The Politics of Theory (Essex Conference Papers on the Sociology of Literature 1982, pp. 121-33). Easthope distinguishes several stages in Screen's development according to predominance of particular theories
1971-74: Althusser's essay on Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses, Brecht's theories on Epic Theatre and Russian Formalist work on film 'language';
1974-76: Metz's 'Imaginary Signifier' and Lacanian psychoanalysis for theories of filmic subjectivity esp. for feminist critiques of desire and pleasure;
1977-79 Foucault, Derrida and post-structuralist 'epistemological anxiety' over 'totalizing' discourses which confine the Subject to enunciation by language systems.
The Screen 'problematic' is comprehensively represented by both Screen Readers (1977) and (1981) which can be read to substantiate Easthope's diachronic reading.

41. Stephen Heath, 'Lessons from Brecht', Screen, 15: 2 (1974), pp. 103-28 (p. 128). Cited in Easthope, p. 122.

42. Tony Bennett (1979), see especially Chapter 7: 'The Legacy of Aesthetics', pp. 127-42.

43. Noel Carroll (1985), p. 107.

44. Two very important sources which document the legitimation of Film and Media Studies within educational institutions, see ed. David Lusted, Guide to Film Studies in Secondary and Further Education (London: BFI Education, 1984) and ed. Christine Gledhill, Film and Media Studies in Higher Education (London: BFI Education, 1981). The latter is particularly apposite in relation to the influence of the problematic (or theoretical matrix) I am concerned with here: see esp. Nicholas Garnham, 'Film and Media Studies: Reconstructing the Subject', pp. 3-10; Richard Collins, 'Media/Film Studies', pp. 11-8; Terry Lovell, 'Marxism and Cultural Studies', pp. 19-30; Sylvia Harvey, 'Women's Studies and Film/Media Studies', pp. 31-41, and Philip Simpson, 'Institutions and Course Structures', pp. 45-69.

45. On Dorothy Arzner, see Claire Johnston, The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema (1975); Pam Cook, 'Approaching the Work of Dorothy Arzner' in ed. C. Penley (1988), pp. 46-56.

On film noir, see ed. Kaplan, Women in Film Noir (1978); Frank Krutnik, 'Desire, Transgression and James M Cain', Screen, 23: 1 (1982), pp. 31-44, and Linda Williams, 'Feminist Film Theory: Mildred Pierce and the Second World War' in ed. E. Pribram, (1988), pp. 12-30.

On Sirk and melodrama, see Laura Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama', Movie, 25: Summer (1980), pp. 53-56; Paul Willemen, 'Distanciation and Douglas Sirk', Screen, 12: 2 (1971), and 'Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System', Screen, 13: 4 (1972/3), pp. 128-34; Stephen Heath, 'Intimations of Lifelessness: Sirk's Ironic Tear-jerker', Movie, 6: (1977-78) pp. 20-22 & p. 34).

On Coma, see Elizabeth Cowie, 'The Popular Film as a Progressive Text: A Discussion of Coma', in ed. C. Penley (1988), pp. 104-40.

For debates on whether or not Klute is a 'progressive classical text', see Christine Gledhill, 'Klute I: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism', (pp. 6-21) and 'Klute II: Feminism and Klute' (pp. 112-28), in E. Ann Kaplan (1978); also Terry Lovell & Simon Frith, 'How Do You Get Pleasure - Another Look At Klute' Screen Education, 39: Summer (1981).

46. Noel Carroll (1985), p. 112.

47. Kuhn (1982), p. 161.

48. Mary Ann Doane, 'Women's Stake: Filming the Female Body' in ed. C. Penley, (1988), pp. 216-28 (p. 217). My emphasis.

49. Kuhn (1982), p. 160.

50. Kuhn (1982), p. 159. My emphasis.

51. Metz (1975) p.
52. Metz (1975), p. 56.
53. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Screen, 16: 3 (1975), pp. 6-18 (p. 18).
54. Kuhn (1982), p. 160.
55. Kuhn (1982), p. 169. Film noir is thus taken to be oppressive rather than transgressive: some analyses in Kaplan (1979) would argue that film noir is marked by potential disjunction between its sexual encoding and visual signification of female sexuality and conventional narrative structure, offering 'gaps' or 'fissures' that enable transgressive readings 'against the grain'.
56. Noel Carroll (1985), p. 114. Carroll's position can be explained by the fact that he traces a non-feminist deconstruction 'lineage' from the found footage experiments of Joseph Cornell's Surrealist Rose Hobart circa 1930 (which re-edits 'a Hollywood potboiler' to the point of its narrative dissolution) and, within the structural film line, Ken Jacob's Tom, Tom the Piper's Son (1969); see pp. 111-15.
57. Kuhn (1982), p. 171.
58. E. Ann Kaplan, 'Theories and Strategies of Feminist Documentary', Millenium Film Journal, 12: Fall/Winter (1982-83), p. 53. (unobtainable). Cited in Carroll (1985), p. 115.
59. Kuhn (1982), p. 172-73. Citron's deconstruction of documentary and confessional modes derives added piquancy from the fact that both were crucially important to feminist 'consciousness-raising' endeavours of 1960/70s.
60. Kaplan (1983), pp. 143-54 (p. 145).
61. An interesting footnote appears in J. Hoberman's survey of post-structural 'theoretical' feminist film practice (identified with Potter, the Sigmund Freud's Dora collective and later Mulvey/Wollen) as films which:
... have followed the lead of film theorists in creating films to illustrate their doctrines. By addressing themselves to a specific audience, such films resemble such late works of the New American Cinema as James Benning's Grand Opera (1981) and George Landow's Wide Angle Saxon (1975), both highly self-conscious films that rely upon the viewer's familiarity with various avant-garde personalities and issues. The whole tendency has been parodied by Manuel DeLanda's Raw Nerves; A Lacanian Thriller (1979). According to the filmmaker, his film is nothing less than 'an allegorical mise-en-scene of certain key concepts in contemporary psychoanalysis. Whereas critical discourses often attempt to elucidate the structure of films by describing them in the terms of some theoretical system, here the film operates as a dramatization of part of one of those systems. The result

is not didactic. It does not add to the understanding of those concepts. It displaces them from the context where they are operative and inserts them in a narrative space where they can be properly 'misused'.

Hoberman, 'After Avant-Garde Film', in ed. B. Wallis (1984), (p. 67, note 12).

62. Doane in ed. C. Penley (1988), p. 226.

63. Doane (1988), p. 216.

64. Elizabeth Lyon, 'Discourse and Difference', Camera Obscura, 3/4 (1979), pp. 14-31 (p. 18). Lyon also surveys Montrelay and Luce Irigaray's use of Lacan but finally rejects both: Irigaray for her 'essentialist' tendency for arguing that 'feminine' discursive specificity can be tied to biological difference, and Montrelay for not theoretically resolving her use of the concept of the repression/censorship of female desire. Lyon asks: how can female desire be 'outside' of language and representation and, more importantly, how can it be made known?:

To say, then, that feminine desire is censored is not to say it is unsymbolizable; if it were unsymbolizable, unrepresentable, we would not know of it. (p. 19).

65. The phrase is Christine Gledhill's who makes an concise appraisal of Lacanian theory in the context of filmic subjectivity in 'Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism', Quarterly Review of Film Studies, 3: 4 (1978), pp. 457-493.

66. Kate Linker, 'Representation and Sexuality' in ed. B. Wallis, (1984), pp. 391-415 (p. 398).

67. Kaplan (1983), p. 175.

68. Kaplan (1983), p. 176.

69. Craig Owens, 'Earthworlds', (originally published October, 10 (1979), inclusive page numbers not given, p. 126-27); cited by Hal Foster in his 'Re: Post' (1982), in ed. B. Wallis (1984), pp. 189-201, (p. 194). Compare with Peter Gidal's stridently 'medium-specific' view that 'deconstruction exercises, maintained filmically, (i.e. on film, in film) are direct translations from the written into film, and are thus filmically reactionary' (1976), p. 5.

70. Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in Image - Music -Text (trans. S. Heath, London: Fontana, 1977), p. 146.

71. Foster (1982), p. 196 in response to Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', (originally published October, 13 (1980) and reprinted in ed. B. Wallis, (1984).

72. Craig Owens, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism', in ed. Hal Foster Postmodern Culture (1985), pp. 57-82, (p. 58).

73. Following Patricia Waugh, Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern (1989).

74. Adrienne Rich, 'It's the Lesbian in Us' (1977) cited in B. Ruby Rich (1979), p. 209.

75. Waugh (1989), p. 2.

CHAPTER FOUR

POSTMODERNISM AND DELEGITIMATION:

THE NARRATIVE OF LIBERTY

I have argued that the emergence of feminism is crucial to the process by which speculative Modernism loses its claim to validate the production of Modernist film. Lyotard's theory of the delegitimation of the grand récit of liberty, it will be recalled from Chapter One, rests primarily with the dissolution of the 'social bond' that the metanarrative specifies as the philosophical grounding for the production of modern knowledge. He argues that discourses on society - the relations between individuals and the social whole - since the nineteenth century have been governed by two 'basic representational models':

- a) Derived from Comte and early French sociology in which society is understood to form an organic whole 'in the absence of which it ceases to be a society (and sociology ceases to have an object of study)';
(PC, p. 11)
- b) Derived from Marx and analyses of emergent capitalism which conceives of society as fundamentally and irreconcilably split between two opposing classes and driven by class struggle, the motor force of historical change.

Although diametrically opposed on most other counts, these two models may now be understood as Modernist constructions of social

explanation and their status as such must be questioned. Most importantly, it is the function of knowledge within the two models that offers the quickest route to the core of postmodernist rejection of the metanarratives. Exemplifying the first, Talcott Parson's functional sociology develops organic unity into a concept of society determined by 'systemic self-regulation'. In his description, 'the most essential condition for successful dynamic analysis is a continual and systematic reference of every problem to the state of the system as a whole'. Thus a 'process or set of conditions either 'contributes' to the maintenance (or development) of the system or it is 'dysfunctional' in that it detracts from the integration, effectiveness, etc., of the system' (PC, p.12).

Lyotard's characterization of Parsonian unitotality by its concept of society as a 'stable' system suggests two ways in which the function of knowledge can be envisaged. Firstly, optimistically which 'corresponds to the stabilization of the growth economies and societies of abundance under the aegis of the modern welfare state'. Furnishing the political enterprises of liberal 'social engineering', Parsons' analysis rests on the given of a 'harmony between the needs and hopes of individuals or groups and the functions guaranteed by the system' (PC, p. 11).¹ The second version of functionalism offers to explain the contemporary explosion of information technologies as evidence of knowledge functioning as a contributory component of a 'hard' technocratic totality; as Lyotard points out, this comes very near to defining a purely performative or 'cybernetic' system in which knowledge as technology is legitimated by the system's operative requirements (power and control relations of inefficient/efficient, minimum

input-maximum output):

Even when its rules are in the process of changing and innovations are occurring, even when its dysfunctions (such as strikes, crises, unemployment, or political revolutions) inspire hope and lead to the belief in an alternative, even then what is actually taking place is only an internal readjustment, and its result can be no more than an increase in the system's 'viability'. The only alternative to this kind of performance improvement is entropy, or decline.

(PC, pp. 11-12)

The Marxian conception, however, offers a critical model to counteract the 'cynical' schema of a functional totality whose very effectivity offers little in the way of hope or optimism to those who aspire to make socio-political/economic challenges to the functioning of that totality.² In contrast, Marx's oppositional model proposes that dialectical conflict is inherent in social structure and that each historical mode of production (relations and forces of production, mode of ownership and exchange) contains revolutionary potential for class struggle against oppression, exploitation, and alienation. The 'end of history' thesis entailed by an emancipatory telos projects its historical completion in the emergence a non-divided social structure (particularly within the state-political discourses of Marxist-Leninist thinking), and posits a future 'communist' condition of non-reified labour and non-alienated human self-identity. Prior to the final transition from socialism to properly unitotal communism, the bifurcated model of society in classical Marxist social theory should not be understood as an absolute split. Even where the radical force of 'vulgar' deterministic analyses have been sophisticated (as in Althusser's shift of transformative capacity from economic base to 'relatively autonomous' sphere of 'superstructural' ideology), some

non-reducible concept of social totality must remain in tact in order for a relational conflict to make any sense, structural causality notwithstanding.³ Without this final determinant, the critical model is 'blurred to the point of losing all of its radicality'; the emancipatory project founders and is 'reduced to the status of a "utopia" or "hope"' (PC, p. 13).

It is true that Lyotard's terms are drawn very broadly indeed though his characterization of Parsonian and Marxist social models as 'unitotal' is valid. The loss of the metanarrative concept of social 'totality' has profound consequences for the way in which the political function of aesthetic knowledge is conceived. In order to specify more clearly how film is legitimated (and then delegitimated) as Modernist emancipatory knowledge under the grand récit of liberty, a wider consideration of postmodernist critiques of the relations between the social bond and the 'use' of film is required. This should serve to locate an inquiry into feminism's place within the modernist/postmodernist divide which Lyotard's post-narrative schema seems to suggest, and then to situate some observations on why I think Lyotard actually fails to capitalize on the 'space' cleared by the loss of metanarratives and resorts instead to Modernist notions of the role of the avant-garde.

Instrumentality and the Use of Aesthetics

From the perspective of critical knowledge, performative film can be crudely equated with films that increase or maintain the functioning of the social system. Again, Althusser's formulation

of a critical function for aesthetic knowledge is important for highlighting the divergent concerns of the two Modernist views of the social bond. At the cost of conceptual sophistication but to the gain of brevity, Althusser's theory of ideology can be summarized for my present purposes as follows:

- a) ideology is a system of material production with a high degree of autonomy from raw economic relations but which is concerned with the production and reproduction of capitalist social relations;
- b) ideology in general is an 'omni-historical reality... present in the same form throughout what we call history (history of class societies)': it is the necessary precondition of specific or concrete ideologies⁴;
- c) the effectivity of ideology is not secured on the terrain of state repressive institutions - the police or military - but operates through 'ideological state apparatuses' - schools, church, the family and the media - which work to 'produce' imaginary social relations in place of knowledge of the objective relations of capitalist class existence;
- d) as opposed to 'subject-less' science, ideology is subject-centred and effects a 'misrecognition of real relations' through the function '(which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as concrete subjects' by 'hailing' or interpellating subjects as subjects of/to ideological misrepresentation.

My reading of Althusser's theory of ideology has clearly stressed its role in securing the social relations of production; in this, ideology which might be fairly described as a functional - even performative - social mechanism which, when successful, increases capitalism's efficiency by producing a workforce largely unconscious of their 'real' conditions of labour exploitation and alienated subjectivity. Several theorists have argued that Althusser's theory of ideology is so profoundly functional that it is very difficult to find space within this schema for the social

praxis that Marxism is founded upon.⁵ In fairness, however, it is true that Althusser does at least attempt to address the question - under what conditions is it possible for interpellated subjects to become concrete individuals capable of acting outside of misrepresentation i.e. how can non-ideological knowledge be produced?

A partial though highly problematic answer can be found in Althusser's propositions regarding the cognitive capacity of critical or 'authentic art' to rupture everyday or 'lived' ideological relations by 'making visible' (donner a voir), 'by establishing a distance from it, the reality of the existing ideology', transfixing it so that we might see its operations at work'.⁶ The disruptive function of 'authentic art' is clearly derived from Brecht's theory and practice of epic theatre⁷ though Althusser adapts his premiss within a Lacanian framework: materialist art must be concerned with breaking the ideological circuit of identification in which the spectator is interpellated as 'humanist' individual, as autonomous and self-possessed Absolute Subject, and thus prevented from grasping the material and social conditions which constitute the historical subject. I do not wish to rehearse well-worn debates on whether, for instance, Althusser's work on Cremonini as a 'painter of the abstract', of 'determinate absences', is a convincing analysis of how such radical dissociation from ideology is effected. I am more interested in his founding assertion that art is a 'specific' form of cognition:

Art (I mean authentic art, not works of an average or mediocre level) does not give us a knowledge in the strict sense, it therefore does not replace knowledge (in the modern sense: scientific knowledge), but what it gives us does nevertheless maintain a certain specific relationship with knowledge. This relationship is not one of identity but one of difference.⁸

Occupying a mediating ground between 'imaginary' representations of the Real, and knowledge of the true conditions of the Real gained through materialism as a 'science', art's specificity resides in its capacity for internal disruption or distantiation from ideology. This is entirely consonant with my earlier assessment of Althusser's role in challenging accounts of art's specificity in purely speculative terms (art as art specific knowledge). But Althusser's account troubles me on two counts. Firstly, the fact that a category of the aesthetic is maintained at all. Tony Bennett⁹ is right to point out that Althusser's claims to cognitive specificity for authentic art actually contradict the more materialist/Russian Formalist assertion that there 'is' no essential category of art as such; Althusser does not transcend the problematic of bourgeois aesthetics because 'authentic art' is essentially predefined and thus excepted from historical analysis of cultural productions according to their specific and concrete relations between the 'relatively autonomous' spheres of the economic, the ideological and the political. Secondly, my point would be to question the circularity of Althusser's attempt to secure a critical function for art. If art makes us 'see' 'conclusions without premisses', whereas knowledge makes us penetrate into the mechanisms which produce 'conclusions' out of the 'premisses', what kind of cognitive status does authentic art really have?¹⁰ Althusser argues that art can provide critical knowledge only because it is differentiated from ideology through its capacity to distantiate the subject from the imaginary experience of lived reality i.e. through its specificity as a mode of cognition. But where does art's specificity really reside if it

is 'authentic' only when the 'knowledge' it offers coincides (or represents through the absences which structure it) knowledge already supplied by historical materialism as 'science'? In other words, art's relative autonomy vis-a-vis both science and ideology is illusory since its knowledge cannot be 'perceived' without the viewer being already cognizant of the principles of Marxist philosophy and theory:

Like all knowledge, the knowledge of art presupposes a preliminary rupture with the language of 'ideological spontaneity' and the constitution of a body of scientific concepts to replace it. It is essential to be conscious of the necessity for this rupture with ideology to be able to undertake the constitution of the edifice of a knowledge of art.¹¹

Althusser is insistent upon the fact that aesthetic works cannot in themselves supply direct knowledge of the subject's ideological misrepresentation, nor the means for arriving at the 'premisses' of historical materialism. Similarly, ideology cannot furnish the means for its own critique so how can art's disruptive and hence critical function become apparent without the prior interpretative schema in place? In short, aesthetic knowledge has no specificity; it is reduced to the status of a supplement and its relation to knowledge is made transparent.

Within Marxist thought, the idea that knowledge must be effective as a 'weapon' in the class struggle is crucial to its critical endeavour. But from Lyotard's analysis this 'given' of critical thinking under the narrative of liberty is made highly questionable and provides a starting point for its delegitimation. If knowledge is legitimate as knowledge if and only if it coincides with the requirements of the critical project, knowledge becomes a tool or instrument in the project of emancipation, that is, 'used

in one way or another as aids in programming the system' (PC, p. 13).

From a post-narrative viewpoint, it becomes apparent that power and domination are perhaps inevitably secreted within the 'emancipatory' model which demands that aesthetic knowledge be instrumental in the name of the People. Lyotard is fully alert to the underlying danger of making knowledge functional for the overall critique of alienated society and this centres on the 'instrumentality' that its unititotal perspective commands. Stephen White's analysis 'Post-structuralism and Political Reflection' would suggest that there are good grounds for placing Lyotard within post-structuralist thinking.¹² Like Derrida, de Man and Foucault, Lyotard is highly sensitive to the political consequences of cognitive schemas which depend on metaphysical binaries. The general strategy for deconstructing binarism:

... takes what is claimed to be authoritative, logical, and universal and breaks those claims down, exposing arbitrariness, ambiguity, and conventionality - in short, exposing a power phenomenon where it was claimed only reason existed.¹³

Applying this to Althusser, I would suggest that he retains the category of authentic art as knowledge only to the extent that it is 'useful' to the critical project of emancipation, and art which does not perform this function is consigned to the performative sphere of ideology. At the State/political level, Lyotard is wholly justified in arguing that the telos of emancipated unitotality can be forced to slide into totalitarian repression. One should not have to point to the very real historical manifestations of national-political totalitarian regimes legitimated by the principle of Marxist unitotality in the

twentieth century - the USSR, the People's Republic of China, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Albania, East Germany - to appreciate that Lyotard's characterization of totalizing discourses in terms of 'terror' should extend far beyond a concern for mere language games: knowledge legitimation, as he constantly reminds the reader, is inextricable from its State political social embodiments.

It may still be possible to object that these are extreme manifestations of totalizing discourse and do not challenge the emancipatory aspirations of Western European liberal democracies. However, I find Lyotard particularly persuasive in his proposition that even the mildest forms of unitotality, such as consensus, share a compulsion to instrumentalize; this is especially important for grasping what the concept of post-narrativity means in terms of the grounding of aesthetic knowledge.

With regard to contemporary theories based on the normative legitimacy of consensus, Habermas once again provides the material for deconstructive strategies employed to dismantle the hierarchical terms of privileged/devalued binaries - felicitous/non-felicitous, serious/fictive, just/unjust which inform his conception of a language pragmatics that will eventually culminate in the social, political and ethical condition of intersubjective communicative rationality. I do not have space here to do more than indicate the main outlines of Habermas's theory which are useful primarily for setting the terms of Lyotard's critique. It is interesting, as Scott Lash has noted, to observe that Habermas begins from the same premiss as post-structuralism, namely, that 'language, not consciousness, is the

human differentia specifica:

Unlike the empirical realism of the early Wittgenstein, for whom language replaces consciousness as a 'mirror of nature', Habermas's signifiers do not directly latch on to referents in the real world... Habermas eschews any notion of 'sign', in which the signifier stands in for a natural connection with signified or concept. Understanding in communication between interlocutors is brought about instead through an attachment of signifier to signified that is conventional and rule-bound. The only disparity with Saussure - and there is arguably no disparity with Eco - is that rules replace the play of difference of elements, and focus is on parole instead of langue.¹⁴

But Habermas is obviously not going to follow the line of Derridean theories of language which stress instead its radical instability and open-endedness. After Searle and Austin, Habermas takes a pragmatic view of language as consisting of speech acts, capable of co-ordinating and performing social actions; it is the rule-bound nature of speech-acts which permits them to be utilized for the project of 'harmonizing' discourse towards the goal of communicative rationality. White observes that for Habermas:

... what is seminal about Austin's work is that it discovered 'a mechanism of action coordination in the illocutionary binding force [Bildungskraft] of linguistic utterance'. For this binding force to take hold in everyday practice, speech must be subject to certain limitations. 'These limitations, under which illocutionary acts develop an action-coordinating force and release action-relevant consequences, define the sphere of normal speech'.¹⁵

Such statements are a deconstructionist's dream and White is not slow to point out how 'normal' speech (which 'co-ordinates action in the world') is functional only by excluding 'fictive' speech which is partially suspended from performing this role. Habermas argues that fictive speech is not concerned with validity claims in the manner of normal or ordinary speech. Here:

[The] neutralization of the binding force unburdens the disempowered illocutionary acts from the decision pressure of communicative everyday practice; it suspends the sphere of ordinary speech and empowers [speech] for the playful creation of new worlds - or rather: for the pure demonstration of the world-disclosing power of innovative linguistic expressions.¹⁶

This opens up three possible critiques.

The first is local in that deconstruction would question the secondarity of fictive (poetic, artistic, metaphoric) speech to normal or serious speech utterance. One could employ Derrida's strategies in 'White Mythologies' to argue with White that 'action co-ordination is ultimately held together by nothing but fictions whose fictionality has been forgotten', and that the separation is an arbitrary one.¹⁷

The second critique follows on from this and relates to the fact that fictive language is granted only a partial suspension of 'counterpressure from the confirming process of practice in the world'. The definition of artistic expression as a space for 'playful creation' and the purity of its capacity to disclose 'worlds' must be questioned because the space of free-play for innovation is made conditional on the prior criterion of contributing to the development of consensual intersubjectivity. This should alert any post-structuralist to the mechanisms by which programmes for social justice are metadiscursively underwritten by some form of coercion and control.

The third critique inevitably follows on from those preceding and centres on the role (and by implication the kind) of aesthetic knowledge Habermas is proposing. As already noted, Habermas's project of modernity can be completed only when aesthetic

experience is fully integrated into a 'practical discourse' (Diskurs) which would equally conjoin political, ethical, practical and cognitive knowledge in a unified experience for the subject. Thus against Lyotard, the specificity and variety of language games (denotative, prescriptive, performative, etc.) are thus subsumed by a consensual metadiscourse which demands that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contribution to emancipation and that justice results from the 'regularization of permitted moves in all language games' (PC, pp. 105-06). In proposing a system of social justice based on means-ends consensus (a horizon that Lyotard argues is never reached) Habermas closes down the heterogeneity of the language 'moves' that Lyotard contends constitute the communication networks of which individuals are 'nodal points'. Hence it is not just Habermas's adherence to a teleology of emancipation that renders him suspect but that the means to this universally rational end are either in White's phrase 'subtly impositional' or, according to Lyotard's construction of postmodern social pragmatics, a disguised form of 'terror', which despite its declared intention coerces knowledge to become 'transparent', to perform. Dumm accurately identifies the risk entailed by making aesthetic-expressive and moral-practical spheres into resources for learning:

... the aesthetic dimension must be structured by Habermas so as to enable a kind of learning to take place. The substance of this learning is 'to make subjects more reflective in relation to who or what is structuring the interpretation of their Bedurfnisnatur'... this discipline of self-reflection is engaged in a project that might render the self more and more transparent and, hence, accessible to instruments of control.¹⁸

Lyotard charges Habermas, and by extension any other theorist who founds the concept of critical knowledge upon the ground of its 'use' value, with 'ravaging the heterogeneity of the play of language' in the name of instrumental rationality. It is possible to venture, then, that the Modernist emancipatory grand récit is subject to postmodernist delegitimation because of its sustaining 'instrumental imperative' which regulates and controls the sphere of the aesthetic as use-value. More importantly for my analysis, postmodernist rejection of the narrative of liberty also seeks to demonstrate that instrumental aesthetics are 'terroristic' in the sense that they depend for their effectivity upon homogenized conceptions of the social bond. White draws an interesting conclusion from his examination of Habermas and post-structuralist critiques:

Post-structuralism is not satisfied with extracting the admission that a theorist's cognitive machinery is linked to nonfoundationalist norms or conventions. Rather it turns its analysis immediately to the way in which these norms or conventions are 'produced by acts of exclusion'. In short, it is always concerned to chart the points at which any cognitive machinery or norms for coordinating action - constructed under the pull or responsibility to act - simultaneously and necessarily create and marginalize an Other. ¹⁹

This seems to be the most appropriate point at which to ask the fundamental question of where feminism is to be located within the debates surrounding political projects which 'reify art into a resource'? If, as I have argued, the project of avant-gardes under the metanarrative of liberty is sanctioned by an instrumental imperative and also demands the construction of a homogeneous 'social bond', is the feminist 'use' of film similarly open to

Lyotard's charge of 'terrorism'? In my view, the primary issue of whether feminism can sustain its political project against post-structuralist critiques of the subject must be addressed for it is here that the most far-reaching challenges to Modernist emancipatory legitimation of film can be gauged. The next section, then, will be concerned to assess how far feminism is also implicated in those 'acts of exclusion' which marginalize the Other, and will follow through to consider how postmodernist calls for 'multiplicity' have begun to influence a post-narrative politics of film spectatorship.

Feminism, Knowledge and the Social Bond

To locate my guiding concern for feminism, film and the avant-garde, I must return to the point at which I concluded the last Chapter with the proposition that the emergence of feminist film theory was highly influential in the delegitimation of 'pure' speculative knowledge. Feminist theory and deconstructionist film practice contest the Modernist speculative space from which women are 'absent' as objects of knowledge and trigger off a series of questions which clearly reveal the extent to which knowledge production is inextricable from power relations: What counts as legitimate knowledge? Who can produce knowledge and who can't? What is knowledge 'for'? Knowledge of what? In whose name? Such critiques were evidently undertaken with the broader aspiration

that knowledge of the techniques of oppression would be useful to the overall project of producing specifically feminist (i.e. non-oppressed) forms of cinematic subjectivity. It should not need repeating that post-speculative feminism is thus placed back within the narrative of emancipation as dominant theoretical model. There are clearly parallels with Marxist emancipatory discourse: society is basically bifurcated according to the social and sexual division between men and women who are alienated by the oppressive hierarchical categories of masculine and feminine; feminist demands for women's emancipation from inequality and oppression are tied to the teleology of a potential organization of social relations freed from sexist, hierarchical patriarchal domination. Towards that end, avant-garde/aesthetic knowledge must be utilized as part of the overall project of securing a less oppressive, more just society. But the parallel does not hold for long. It is simply not possible to obscure the fact that feminism has articulated its demands for legitimation as knowledge explicitly against a homogenous concept of 'the People'. To put this more pointedly, second Wave feminist thinking forces a lateral split in the constitution of the domain of Modernist knowledges and reveals how 'human emancipation' implicit in Marxist philosophies of Progress had always implied a subjugation and effacement of those who do not recognize themselves in the 'humanity' that this phrase implies.

Establishing that feminism does fracture a monolithic oppositional discourse, however, is relatively straightforward and the following quotation from Christine Di Stefano neatly situates my own analysis of feminism's role in inaugurating an initial split in unitotal knowledge:

Contemporary Western feminism is firmly located in the modernist ethos, which made possible the feminist identification and critique of gender... The concept of gender has made it possible for feminists to simultaneously explain and delegitimize the presumed homology between biological and social sex differences. At the same time, however, gender (rather than sex) differences have emerged as highly significant, salient features which do more to divide and distinguish men and women from each other than to make them parts of some larger, complementary, 'humanistic' whole.²⁰

But this raises the tricky issue of whether feminism, in turn, doesn't simply replicate the unitotal structure which permits critical knowledge for Marxism, and thereby 'risks' being implicated in the 'terrorism' of totalizing and 'instrumental' thinking. Were this to prove to be the case, then the terms of Lyotard's critique would be equally valid if applied to feminist claims for emancipatory knowledge. The most concise way towards answering this challenge lies in assessing if feminism construes its social bond within the parameters of Modernist (Enlightenment) epistemology, or within anti-epistemological postmodernist/post-structuralist philosophy. This has formed the substance of recent debates concerning feminism and epistemology, and has brought the principle of 'unitotality' to the fore.

It is as well to be clear what epistemology is, or does. Sandra Harding suggests that 'considered from sociological and historical perspective, epistemologies are justificatory strategies': like 'moral codes, they present themselves as challenging 'might make right' - this time in the domain of knowledge claims'. This should not be mistaken for the claim that all epistemologies 'end up rationalizing the beliefs of the powerful' or else 'epistemology would only be an honorific used to designate the winners in such struggles'.²¹ Both Margareta Halberg

and Sandra Harding suggest that a coherent feminist epistemology must stake its claim against two 'traditional discourses' - objectivism and its 'loyal opposition' interpretationism/relativism.²² Objectivism - the mainstay of speculative science - insists that 'scientific claims can be produced only through dispassionate, value-free, disinterested, point-of-viewless objective inquiry procedures, and that research generated or guided by feminist concerns clearly cannot meet such standards'.²³ From Stephano's modernist view, it is possible to arrive at the general proposition that the concept of gender in relation to epistemology and the social bond entails the explicit assumption that there is: a) a divisory split between genders through which women are united by a common experience as an effect of gendering, that there exists an essential and irreducible communality between women; which b) necessitates the formulation of an epistemology which accounts for this difference and, more politically, produces specifically feminist knowledge to counter the social dominance of masculine ways of thinking, researching and investigating. Modernist feminist theories of knowledge thus start from the base point that traditional epistemology is male-centred which produces male-centred knowledge. In film theory, feminists have successfully outlined the inability of male theorists to conceive that sexual difference may be at the centre of their analyses (for instance, Jacqueline Rose's critique of Comolli's theory of disavowal for its non-differentiation between male and female relations to the cinematic apparatus; Janet Bergstrom's work on Bellour's theory of textual segmentation and the sexual economy of enunciation in narrative cinema).²⁴ Relativism, on the other hand, challenges

objectivism from the point of view that 'concepts must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture'.²⁵ This would seem to fit feminism's requirements. Relativism, however, can be understood in a limited or radical sense, both of which can cause huge problems for the project of a feminist epistemology. Limited relativism allows feminist challenges to male-centred knowledge on the grounds of higher truth claims (crudely, that 'better' or 'less false' knowledge can be produced if the androcentric bias of male knowledge is corrected): 'unless one supposes that male-based theories somehow misdescribe reality and misrepresent how things are, it is difficult to make much sense of much feminist... criticism'.²⁶ However, this makes it difficult not to fall back into a form of 'feminist objectivism' which would lay claim to the truth of feminist analysis measured against male-biased knowledge. Both Halberg and Jane Flax have also objected to such 'female standpoint theory' for assumptions derived from an 'uncritical appropriation' of Enlightenment ideas:

These include an optimistic belief that people act rationally in their own interests and that reality has a structure that perfect reason (once perfected) can discover... the notion of such a standpoint also assumes that the oppressed are not in fundamental ways damaged by their social experience. On the contrary this position assumes that the oppressed have a privileged (and not just different) relation and ability to comprehend a reality that is 'out there' waiting for our representation.²⁷

Such foundationalist claims are challenged by post-Enlightenment thinking on three counts. Firstly, radical relativism takes the critique of objectivism to its logical extreme and argues that if

'truth' is relatively defined then there is no way of arriving at non-relative or objective Truth. A feminist standpoint cannot be justified without finally appealing to claims for its own objectivity; if this objectivity is only relative (to feminism) it follows that it cannot take a place as a privileged standpoint but is reduced to the status of being just one of many interpretations and its claims to explanatory strength are severely weakened.

Secondly, if feminist epistemology is founded on the existence of female subjects constituted 'outside' of representation, it brings forth 'all the dichotomies on which Enlightenment epistemology rests, including subject/object, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, and language/reality'. Post-structuralist critiques of epistemological projects reject the 'presuppositions involved in these dichotomies - the ideas of coherent, unified self, a rationalist and individualist model of knowing and the possibilities of a metalanguage'.²⁸ However, in line with my inquiry into how the social bond is specified by feminism, the most important critique which can be made of attempts to ground feminist epistemology in the realm of female experience is that from Lyotard's perspective it entails a totalized conception. In Flax's view, standpoint theory 'supposes gendered social relations in which there is a category of beings who are fundamentally like each other by virtue of their sex... it assumes the otherness men assign to women'. Crucially, Flax continues, feminist standpoint epistemology 'assumes that women, unlike men, can be free of determination from their own participation in relations of domination such as those rooted in the social relations of race, class or homophobia'.²⁹ In other words, the notion of a feminist

epistemology cannot be sustained without eradicating differences between women and essentializing the heterogeneity of black, Asian, lesbian, religious, geographical and class experience into a non-oppressing ideal abstract - Woman. Halberg concludes rather pessimistically that feminist epistemology is thus an 'impossible project': either it accepts its implication in a structure of domination and essentializes women into a homogeneous social bond, or else it takes the concept of difference to its logical conclusion and gives up the idea of a specifically feminist knowledge which can satisfactorily address those differences.

This is an interesting point at which to return to Lyotard. It is possible to state that the delegitimation of the metanarrative of liberty is fuelled by the demand for legitimation itself. Historically, feminism triggers off a series of competing claims to legitimation from socially and historically underrepresented and oppressed Others. Having opened up the space of 'difference', it can be held that feminism is thus subject to its own delegitimation by the proliferation of knowledge claims made from the point of view of interest groups who contest the homogenizing effects produced by analyses of gender made from a highly partial (ethnocentric/heterosexist) perspective. It would seem that Halberg shares Lyotard's postmodernist concern to avoid the conceptual snares of enforcing homogeneity upon a heterogeneous constituency, and it is clear that anti-foundationalism poses a real theoretical problem for feminists who take post-structuralist critiques of totalizing thought seriously enough to arrive at the conclusion that such splintering is beyond the recuperation of a non-totalizing feminist emancipatory discourse.

How, then, does the preceding excursus on debates in feminist epistemology relate to the political project sustaining feminist intervention in avant-garde film making? I would argue that the issues raised are crucial for grasping that, under the grand récit of liberty, aesthetic knowledge and the role of the avant-garde are bound to both an instrumental imperative and to a 'terroristic' social bond. This has important repercussions for my earlier discussion of feminist deconstructionist cinema and its role in delegitimizing the narrative of speculation. From this outline, it becomes possible to see that it does not escape the governing conditions of the emancipatory metanarrative and must take its place, after all, as a properly Modernist aesthetic. I would suggest that the primary source of the Modernism of feminist deconstructionism can be attributed to the status accorded to psychoanalysis for conceptualizing the negatory work of feminist avant-garde practice: Lyotard's strictures against the epistemological 'cost' of grand narratives are borne out if feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis for film politics is understood as fundamentally rooted in an epistemological model of a 'difference' which is also monolithically the Same. This becomes most apparent when versions of Lacanian theory are deployed to articulate claims for a feminist cinema which permits women to 'speak' rather than be 'spoken' for by patriarchal discourse. I would hold that theoretical discourses which seek to utilize Modernist psychoanalytical models of difference for emancipatory knowledge also exert unacknowledged 'totalizing' pressures which render them, from a post-narrative position, illegitimate. The next section, then, will firstly address how the psychoanalytical

paradigm is embedded within the metanarrative of emancipation and, secondly, confront the issue of whether feminism can sustain its political project against post-structuralist critiques of 'the' female subject for it is here that the most far-reaching challenges to Modernist emancipatory legitimation of film can be gauged.

Delegitimation: The Narrative of Liberty

For explaining the simultaneous repression of female sexuality and spectacularization of the female image in dominant cinema, psychoanalytical notions of subjectivity and mechanisms of identification are very powerful, particularly for challenging the institutionalization of the male Gaze and 'decentring' its claims to rationality and power. The destruction of visual pleasure that Mulvey and Johnston propose is the destruction of specifically male pleasure which is held to structure dominant narratives as narratives of male desire. Feminist deconstructionist film is thus bound to the negatory task of re-staging spectatorial desire, in order to break with the phallogentric function of the female image within them. Feminist deconstructionism is also concerned to articulate a positive programme, and asks: how is it possible to film the female body without recapitulating phallogentric inscriptions of women built upon the disavowal of their castrating threat? The affirmative aspect of feminist deconstruction is thus concerned with the production of a film language of specifically female desire, a 'women's language' of visual signification.

However, within the terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this is rendered highly problematic: if the denial of sexual difference is at the same time the repression of female desire, Woman, as positive term rather than negatively defined, must remain 'the unnamable, the unsaid'.³⁰ Mulvey and Johnson have concluded from this scenario that female desire can only be spoken through/by a 'politics of the unconscious' which must assert sexual difference in order to force a rupture 'at the point where the patriarchal subject is formed and female desire is repressed: castration'.³¹ In terms associated with Julia Kristeva's theory of the relationship between the repression of a pre-Symbolic semiotic realm and the 'feminine', transgression of the patriarchal symbolic order must take place within language. Accordingly, feminist avant-garde practices must 'work toward dislocating and restructuring the symbolic order in order to change the function, in the moment of perception of sexual difference, of the entry of the third term in the production of the symbolic signifier' thus 'creating a new subject and a new order of language that will assert rather than repress sexual difference'.³² Mulvey makes a direct link between Kristeva's work on poetic language (transgression through the 'eruption of linguistic excess, involving the pleasure and the 'feminine' directly opposed to the logical language and repression endemic to patriarchy'), and her own practice in Riddles of the Sphinx in which pleasure and involvement 'are not the result of identification, narrative tension or eroticized femininity, but arise from surprising and excessive use of the camera, unfamiliar framing of scenes and the human body'.³³ Mulvey and Wollen use a panoply of Anti-

Illusionist techniques for dislocating the female spectator's relation to the psycho-sexual economy of the film text:

... separations between form and content, division of the text into seven sections, use of the single circular (360 degrees) camera movements for single scenes to build up the woman's story as a series of tableaux... a mixture of theory and fiction, purely visual elements and exposition of ideas.³⁴

For Doane, the use of circular movements 'effects a continual displacement of the gaze which 'catches' the woman's body only accidentally, momentarily, refusing to hold or fix her in the frame' thus escaping from the voyeuristic/fetishistic function of the female image in dominant cinema.³⁵ The political value of such film forms to feminism is premised on the Kristevan notion that only new languages can produce new subjects. Through the use of Anti-illusionist strategies, a filmic experience of the disintegration, in-coherence and fracturing of phallogcentrically-defined subjectivity is considered a necessary prelude to the female viewer's critical reconstruction of a politicized feminist subjectivity. Yet, despite the apparently liberatory promise of such formulations, I am interested in teasing out the means by which feminist deconstructionism is enmeshed with the 'terrorism' of the grand récit of emancipation.

Approaching this proposition firstly from a general angle, several critics have questioned the political value of psychoanalytic avant-gardism to feminism and have argued that it is extremely limited where it leads feminist film makers to work under the Kristevan assumption that the only 'site' open for a non-repressed, even 'authentic' female voice is negative, that is, outside of logic, representation and narrative order per se. This

is a wholly justifiable conclusion to arrive at from within a Lacanian perspective which holds that the perception of sexual difference, forced by the threat of castration and the acquisition of language, are the conditions of entry into the realm of the Symbolic; that, in other words, rational language is itself 'male'. In her critique of Riddles of the Sphinx, Judith Williamson objects to the danger inherent in the deconstructionist tactic of subverting the cultural value-ladenness of symbols. The Sphinx, she argues:

... can be seen as part of a strategy intended to evoke mystery and an image of inscrutable womanhood, as a preliminary to their 'deconstruction' with the later role of the Sphinx as speaking subject: 'she' is given a voice. But this involves a fundamental misconception: you don't dispel a myth by trying to make it speak, or reject an image by giving it a voice with which to deny itself. The film undercuts its own strategy, by not recognizing that the power of the image of Female Mystery is so strong that it functions in the most traditional way and is too strong to be undercut by anything later in the film - even if this were intended.³⁶

The use of the image of the Sphinx, and structuring of the film around 'femaleness' as the 'riddle' which cannot be answered, also carries the inherent risk of intensifying dominant social and cultural meanings of femininity which most feminists vehemently reject: women 'not only have a mystical, symbolic, irrational speech: it is shown as being unintelligible even to themselves' and the 'introduction expressly describes the Sphinx as "disordering logical categories"'. All this 'justifies the prevailing view of women's bounteous, timeless unreason and is completely complicit with the image of women which is inscribed in male rational discourse as the representation of its opposite'.³⁷ My own viewing of the film produced a similar reading. The film cannot escape

from proposing the following 'equation': the Sphinx = Mystery = Irrational = Unconscious = Women = Unintelligibility. Williamson is acute in pointing out that perpetuating the division between Oedipus/Male/Conscious v. Sphinx/Female/Unconscious is to remain within the terms that exclude women from the order of rationality and cultural power. It must here remain an open question if such a conclusion is the inevitable result of feminism's engagement with irredeemably phallogentric Freudian and Lacanian theory.³⁸

However, it is important to note that other feminist film theorists have challenged the phallogentrically-defined processes of sexual differentiation proposed by them, and have called for a revaluation within psychoanalysis of the 'absent' figure, the place of the castrated Mother. This revision, it is argued, might produce a critical film form that, for Kaplan, will 'represent the start of a new language, a new Symbolic Law'. Mothering 'has been repressed in patriarchy but may, for that reason, provide a gap through which women can begin to assert their voices and find a subjectivity':

The domination of women by the male gaze is part of patriarchal strategy to contain the threat that the mother embodies, and to control the positive and negative impulses that memory traces of being mothered have left in the male unconscious. Women, in turn, have learned to associate their sexuality with domination by the male gaze, a position involving a high degree of masochism in finding their objectification erotic... Female sexuality has been taken over by the male gaze [and] because of patriarchy's intricate involvement in heterosexuality, its discourse has been able to control female sexuality, including lesbian relations. But while Motherhood has of course been annexed by the symbolic, Kristeva and others have shown that some part remains unviolated, unable to be penetrated by patriarchy. This is because, unlike in the realm of sexuality, some part of Motherhood lies outside of patriarchal concerns, networks, economy. It is this part that eludes control.³⁹

Riddles of the Sphinx, Daughter Rite and Sigmund Freud's Dora each question the scenario which produces the signification of the Mother as castrated, offering instead a potential space for reformulating the male psychical trajectory which provokes the 'extremity of patriarchal domination of female sexuality' as a 'reaction to helplessness in the face of the threat that Motherhood represents'.⁴⁰ However, the suggested 'return' to the Mother has also been criticized for its unacknowledged biologism which permits women a 'voice' on the condition of identification with a bodily/cultural function. Both Williamson and Peter Gidal have argued that:

... if anything has not been repressed in patriarchy it is Mothering (and the Law of the Symbolic). Mothering as constructed in patriarchy is not coincidentally the most oppressive, most conventional, position 'for' women. It is defining via biologism a place for woman's 'voice'.⁴¹

But I want to leave aside both the specific criticism of Riddles and internal debates within psychoanalysis centring on a potential shift in the Symbolic meaning of the concept of Mother to suggest that, even if it were possible to formulate the 'place' of female discourse and/or female desire, it would seem that posing the original problem in terms of the search for a specifically 'feminine' discourse cannot avoid falling into the essentializing trap that the grand récit of liberty unwittingly demands.

Psychoanalytical-feminist deconstruction is clearly predicated upon a didactic enterprise which binds it closely to that which I have defined as Modernism specified by the narrative of liberty. But it is tied to the Modernist metanarrative in a more profound way which is highly significant for a reading of its emancipatory

strategies: deconstructionist feminism purports to offer a 'new language' of female desire but the use of psychoanalysis for emancipatory knowledge within the feminist avant-garde is inescapably bound to a Modernist social bond which predetermines that female 'liberation' is conditional upon compulsory identification with a constituency homogeneously construed.

Feminist avant-garde practice can thus be defined as Modernist where its intended female/feminist audience is conceived within the horizon of an idealized homogenous totality of Women (here guaranteed by psychical processes which produce female subjects). In other words, deconstructionist feminism must accept the risk of positioning an abstract or 'unitotal' Woman, of claiming to 'speak' to and for all women regardless of a series of other pressures conditioning spectatorial identification. This is not to suggest that psychoanalysis is rendered delegitimate for reasons which are immanent to it; it is possible to argue that the explanatory power of libidinal theories of subjectivity are perfectly adequate to account for a bi-polar sexual economy of filmic signification. Rather, I am concerned to indicate that Modernist feminist avant-garde film and criticism are marked by a tendency to construct transformatory practices from the initial assumption of an epistemological bond between women which, in this context, is guaranteed by the psychical processes which deliver sexually differentiated beings. How else is it possible to ground the project of a specifically 'feminine aesthetic' without denying postmodernist counterclaims that abstract and 'unitotal' concepts constitute a foundation for emancipatory knowledge only through the

deployment of a totalized 'fiction' which takes for granted an irreducible unity between women?

Returning to my conclusion that 'incredulity' towards the grand récit of liberty is fuelled by the demand for legitimation, the especial limitations of psychoanalysis for film feminism become most apparent at the point at which demands for the recognition of a heterogeneous notion of the constituency of feminism (and/or of women) are made since this clearly demands attention to the 'extra-textual' which psychoanalytical theories alone cannot accommodate (colour, class, etc.). The metatheoretical appeal to the notion of Motherhood, for instance, is constructed homogeneously which, from the point of view of multiplicity, blocks analysis of the variety of modes in which that function is socially and historically constituted. In this respect, I find Lyotard's postmodernist rejection of epistemological unitotality very useful for grasping the ways in which certain feminist film theories are embedded within Modernism, and for appreciating that calls for legitimation from historically unrepresented Others also demand the most urgent revisions of the fundamentally Modernist underpinnings supporting early feminist interventions in counter-cinema. In short, the feminist avant-garde practices I have discussed have very narrowly defined notions of their constituents. I want now to consider how this broad epistemological framework also underlies the way in which 'emancipatory' relations between film texts, female spectators and identification are actually modelled for it is here that the 'instrumental' imperative is most clearly manifested.

Postmodernism: The Politics of Fragmentation

I have suggested that what sets feminist deconstructionist engagement with film apart from the discourses of emancipation already documented as Anti-illusionist is that a psychoanalytically derived notion of subjectivity does not, indeed cannot, appeal to an extra-textual and 'neutral' spectator. To posit subjectivity in terms of self-possessed individuality would be to deny at once the prior functioning of psycho-textual structures at work in the construction of oppressive gendered subjectivity. Thus, to avoid the pitfalls already noted of tying a specifically 'feminine' discourse to preexistent biological difference, Lacan's emphasis on language as a system which produces rather than represents sexual difference is observed. In Elizabeth Cowie's view, it is then possible to theorize 'woman' 'not as a given, biologically or psychologically, but as a category produced in signifying practices': 'what must be grasped in addressing women and film is the double problem of the production of woman as a category and of the film as a signifying system'.⁴² Taking this further, Jacqueline Rose holds that Lacan's theory must be taken to mean that there can be 'no pre-discursive reality':

... in so far as it is the order of language which constructs sexuality around the male term, or the privileging of that term which shows sexuality to be constructed within language, so this raises the issue of women's relationship to that language and that sexuality simultaneously.⁴³

Despite the slippage in Rose's terminology which actually suggests that women have a 'relationship' to male language and sexuality

(i.e. that 'women' is a category of meaning which already pre-exists linguistic/sexual construction),⁴⁴ this position supports the transgressive aesthetic of psychoanalytic formalism by making textuality the 'point of production' of sexually differentiated subject positions, of masculine/feminine. Understood in this way, it is evident that this formulation marks a shift from the earlier feminist notion that cinematic language is sexually coded to the quite different proposition, that sexual difference is actually produced by/through/in the enunciation of cinematic language. If, then, female subjectivity is a determined effect of/by film language, it follows that transgressing the dominant mode of that positioning must also be a matter of inscribing the spectator as an effect of textual organization. What does this imply for text/spectator relations if measured against Lyotard's postmodernist resistance to instrumentality? If psychoanalysis is vital to feminism for emphasizing the 'activity of reading, of seeing film as a textual practice rather than an autonomous object of study or consumption'⁴⁵, in its Modernist form it is nonetheless questionable what degree of 'activity' is being permitted to female spectators. The use of Anti-illusionist techniques appear to offer the film reader a creative role in the construction in the 'meaning' of the text but, within a psychoanalytical framework, this is to a large extent illusory. I would suggest instead that the 'use' of avant-garde aesthetics as instrument in the service of feminist politics finds its corollary in an exclusive concern for the enunciation of subjectivity through cinematic language which makes spectatorial activity a highly predetermined one, which can

problematize positionality and reading as a matter of textual enunciation only. Where such conceptual priority is granted to the textual production of subjectivity, it is difficult to assess what meaningful role spectators are being expected to play; deconstructionist 'recruitment' of female viewers offers little activity beyond that of occupying the textually prescribed position of idealized Female Spectator. Here, it is held that spectatorial identification and positionality are inscribed into/by the text thus the notion of the 'textual' is granted a high degree of autonomy and determinacy. In this way, the Modernist film/spectator binary which deconstructionist film rejected in structural film - the spectator as autonomous, self-possessed and external to the film text - is actually preserved by its reversal (which is not its transcendence). Feminist 'use' of instrumental Modernist aesthetics requires highly determinate formulations of text/spectator relations in order to ensure its political effectivity and this, one could argue, is the strength of its appeal for feminism. However, one must ask: what could be more homogenizing and less emancipatory than a view of spectatorship which objectifies and privileges the notion of 'text' at the conceptual expense of the viewer who is given to be sutured into the film text as a function of its enunciation? Within the 'instrumental' parameters of the avant-garde under the metanarrative of liberty, female film spectators are offered few options beyond accepting a textually prescribed interpellation (as Female Subject), or else of refusing the 'politics of displeasure', and thereby falling into a politically unacceptable position of

seeking 'pleasures' from essentially masochistic and oppressive structures of narrative, filmic enunciation, spectacularization of female image, and so on. It is worth asking whether the same terms which deny women access to the pleasures of spectatorship (except through masochistic identification) are not here repeated: is not the deliberate seeking out of 'displeasure' as advocated by Mulvey et al. in itself not far removed from that of the masochist? More pointedly, the 'instrumentalism' of the either/or choice offered by this model brings into question the entire Modernist conceptual framework which defines feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis for theorizing avant-garde film politics.

From my analysis so far, it is possible to outline the three main characteristics which bind feminist deconstructionism to the grand recit of liberty:

- a) the 'instrumental' notion of textually inscribed/prescribed subjectivity which situates female spectators as an effect of signification;
- b) an implied dependence on a metanarrative social bond which results in the theoretical construction of a homogeneous unity 'Woman';
- c) the aesthetic of transgression which has sustained the emancipatory Modernist function of the avant-garde.

It is not easy to split these apart since they are so tightly related but I would suggest that the fundamental source of pressure for the break-up of Modernist emancipatory models of spectatorship stems from demands for legitimation which I have argued sets in motion the delegitimation of the grand récit of liberty. Thus, from a post-narrative perspective, discourses which address and

position 'the' spectator as Woman are ambivalently situated; post-speculative, certainly, but the delegitimation of the narrative of liberty requires theoretical models which respect the proliferation of legitimation claims that I discussed as postmodernist epistemological claims, and these find no place in the Modernist psychoanalytical model of Difference. If a female audience is construed homogenously according to an unconscious libidinal binary, those factors which differentiate women from each other, and which multiply the possibilities of being positioned as a female spectator, cannot be represented. Without considering that gender positionality is also intersected by social, historical and ideological considerations, there is little room for assessing how primary psychical sexual differentiation might be socially and historically experienced 'differently' for women who are diversified by colour, religion, age, sexual orientation, education, class and occupation. Placing these claims against feminist deconstructionism's 'unitotal' suppositions, it is clear that the emergence of a postmodernist politics of 'multiplicity' cannot be adequately formulated within the Modernist framework of deconstructionism. Hence I want to put forward the proposition that the broader terms of the demand for legitimation discussed above are directly mirrored within feminist film theory by emergent demands for cinematic representation. The delegitimation of the Modernist feminist narrative of liberty must, therefore, be accompanied by a radical revaluation of each of the Modernist tenets identified above.

The primary point of departure must be to question the status

of psychoanalysis and its use in justifying negatory avant-garde strategies of deconstructionist disruption. A few feminist theorists have begun this task, stimulated by the overriding need to escape from the political and theoretical constraints placed upon the development of a 'specifically feminist' cinema construed within negatory parameters. B. Ruby Rich draws out the impasse confronting film makers faced with phallogentric theories which leave no space for formulating female subjectivity in positive terms:

According to Mulvey, the woman is not visible in the audience which is perceived as male; according to Johnston, the woman is not visible on the screen... How does one formulate an understanding of a structure that insists on our absence even in the face of our presence? What is there in a film with which a woman viewer identifies? How can the contradictions be used as critique. And how do all these factors influence what one makes as a woman film maker, or specifically as a feminist film maker?⁴⁶

Similarly, Lesley Stern:

The conceptualisation of desire, a theorisation of its inscription within cinematic language, has been useful for understanding the fascination of the cinema in its ideological dimension... but in so far as this work is still being located within the problematic of castration it promotes a politics of negation and blocks the question of feminine desire.⁴⁷

I have argued already that the text/spectator model of feminist deconstruction is both 'instrumental' and homogenizing: it is more relevant at this stage to stress instead that one of the most important outcomes of critical engagement with feminist Modernism has been to re-evaluate the fundamental source of such thinking - the conception that cinematic 'language' is co-extensive with

masculinity and that feminist cinema must be founded on transgressing that language. Teresa de Lauretis has recently argued for a 're-vision' of what she correctly contends has become:

... the established film-theoretical view of cinematic identification, namely that with the look is masculine, and identification with the image is feminine... that the camera (technology), the look (voyeurism), and the scopic drive itself partake of the phallic and thus somehow are entities or figures of a masculine nature. ⁴⁸

This fundamental act of 're-vision' has several consequences which relate directly to the 'bankruptcy' of the feminist grand récit of emancipation.

Firstly, a revaluation of the negatory aesthetic of transgression which sanctions the deconstructionist project of subverting dominant representational practices through 'work on the signifier'. Beneath the objections of each critic cited above, one can detect a deeper dissatisfaction with the Modernist assumptions which have supported the notion that textual strategies for destabilizing, for putting the subject 'into crisis', are necessarily politically effective. There are actually two distinct points at issue here: on the one side, the political objective of 'decentring' the viewing subject and, on the other, the notion that spectatorship is a predominantly textual matter. Lesley Stern's review of the 'Feminism and Cinema' Special Event at the Edinburgh Film Festival (1979) lucidly draws out the highly problematic nature of posing feminism and cinema in terms of the 'politics of displeasure', especially in the way that it specifies the audience for 'specifically feminist film'. It is important to ask what, for instance, becomes of those female spectators who do not possess the

necessary reading competence to take displeasure from the dislocation and the refusal of representation as demanded by such practices? But, more crucially, Stern argues that:

The viewing subject has to a certain extent displaced the social audience - both as object of knowledge and site of transformation. Heterogeneity has been invoked as a conceptual tool to put the subject in crisis - the viewing subject, the 'subjects' of special events. But one gains the impression that the audience for the special events has assumed an unquestioned homogeneity in part guaranteed by unanimous agreement that the subject must be put into crisis, decentred.⁴⁹

Within the context of my argument, this is an important critique as it clearly reveals the point at which the Modernist conceptual horizon is reached, the principle of 'unitotality' being secreted at a highly abstract level: even the radical project of decentring the subject cannot escape, at another level, from 'ironically ensuring a very safe, central and functional place to the concept of the subject as an imaginary category'.⁵⁰ That this subject is constituted in 'unitotal' terms produces a politics of spectatorship which seeks from its viewers what in fact may be termed a 'decentred homogeneity'. To women whose 'differences' are rendered invisible within the Modernist avant-garde, 'decentring' offers little: from this perspective, the objective of putting 'the' female subject into crisis stands exposed as a cultural privilege exercised by those women (predominantly white, heterosexual, educated middle-class) whose experience of culturally 'centred' identity can afford the luxury of 'jouissance' and 'dispersal'. In other words, to pose the specificity of feminist film in terms of the undermining of positionality *per se* is to void the polymorphicity of the 'social audience' from the outset. Two parallel lines are thus opened for argument, which both bear

heavily on the terms of development of a postmodernist feminist politics of spectatorship:

- a) for permitting the 'outside' of textual discourse a much greater degree of influence in determining that the 'meaning' of subjectivity cannot be reduced to a idealized vision of viewers as homogenous female subjects. This must entail the reformulation of deconstructionist feminism's instrumental, text-constructed model of spectatorial inscription;
- b) for recognizing the claims of women who are 'constituted socially, outside the text, in different sets of relations',⁵¹ that is, colour, class, economic, and sexual relations. This must entail a reworking of the implicit homogeneity of Modernist feminism's notion of its constituent audience.

Following either of these routes, I suggest, will lead to the conclusion that the Modernist model of spectatorship (which sets itself against representation) must be jettisoned to accommodate postmodernist demands for representation thus making way for the exploration of cinematic forms which do not assume text/spectator relations are solely a matter of textual productivity, and which are constructive rather than transgressive and deconstructive. Whether this is enough in itself to constitute a postmodernist politics of feminist film becomes a matter of real contention when the second line of argument, concerning the 'multiplicity' of the audience of feminist film, is examined. Firstly, however, the theoretical potential for constructive feminist cinema needs to be explored.

It must be noted that the concept of spectatorship as formally constructed, text-positioned enunciation has frequently and cogently been challenged by feminists without having recourse to a notion of 'postmodernism' to frame their rejection.⁵² This once again suggests caution in too readily drawing upon diverse, and often contrary, lines of argument within feminism as wholly

conclusive evidence of a postmodernist 'break'. Feminism, despite recent characterizations which I shall soon assess, has been marked by heated debate on the most politically effective forms of cinema since its emergence as a theoretical and cultural force of oppositional critique. I would therefore be wary of placing a chronological construction of succession upon recent rejections of the text/spectator relations implicit in some models of subjectivity in favour not of the textual production of identification, but of the reception of texts by socially and historically constituted audiences. Nonetheless, it is only by working through feminist 'alliance' with Modernist avant-gardism that the recognition of the need for film practices which are founded on quite different assumptions about 'specifically feminist' aesthetic knowledge has been forced. With Mellencamp, Doane and Williams, de Lauretis's act of 'revision'⁵³ argues for some historical distance from early feminism which - necessarily - engaged with the negative aesthetics of deconstructionism but should now be superseded. This critique parallels my earlier point (discussed with regard to debates in modernist/postmodernist feminist epistemology) that feminism's initial role was most crucially manifested in the splitting of 'neutral' (male, or properly 'unitotal' knowledge), and of 'envisioning' women as the subject of knowledge:

As a form of political critique or critical politics, and through the specific consciousness that women have developed to analyse the subject's relations to sociohistorical reality, feminism has not only invented new strategies or created new texts, but more importantly it has conceived a new social subject, women: as speakers, writers, readers, spectators, users and makers of cultural forms, shapers of cultural processes.⁵⁴

Having accomplished this, the negatory function of engagement with deconstructionist 'subversion' of the basic cinematic apparatus must be reviewed, and de Lauretis suggests that feminist film makers have begun to recognize a different aim for feminist cinema:

The project of women's cinema is no longer that of destroying or disrupting man-centred vision by representing its blind spots, its gaps, or its repressed. The effort and challenge now are how to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject.⁵⁵

The most important outcome of the 'loss' of negatory feminism is the loss of its concomitant notion that feminist spectatorship is a matter of textual 'appointment'. Thus, the formulation of a constructive mode of feminist cinema is predicated upon a shift towards 'an aesthetics of reception, where the spectator is the film's primary concern - primary in the sense that it is there from the beginning inscribed in the film-makers's project and even in the very making of the film'.⁵⁶

De Lauretis's search for film which 'addresses its spectator as a woman, regardless of the gender of the viewers'⁵⁷ is indeed a radical departure from Modernist, psychoanalytically-based 'politics of displeasure' though the production of films that work from this premise has to date been small. However, much critical attention has been focussed on Chantal Ackerman's film Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce -1080 Bruxelles (1975) by feminists who are interested in the way in which it 'envisions' female spectators but does not 'instrumentally' interpellate them.⁵⁸ The most intriguing aspect of this film is to be found in the way in which three days in the life of a woman confined to the domestic sphere (as housekeeper and prostitute) are signified. That this

period of time includes the gradual breakdown of domestic order and Jeanne's stabbing her client on his third visit does not amount to a narrative of events as in traditional realist film. Janet Bergstrom suggests that the 'film's sense depends very much on the strict, chronological progression of events' which is established by granting 'real time' duration to actions (bathing, washing dishes, peeling potatoes) usually elided in favour of narrative economy. These 'carry a high degree of anxiety as the fiction proceeds' so the 'fact of prostitution and the visualization of murder... evens out into equal significance with the many conventionally less important images'.⁵⁹ But Jeanne Dielman... is intriguing for the manner in which 'economy of the enunciation of the images' matches subject matter. Bergstrom points to the fact that the entire film is shot in medium scale from a static camera position which avoids the frequent shifts to privilege point-of-view characteristic of 'classic' narrative film. Similarly, the absence of traditional editing patterns is noteworthy:

Unlike the network of looks in most films which is mediated predominantly by eye-line matches and other kinds of match-cutting, the logic of viewer/viewed in this film by-passes the fiction. The system of subjective shots is eliminated and with it a logic of spatial matches rationalized by the interest of various characters.⁶⁰

The refusal of shot-reverse shot sequences effectively thwarts the spectator's 'suturing' into the narrative which distances the spectator from the diegetic events, and denies the spectator access to the pleasure of an emotional identification with Jeanne and her 'narrative'. Estrangement, or critical detachment, then, is not Godardian in that distantiation does not derive from the textual

fragmentation of patterns of spectatorship. The 'feminism' of the film does not stem simply from formal filmic techniques but from the way in which Jeanne's silence is set against visual duration and temporal elisions:

Who speaks when she speaks? In Rainer's Film About Women Who... for example, the woman's thoughts are spoken by a male voice-over narration. The woman is separated from her own language. She is quite literally spoken by men. In Jeanne Dielman the problem is expressed through diegetic silence. Although the repression of the woman's voice is naturalized by the fiction - most of Jeanne's time is spent alone, and she and her son need few words to sustain their relationship - the duration, both of the shots and of the fiction, and the lack of variation in the enunciation of the images work to denaturalize this repression.⁶¹

Rather, the 'logic of the organization of shots reverts to the camera and its marked controller, a feminist filmmaker'.⁶²

Bergstrom concludes that Jeanne's diegetic silence 'brings us into a discourse of women's looks, through a women's viewpoint': the 'controlling discourse is constructed of looks, not voices. A dialectic operates between the one looking (camera/director) and what is being looked at (characters' actions, characters' space)':⁶³

What the film constructs - formally and artfully, to be sure - is a picture of female experience, of duration, perceptions, events, relationships and silences, which feels immediately and unquestionably true. And in this sense the 'pre-aesthetic' is aesthetic rather than aestheticized, as in films like Godard's Two or Three Things I Know About Her, Polanski's Repulsion, or Antonioni's Eclipse. To say the same thing in another way, Ackerman's film addresses the spectator as female.⁶⁴

For my argument, the most significant aspect of Jeanne Dielman... is that it does not attempt to interpellate its audience a priori and offers a powerful alternative to the deconstructivist model. Again, de Lauretis is acute in her analysis:

... the textual space extends to the spectator...
addressing, speaking to, making room, but not (how very
unusual and remarkable) cajoling, soliciting, seducing.
[This film does] not put me in the place of the female
spectator, [does] not assign me a role, a self-image, a
positionality in language or desire. Instead, [it makes]
a place for what I will call me, knowing that I don't
know it, and give 'me' space to try to know, to see, to
understand. Put another way, by addressing me as a woman,
they do not bind me or appoint me as Woman.⁶⁵

This is a concise encapsulation of an 'anti-instrumentalist'
version of film feminism and might be held to circumvent failings
of the Modernist model of transgressive spectatorship and thus
recommend it as a form of post-Modernist feminism for permitting
film practices which do not assume that female audiences can be
monolithically interpellated. This, it is true, does open up a
space for rethinking Modernist relations between text and spectator
more complexly: hence the project of a constructive mode of
feminist cinema conjoins with the concerns of the second line of
argument outlined above, regarding the definition of postmodernism
as a condition of 'multiplicity'. However, I do not see that this
project goes far enough to satisfy my proposition with regard to
the demand for legitimation and for representation. My discussion
of feminist/post-structuralist critiques of the subject makes it
difficult to ignore the fact that de Lauretis's reading of Jeanne
Dielman..., despite the evident accommodation of a non-capitalized
notion of 'woman', is nonetheless dependent on the implicit
assumption of an experiential 'social bond' between women which
predefines the audience for feminist film. Despite claims that the
mechanisms for 'suturing' and textually constructing female
subjectivity are absent, it is questionable whether both the film
and its commentators are not still falling into the same

'totalizing' trap as the negative aesthetic. The full emergence of postmodernism, I have argued, must be defined by the delegitimation of both Modernist metanarratives, and the dissolution of the metanarrative bond must give way to the nodal or network model of social relations as a condition of heteromorphous multiplicity. In respect of the full import of postmodernist critiques of the subject of feminist emancipation, it is at this point that the delegitimation of the narrative of liberty poses acute problems for feminism, and for feminist avant-garde 'knowledge'.

Consider the terms of Johnston's anti-instrumentalist critique: the 'notion of the 'reader' is a purely theoretical construct. Real readers are subjects in history rather than subjects of a single text':

... feminist film practice can no longer be seen simply in terms of the effectivity of a system of representation, but rather as production by and of subjects already in social practices which often involve heterogenous and often contradictory positions in ideology. ⁶⁶

This is an important challenge which insists that film audiences are constituted by individuals who are also formed by social and historical experiences which may produce radically divergent readings at the point of textual reception. Nonetheless, from recent debates concerning feminism's relation to postmodernism, it would appear that Johnston's demand for a less homogeneous notion of spectatorial subjectivity (and for a form of 'contextual analysis'), is still governed by the notion that a heterogeneity of reception can ultimately be returned to a unity at a higher level - to the unifying social experience of male/female or masculine/feminine gender difference. Even this minimal claim for unity

based on gender (even if the experience of gendering is admitted to be non-monolithic and at times contradictory) has been subjected to serious revision. Some postmodernist feminists have made wholesale revaluations of the epistemological privilege granted to gender in the social construction of 'difference' on the grounds of its potential for marginalizing and repressing multiplicity. For feminism, this must necessarily entail rethinking even the principle of binary difference which has until recently been adequate to define its political and emancipatory project. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson suggest that feminism should not limit the proliferation of 'difference' which post-structuralist critiques of 'centred' epistemologies set in place, and must respect the deconstruction of the notion of female identity upon which earlier Modernist feminism is based. Instead, they propose that postmodernist-feminism 'dispense with the idea of a subject of history' and 'replace unitary notions of women and feminine gender identity with plural, complexly structured conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending to class, race, ethnicity'.⁶⁷ Jane Flax quite explicitly embraces the idea that deconstruction of the 'myth' of the Cartesian stable, unified Self should be pushed further to deconstruct the male/female binary (the root cause of early feminist 'totalizing' epistemologies):

... there is no force or reality outside our social relations and activity (e.g. history, reason, progress, science, some transcendental essence) that will rescue us from partiality and differences. Our lives and alliances belong with those who seek to further decentre the world - although we should reserve our right to be suspicious of their motives and visions as well.⁶⁸

Similarly, Harding refuses the 'delusion of return to an 'original unity'' which Di Stephano takes to 'designate the fiction of wholeness applied to the self, to the group, to the ideal of a comprehensive politics or theory, to the epistemological problem of the subject-object relationship, and to the political vision of communal (totalitarian) utopia'.⁶⁹

It would seem from postmodernist critiques that Modernist feminism's emancipatory project is rendered delegitimate because of the unitotal bond tying its female constituents, and an either/or choice for feminism is proposed: either Modernist feminism characterized by metanarrative, universalized and thus 'terroristic' in-different construction of the female social bond), or postmodernist proliferation (which deconstructs gender analytics and refuses the 'fiction of wholeness' in favour of multiplicity and non-homogeneity). But set out in this way, the most urgent question raised by Lyotard's thesis is obscured: how far can the postmodernist notion of heterogeneity be pushed and still remain within the metadiscursive boundary of feminism? In other words, if all claims for unity are 'terroristic', what returns the multiplicity of differences to a feminist emancipatory project? Further, what real meaning is left of the term 'feminism' if it can no longer command a sense of communality or unity between women? Without the social bond from the grand récit of liberty, feminism must be contented with its role as but one part of a 'politics of solidarity' between fragmented 'selves' but, consequently, the 'utopia' of a political movement which can adequately command the heterogeneity of its constituents is rendered unsustainable. If

the line of post-structuralist thinking about totalization is taken to its logical conclusion, the possibilities for constructing feminist film forms which do not at the same time exclude and marginalize the claims of at least some Others look increasingly unlikely, and feminism's emancipatory claims are seriously threatened. This points towards a most dangerous end-point of setting the critique of 'totalization' in motion: when, where and whether to limit the multiplication of differences? Pushed to its extreme, a radical reading of heteromorphous postmodernism leaves no theoretical means by which to return limitless 'differences' to a common 'politics of solidarity', let alone a politics based on the 'monolithic' assumptions required for feminist, gender-determined politics. Postmodernist feminists, as Bordo is keen to indicate, thus tread a difficult path: even Harding's 'politics of solidarity' is but partially differentiated, being clearly envisaged with predefined 'unities' in mind (Black women, white working class, Lesbian, Third World women). Logically, even this degree of differentiation is open to the same critiques of homogenization and totalization laid against Modernist feminism.

As Halberg notes:

When feminists make use of the poststructuralist concept of 'difference', they are in fact not just (sic) integrating the concept itself. What emerges is a new way of doing philosophy, which has as one of its basic tenets the rejection of the logic of identity. Many feminists seem to refer to multiple subjects that would be interpreted ideally in an ideal situation. We find a gap, then, between the understanding of 'difference' as a term denoting many different realities, and looking at it as the mainstay for the anti-thesis of unified, present and limited entities.⁷⁰

The full consequences of the postmodernist proliferation of

difference are - intentionally - destabilizing: from the dissipation of metanarrative 'bonding', it is instructive to note Ann Curthoy's conclusion about solipsism, in other words, that without delimitation and boundaries of some kind, [we] are 'all reduced in the end to categories of one'.⁷¹

It is very important, then, to consider what the effect of losing a Modernist epistemological bond has upon the project of feminist avant-garde film since it is here that the exponential multiplication of the social constituency becomes even more fraught and problematic. Feminist deconstruction has been rejected for the 'totalized' conception of the female social bond and I have argued that even the constructive mode of feminist cinema is implicitly Modernist for its residual dependence on a 'unitotal', experiential bond. But this bond is exactly what grounds them in the Modernist narrative of liberty, and it is upon this unity that Modernist feminism sustains its political 'use' of avant-garde aesthetics to tell the 'story' of female emancipation. For Modernist feminism, the post-narrative loss of the social bond and consequent condition of multiplicity must appear rather more as an irretrievable splintering or fragmentation which would deny the potential for social critique (and, hopefully, social change) founded on gender differentiation. In a postmodernist situation which defines its subjects as splintered and partial, doesn't the feminist avant-garde project also collapse under the pressure for 'difference' - for how is it possible to formulate a mode of film practice which can address an audience which is non-centred, heteromorphous and, by definition, fragmented beyond recuperation by a metadiscourse

and still remain feminist? If the concept of 'difference' also carries with it the assumption that 'differences' are radically disparate and incommensurable, then the fracturing of metanarrative feminism is absolute. Thus the paradox emerges: I have argued that the feminist Modernist narrative of liberty dissolves under pressures for legitimation and yet the recognition of multiplicity sets its own 'trap' by potentially invalidating the gender-determined framework that supplies feminist avant-gardism with its purpose. The primary challenge set by post-structuralist critiques of 'the' female subject, then, is whether it is possible to construct a mode of cinema which does not premiss its claim to be emancipatory knowledge by addressing female spectators in a way that would deny that female subjects are always multiply determined. Again, De Lauretis's analysis of what she defines as postmodernist feminist film is instructive and her analysis of Lizzie Borden's Born in Flames (1983) is useful for highlighting some of the critical issues which arise from thinking of feminism within a postmodernist framework.

Born in Flames is a fascinating film which exemplifies my proposition that the delegitimation of the narrative of liberty stems from the demand for legitimation, and for the representation of female identity as 'differently' determined. Importantly, it utilizes few of the features I have identified as Modernist strategies and exhibits a playful disregard both for the 'purity' aesthetic of speculative film, and for the textually transgressive aesthetic of deconstructionist spectatorship. An immensely pleasurable 'action pic, a sci-fi fantasy, a political thriller, a

collage film, a snatch of the underground', Born in Flames is 'all and none of these... edited in 15-second bursts and spiked with yards of video transfers... seizing on a dozen facets of our daily media surroundings'.⁷² At the level of form, the 'film's narrative remains unresolved, fragmented and difficult to follow'⁷³ and this is important for signifying in visual terms the allegorical 'envisioning' that the film performs. I have found no other film which successfully attempts to tell a feminist 'story' without basing its narrative of emancipation on a homogenous conception of its female constituents. Born in Flames narrates a fiction of a post-revolutionary future: discontented with the failure of a male-dominated Left revolution to deliver substantial change for women, the film's female characters are explicitly marked by racial, social and sexual divergence and disparity. Out of an initial consciousness of this 'specific gender oppression':

... several groups of women, (Black women, Latinas, lesbians, single mothers, intellectuals, political activists, spiritual and punk performers and a Women's Army) succeed in mobilizing and joining together: not by ignoring but, paradoxically, by acknowledging their differences.⁷⁴

The multiplicity of ways of being a women thus offer a multiplicity of ways of having a feminist consciousness and, for de Lauretis, like Harding and Flax above, this is conceived not as a weakening of feminism as a political project but a positive step towards recognizing the demands for representation made by traditionally underrepresented female Others. The strength of Born in Flames, and its distance from Modernist formulations of feminist avant-garde knowledge, can be gauged by the manner in which the film offers multiple points of spectatorial identification to an

audience that de Lauretis suggests Borden 'envisaged in its heterogeneity and otherness from the text':

What Born in Flames succeeds in representing is this feminist understanding: that the female subject is engendered across multiple representations of class, race, language and social relations; and that, therefore, differences among women are differences within women, which is why feminism can exist despite those differences and, as we are just beginning to understand, cannot continue to exist without them. The originality of this film's project is its representation of women as a social subject and site of differences; differences which are not purely sexual or merely racial, economic or (sub)cultural, but all of these together and often enough in conflict with one another.⁷⁵

Once more, it must be acknowledged that a radical postmodernist could object to both Born in Flames and de Lauretis's critical appraisal for their residual dependence on a conception of multiple female subjects which can be finally recuperated for a feminist emancipatory project. However, the implicit bond which ties women across the space of difference is all that ties them to feminism and, without this, there is nothing to hold back the absolute splintering of difference into an incommensurability of partial perspectives. In short, if any film form which construes its 'vision' within the conceptual parameters of feminism is challenged for its metanarrativized vision, nothing can be retrieved upon which to base even a political (but non-metanarrative) postmodernist (but also feminist) avant-garde cinema.

Working through the consequences of postmodernist delegitimation of the metanarrative of liberty, it is evident that The Postmodern Condition is extremely problematic for feminism and the project of avant-garde film 'knowledge'. On the positive side, Lyotard's critique of emancipatory Modernism should, at the least, alert feminism of its susceptibility to the concomitant power

effects of knowledge deployed by totalizing discourses and, at its strongest, my analysis to this point would suggest that feminism's relationship to Modernism must be seriously questioned. But, on the other side, if Lyotard's thesis offers feminism no more than a choice between Modernist homogeneity and 'terrorism' or postmodernist dispersal and fragmentation, then feminism's relationship to postmodernism must also be approached critically. This may be an extreme way of posing feminism's Modernist/postmodernist alternatives, and I shall shortly examine whether this Hobson's choice is really all that The Postmodern Condition can offer. But before this, I want to review where the course of this analysis has taken an understanding of the epistemological shifts from Modernism to postmodernism in relation to the legitimation of film as an 'object' of knowledge.

To this point, this work has been concerned to measure the explanatory strength of Lyotard's theory in The Postmodern Condition for defining postmodernism in the field of film. My primary task in Chapter Two was to propose how the two grands récits might be applied to formulate an understanding of film Modernism; the four ideal-types suggested that film Modernism could be construed as the production of film as aesthetic knowledge which is speculative and/or emancipatory. Having established this, Chapters Three and Four were concerned to use Lyotard's notion of postmodernism as a cultural 'incredulity' towards these Modernist grands récits. Accordingly, I have proposed for consideration some processes by which they have come to lose their legitimating authority: Chapter Three suggested that the emergence of feminist intervention in the gender-neutral version of speculative Modernism

was highly significant for illuminating the process by which the speculative metanarrative is rendered delegitimate. But postmodernist 'incredulity' must also extend to include the other grand récit, and Chapter Four has examined the consequences of the loss of the metanarrative 'social bond' underwriting Modernism's emancipatory metanarrative in regard to avant-garde feminist film projects conceived within its conceptual parameters. In short, the first two Chapters of my thesis have tested the validity of a theory of film Modernism defined as aesthetic practice governed by metanarratives, while the second two have been concerned with demonstrating that the epistemological resources of both metanarratives are challenged if Lyotard's thesis of 'incredulity' is applied. Having reached this stage, the main task is now to consider the broader framework of Lyotard's thesis on the 'conditions' for postmodernist aesthetic knowledge, that is, to examine the terms offered by his schema for the legitimation of aesthetics in place of Modernist validation. It is timely, then, to consider how Lyotard conceives the organization of aesthetics after the dissolution of the grands récits.

All forms of knowledge require legitimation; for Lyotard, the loss of Modernist legitimation by metanarratives has given way to postmodernism, a cultural condition in which knowledge is legitimated by 'performativity' but also by subversive manoeuvres of dissensual parology which replace Modernist metanarrative notions of resistance and critique. In the context of film, this formulation brings into debate one of the most distinctive products of Modernist differentiations - the concept of avant-gardism. I must signal here that my interpretation of a post-narrative field

of film 'knowledge' is radically at odds with Lyotard's vision of postmodernist aesthetics, and I want to assess how far Lyotard's 'postmodern condition' really does theorize a 'break' from Modernist epistemological differentiations. More importantly, I am concerned that the way in which Lyotard replaces the political project of metanarrative avant-gardism renders feminism's relationship to the aftermath of delegitimation highly problematical. To look ahead, I want to question whether the 'paralogical' does not in fact cause Lyotard to commit the performative crime he fears most, that of eliminating feminist 'players' from the agonistics of language games. As a precondition for establishing this, the next Chapter will return to an examination of the concept of the avant-garde. From there, I want to argue that a close reading of The Postmodern Condition should suggest that the terms of postmodernist 'paralogy' are inconsistent with Lyotard's theory that the postmodernist model of the social bond is that of the network: nodal, fragmented and dispersed. This observation should lay the foundations for a final consideration which will offer an alternative, more positive, mapping of the epistemological spaces left for feminism within a nodal, network model of the social bond, and for feminist film knowledge after the loss of the metanarratives.

Postnarrativity and the Social Bond

1. From Talcott Parsons, Essays in Sociological Theory Pure and Applied (1954) pp. 216-18. For a useful overview of the development of functional sociology through Hobbes, Weber and Durkheim to Parsons, see ed. P. Worsley, Introducing Sociology (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1977, second edition; esp pp. 477-564).

2. It is impossible to recommend specific texts for Marxist theories of social analysis other than those already cited in the bibliography. Marx himself provides the most lucid formulation: see eds. Bottomore & Rubels, Karl Marx: Selected Writings on Sociology and Social Philosophy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

3. Althusser's analysis of society as composed of 'relatively autonomous' regional structures within the global structure of capitalism is most clearly expressed in Chapter 9 of Reading 'Capital' (1970): 'Marx's Immense Theoretical Revolution' (pp. 182-93) which also sets out his theory of structural causality to replace preceding base/superstructure models (mechanistic and expressive) for relating these spheres. See also Fredric Jameson's analysis of Althusser's formulation of 'a structuralism for which only one structure exists: namely the mode of production itself' in his The Political Unconscious (London: Methuen, 1981), and Chapter Five of Steve Smith's Reading Althusser (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1984).

Instrumentality and the Use of Aesthetics

4. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (1971), pp. 1-57 (p. 35). The idea of 'ideology in general' is expressed in 'Marxism and Humanism' in For Marx (1969) (pp. 221-247): 'it is clear that ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of the conditions of their existence', p. 235. The a-historical and therefore immutable nature of this construct has been rigorously questioned by Larrain in The Concept of Ideology (London: Hutchinson, 1979) and in his later work Marxism and Ideology (London: Macmillan, 1983).

5. See, for instance, Paul Hirst, 'Althusser and the Theory of Ideology', Economy and Society, 5 (1976), pp. 385-412, and Rosalind Coward, 'Class, Culture and the Social Formation', Screen, 18: 1 (1977), pp. 75-105. Althusser's aesthetic theory highlights the contradictions already embodied in his theory of ideology; again, this refers back to the degree of determination (or functional effectivity) that can be ascribed to ideological misrecognition. Althusser sets himself an intractable problem by borrowing Lacan's view that social subjectivity is produced or constructed through a series of ideological or 'imaginary' relations, and then trying to formulate a 'space' of non-alienated

subjectivity outside of these relations (a 'space' equated with Lacan's 'the Real').

6. Althusser's aesthetic theory is specifically addressed in 'Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract' (originally 1966) in Althusser, (1971), pp. 209-20, and 'A Letter in Reply to Andre Daspre' (originally 1966) in same volume, pp. 203-08.

7. See 'The "Piccolo Teatro": Bertolazzi and Brecht: Notes on a Materialist Theatre' in Althusser (1969), pp. 131-51.

8. Althusser, 'A Letter in Reply to Andre Daspre' (1966), p. 204.

9. Bennett, (1979) esp. Chapter Five 'Marxism Versus and Aesthetics', pp. 97-110 and Chapter Six 'Science, Literature and Ideology', pp. 111-26.

10. Althusser, 'A Letter in Reply' (1966), p. 205.

11. Althusser, *ibid.* p. 206.

12. Stephen White, 'Post-structuralism and Political Reflection', Political Theory, 16: 2 (1988), pp. 186-208.

13. White (1988), p. 188.

14. Scott Lash, 'Postmodernity and Desire', Theory and Society, 14: 1 (1985), pp. 1-33 (p. 21).

15. Cited in White (1988), p. 194.

16. Cited in White (1988), p. 194.

17. White (1988), p. 195.

18. Thomas Dumm, 'The Politics of Post-Modern Aesthetics', Political Theory 16: 2 (1988), pp. 209-28 (p. 213).

19. White (1988), p. 196.

Feminism, Knowledge and the Social Bond

20. Christine Di Stephano, 'Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism' in ed. L. Nicholson, Feminism and Postmodernism (1990), pp. 63-82 (p. 64).

21. Sandra Harding, 'Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques' in ed. L. Nicholson, (1990), pp. 83-106 (p. 87).

22. Harding (1990) and Margareta Halberg, 'Feminist Epistemology: An Impossible Project?', Radical Philosophy, 53: Autumn (1989), pp. 3-7. Harding, however, makes a distinction between interpretationism and relativism on the grounds that 'relativism is a consequence, but not always the intent, of interpretationism'. Interpretationism would insist that, without the means for deciding 'objectively' between feminist and non-feminist knowledge claims (e.g as to why rape occurs, or the causal role of family forms in historical change), 'this is just their opinion' and 'there is no reason why people who are not already convinced of feminist claims should support them'. She continues:

This position functions to justify the silencing of women/feminists no less than its objectivist twin by refusing to recognize existing power relations of male dominance and the dynamics that insure intimate relations between partial and perverse beliefs and social power (p. 88).

23. Harding (1990), p. 87.

24. See Jacqueline Rose, 'The Cinematic Apparatus - Problems in Current Theory' in eds. T. de Lauretis & S. Heath, The Cinematic Apparatus (1980), pp. 172-86; Janet Bergstrom, 'Enunciation and Sexual Difference (Part I)', Camera Obscura 3/4 (1979), pp. 32-65.

25. Cited in Halberg (1989), (p. 4).

26. Halberg (1989), p. 4.

27. Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory' (1989) in ed. L. Nicholson, (1990), pp. 39-62 (p. 56).

28. Halberg (1989), both citations p. 4. Flax offers a far more comprehensive evaluation of Enlightenment legitimization beliefs in the context of postmodernist feminism. See above, esp. pp. 40-43.

29. Flax (1990), p. 56.

Delegitimation: The Narrative of Liberty

30. Claire Johnston, 'Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses' (1976), cited in Gledhill (1978), p. 481. Gledhill notes that Johnston's feminist aesthetic is based on transgressing the 'union between signifier and signified in patriarchal and classic film discourse which ipso facto represses the feminine because it constitutes a denial of difference' (p. 481).

31. Christine Gledhill, 'Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism', (1978) p. 481.

32. Gledhill (1978), p. 481.

33. Mulvey (1979), both citations p. 189.
34. Mulvey (1979), p. 194.
35. Doane (1988), p. 226. I find the idea that a camera might 'catch' the female image only accidentally in this context rather puzzling: the calculated filming and cutting of film footage makes this an impossibility. It is rather disingenuous to propose that this somehow escapes the logic of more orthodox voyeuristic structures of looking in dominant cinema which similarly depend on the denial of the intervention of the camera in 'capturing' its filmed subjects.
36. Judith Williamson, 'Two or Three Things We Know About Ourselves: A Critique of Riddles of the Sphinx and 3 Women' in Consuming Passions (1986), p. 132.
37. Williamson (1986), p. 134.
38. Jacqueline Rose's survey of the history of feminist relations with psychoanalysis - 'Feminism and the Psychic' in her Sexuality in the Field of Vision (1986), pp. 1-23 - outlines the major criticisms that have been levelled against Freudian theories of sexual identity: on the one hand that it is simply descriptive, that is, it describes the means by which women are constituted as unequal and therefore offers no alternative; and, on the other, which is actually normative or prescriptive, in arguing that psycho-sexual identity must necessarily take this form. Rose's Lacanian/Derridean answer to these objections is that they can be sustained only by omitting the radical aspects that a concept of the Unconscious carries with it: firstly, the rejection of the 'common sense' stable, rational 'bourgeois' Self and, secondly, the view that the passage towards the acquisition of female sexual identity is 'difficult' and can 'fail'. A radical potential, then, is offered to feminists concerned to demonstrate that female sexual identity is not stable, not fixed and, therefore, changeable. For a postmodernist-feminist critique of psychoanalysis, see Judith Butler, 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse' in ed. L. Nicholson, (1990), pp. 325-340.
39. Kaplan (1983), p. 205-06.
40. Kaplan (1983), p. 206. The Conclusion to Women and Film is devoted to exploring the radical potential that Kaplan finds in the gap or space offered by patriarchy's repression of the Mother. See to 'Motherhood and Patriarchal Discourse', pp. 200-06.
41. Peter Gidal (1989), p. 41. For Gidal, feminist deconstructionism is equally implicated in his outright rejection of any form of avant-garde cinema which attempts to 'work against' Hollywood illusionism by 'subverting' generic, narrative and representational codes:

... questioning a code instantiates its normative power, repeating dominant power relations of representation, without acknowledging the repetition, and then subsuming it to a different style (p. 39).

Gidal's debate with Stephen Heath is paradigmatic of the historical tension between the divergent radical claims of speculative and anti-illusionist film practices. See Heath's Afterword to Gidal's 'The Anti-Narrative' (1979). For more detailed arguments against specifically feminist deconstruction, see Gidal (1989):

'Deconstruction and Sexuality', pp. 39-44; 'Denial of semioticity', pp. 44-51; 'The stare and voyeurism', pp. 61-5, and 'Questions around structural/materialist film', pp. 75-7.

Postmodernism: The Politics of Fragmentation

42. Elizabeth Cowie, 'Woman as Sign', originally published in m/f, 1 (1978), pp. 49-64. Cited in Lyon, (1979), p. 17.

43. Jacqueline Rose, 'Feminine Sexuality - Jacques Lacan and the ecole freudienne' in her Sexuality in the Field of Vision (1986), pp. 49-81 (p. 78).

44. Peter Middleton makes much capital from the point about Rose's terminological 'slippage' in his article 'Socialism, Feminism and Men', Radical Philosophy, 53 (1989), pp. 8-19 (p. 14).

45. Claire Johnston, 'The Subject of Feminist Theory/Practice', Screen, 21: 2 (1980), pp. 27-34 (p. 29).

46. B. Ruby Rich, 'Women and Film: A Discussion of Feminist Aesthetics', New German Critique, 13, Winter (1978), (p. 87).

47. Lesley Stern, 'Feminism and Cinema - Exchanges', Screen, 20: 3/4 (1979), pp. 89-105 (p. 91).

48. Teresa de Lauretis, 'Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema' in ed. E. Pribram, Female Spectators (1988), pp. 174-95, (p. 180).

49. Stern (1979), p. 89.

50. *ibid.* p. 90.

51. Johnston (1980), p. 27.

52. Stern's article is again useful for her overview of competing tendencies within debates about feminism and political cinema. She contrasts the editorial positions of two leading feminist and socialist/feminist journals and establishes the two major competing tendencies that have split feminist opinion on the most effective strategies for 'specifically feminist' film practice. On the one hand, and represented by Jump Cut, are calls for 'a new language of film at once relevant and comprehensible' as the 'prerequisite of political effectivity'. On the other, represented by the psychoanalytical/semiotic/marxist/discourse theory editorial of Camera Obscura, for the production of textual

practice in the mode of transgressive 'work on the signifier'. Stern's analysis is particularly acute in identifying the pitfalls of both positions and she concludes that both oversimplify the very real contradictions involved in formulating a political feminist film practice with regard to the heterogeneity of a feminist film audience.

53. Taken from the title (and project) of Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, eds. Patricia Mellencamp, Mary Ann Doane and Linda Williams (1984).

54. De Lauretis, (1988) p. 182. Cf. Mary Ann Doane, 'Women's Stake: Filming The Female Body' (1988).

55. *ibid.* p. 182.

56. *ibid.* p. 188.

57. Mary Ann Doane's work on the melodramatic 'Women's Film' of 1940's has explored the Hollywood genre as codified system of direct address to female spectators as female spectators; see Doane The Desire to Desire: The Women's Film of the 1940's (1987).

58. See Kuhn (1982), pp. 73-74, who is heavily indebted to Janet Bergstrom's article on the film in Camera Obscura 2 (1977), pp. 114-18, followed by an interview with Chantal Ackerman about the process of its making (pp. 118-21). Similarly, Linda Williams reads Marlene Gorris's A Question of Silence (1984) from the point of view that the film articulates the 'muted' voices of its female protagonists, and thus encourages 'unsolicited' female audience identification, in E. A. Kaplan (1988), pp. 107-115.

59. Bergstrom (1977), p. 116.

60. *ibid.* p. 117.

61. *ibid.* p. 116.

62. *ibid.* p. 117.

63. *ibid.* p. 118.

64. De Lauretis (1988), pp. 178-79.

65. *ibid.* pp. 189-90.

66. Johnston (1980), p. 30.

67. Fraser and Nicholson, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism' in ed. L. Nicholson, (1990), pp. 19-38 (p. 35).

68. Flax (1990), p. 56.

69. Di Stephano (1990), p. 74.

70. Halberg (1989), p. 6.
71. Ann Curthoys, 'Culture and Politics: or The Shibboleths of the Left' in ed. Lawrence Grossberg, It's a Sin: Essays on Postmodernism, Politics and Culture (1988), pp. 83-87 (p. 85).
72. Kathleen Hulser, 'Les Guerilleres', Afterimage, 11: 6 (1984), p. 14. Cited in de Lauretis, (1988) p. 187.
73. De Lauretis (1988), p. 186.
74. *ibid.* p. 184.
75. *ibid.* p. 186.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONSEQUENCES OF POSTMODERNISM (1)

My analysis has so far offered a negative framework for answering the question 'what is postmodernism?', and has actually yielded a specific set of parameters which more properly define what film Modernism 'was'. Within the terms of analysis proposed, it is now possible to advance several versions of the meaning of the term 'postmodernism' for film.

Firstly, postmodernism might describe the cultural condition in which speculative Modernism has no use, force or function, and feminism's role in delegitimizing this grand récit is clearly crucial in pressing a politicization of film spectatorship into the service of liberty.

Secondly, postmodernism might be construed as a post-
emancipatory condition in which aesthetic practice is no longer viable as political 'tool' or instrument in the service of liberty, and Modernist feminism may be considered illegitimate for its embeddedness within discourses that are both totalizing and homogenizing.

A third definition, which more closely follows Lyotard's analysis, would define postmodernism as a cultural condition in which both resources for legitimating film as aesthetic knowledge are bankrupt.

Having arrived at this point, though, the thorny issue of what Lyotard's analysis offers in place of Modernist legitimation

remains to be interrogated. As already suggested, it is here that my application of the thesis of The Postmodern Condition to film runs into certain difficulties. One of the major problems arises when the question debated abstractly in Chapter One is re-posed: what degree of epistemological difference or 'break' from modernism does a Lyotardian notion of postmodernism imply? For the term 'postmodernism' to stand for a radically incommensurate mode of knowledge - that which 'comes after' modernism by supplanting it - one would have to demonstrate that its conceptual constitution is temporally, logically and epistemologically discontinuous with modernism. But negative notions of postmodernism such as those above, which only designate an absence of the conceptual parameters which I have suggested define film Modernism, do not of themselves provide a positive content that such a 'break' would imply.

However, this may not be a real problem - to posit an absolute break between modernism and postmodernism would be to remain within a set of ideas which characterize Enlightenment thinking.

Conversely, I have been working under the assumption that postmodernism is more essentially, and more complexly, grasped as an epistemological event which de-differentiates modernist categories for knowledge and therefore a full definition of postmodernism should raise questions about the validity of modernist notions such as differentiation between 'spheres', chronological succession and linear temporality. My point is that Lyotard's proposals for the 'conditions' of postmodern knowledge need to be assessed by asking how far they depart from the legitimation 'rules' of modernism, that is, how far does Lyotard's analysis reach in terms of de-differentiation? In short, I am

interested in determining whether Lyotard does not replace one form of modernism with a 'postmodernism' which recasts the 'conditions' of knowledge in the form of another. This in itself is not a major problem but it becomes visible as a problem for feminism in that its 'use' of film practices legitimated by Modernist conceptual foundations has been subject to serious critique: so what space does Lyotard leave for feminism to construe its emancipatory project without the resources of the emancipatory metanarrative? To approach an answer to this, I want firstly to establish that Lyotard's thinking on what becomes of avant-gardism in his schema is not consistent with a notion of postmodernism which should question its modernist origins, and then to argue that this inconsistency is highly significant for feminism's relation to Lyotardian postmodernism.

If Chapter Three lends support to the proposition that speculative avant-gardism has lost its validating authority, then the last Chapter concluded with serious reservations about the viability of feminist 'use' of avant-gardism. It would appear from this that Lyotard's theory of postmodernism as a cultural 'incredulity towards the metanarratives' must then raise grave doubts about the function of any avant-gardes which have been historically and conceptually associated with them. Should, then, Lyotard's theory be taken to mean that it is avant-gardism per se which is bankrupted along with the grands récits, or can avant-gardism be separated from its Modernist manifestations and retrieved for a 'postmodernist' aesthetics? To anticipate, I find that Lyotard's notion of dissensual paralogy, despite its typification as postmodernist, actually smuggles in a set of ideas

which the rest of his work would suggest is actually Modernist. To substantiate this claim, a brief summary of the functions of avant-gardism under Modernism is required.

The Concept of the Avant-Garde

The concept 'avant-garde' is a metaphor informed by both structural and temporal dimensions: it implies both a structural relationship to or rather aside from something (mass culture), and a temporal sense of historical movement in terms of change. Under the narrative of speculation, avant-gardism is dominated by the notion of structural 'set apart-ness', so that temporality is confined to historical succession within the field of the aesthetic, measured as the history of artistic movements and of immanent stylistic innovation. For emancipatory avant-gardes, the literal sense of the metaphor (of being 'before the body') takes on an additional socio-political inflection so that structural autonomy from the 'mass' is overdetermined by a temporal commitment to a telos of socio-political emancipation. In this sense, avant-gardist aesthetic knowledge is utilized for contributing to the project of liberation from the ideological ill-effects of alienating mass consumption of 'classical realism'; crudely, the future being construed as the disappearance of oppressive forms of cinematic representation. The concomitant differentiations which accompany these metanarrative Modernist functions for film avant-gardism have been outlined more specifically as a series of binaries. A potentially 'postmodernist' avant-gardism is also

suggested by them but I shall defer consideration of this for the moment:

Abstract Formalism:	autonomous art/social life, abstraction/representation, High Art/low culture, aesthetic value/entertainment;
Structuralism & Structural/Materialism:	medium-specificity/representation knowledge/pleasure, production/consumption;
Anti-illusionism:	knowledge/ideology, reality/representation, estrangement/identification;
Surrealism:	desire/rationality, imagination/reason, unconscious/conscious, automatism/creativity.

Set out thus, it becomes evident that it is the ways in which relationships are posed between the realm of the aesthetic and mass popular culture which distinguish the two dominant Modernist functions for avant-gardes.

The first Modernist avant-garde may be termed 'artistic', taking its charge from pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge of the internal or formal conditions of the film medium, and accepts as necessary an ethical division between autonomous art practice and 'mass' or commodity film production in order to constitute an oasis of pure thought or consciousness. For the second type of avant-gardism, though, the demarcation between mass culture, viewed speculatively as ideologically repressive, 'reified' or monolithically 'kitsch', and mass culture is certainly less clearly defined since emancipatory avant-gardes do not entirely forsake the commodified forms of mass culture. Rather, emancipatory film avant-gardes reject the elitist and exclusive High Cultural assumptions of speculative art and are concerned to politicize art, importantly, by incorporating mass cultural or

popular consumption patterns within its domain. The emergence of film practices such as feminist deconstruction during the 1970's-80's evidently attests to important cultural challenges to the dominance of speculative avant-gardes on the grounds of a) an adherence to radical aesthetic autonomy, b) the etiolation of social content, and particularly c) the effacement of gender and sexuality as issues of concern. However, Chapter Four was concerned to suggest that a full definition of postmodernism cannot rest upon feminism's role in delegitimizing the function of avant-gardes under the grand récit of speculation because feminist avant-gardes are themselves metanarratively embedded. The binaries outlined above would suggest that, despite clear evidence that the margin between 'aesthetic' and 'popular' domains is drastically reduced in terms of engagement with the content of dominant cinema, it would be a mistake to suggest that deconstructionism's appropriation of popular cultural film forms for art is enough to warrant the term 'postmodernist'.

It was noted above that for some critics, the incorporation of mass cultural forms into the realm of pure speculative art constitutes a postmodernist activity. It is perhaps more pertinent to recognize here that film deconstructionism's enlistment of 'impure' mass cultural elements for a didactic enterprise characterized by spectatorial 'difficulty' and 'displeasure' is only a partial de-differentiation, and does not transcend the Modernist binaries which secure a critical function for avant-garde film as aesthetic knowledge. I would suggest instead that such practices actually intensify (by reinscribing) the art/mass culture distinction: as Lipkis has also observed, the tactic 'simply

replays the categories of mass culture by 'framing' them within an art context without in any way transforming those categories'.¹ To find the term 'postmodernist' used as an appellation for film forms which are more properly defined by avant-gardist intentions is confusing, and critics such as Owens and Foster add to this confusion. To counter the anti-modernist critiques from those Habermas labels as 'old conservatives', who typify a 'postmodernism of reaction', Foster argues for a 'postmodernism of resistance':

A postmodernism of resistance, then, arises as a counter-practice not only to the official culture of modernism but also to the 'false normativity' of a reactionary modernism. In opposition (but not only in opposition), a resistant postmodernism is concerned with the critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo-historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them. In short, it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations.²

Kaplan is right to suggest that this is a 'good description of some modernisms' and especially so with regard to the position occupied within the terms of my argument by feminist deconstructionist avant-gardism.³ The idea that 'postmodernism and transgression can be seen to be incompatible theoretical concepts'⁴ is an important one: where mass cultural conventions are used to support the notion of avant-garde projects as 'interventions', they are being utilized from within a Modernist cultural and institutional perspective which still maintains a critical space for art 'outside' of dominant commodified forms of industrial film. The fundamentally Modernist assumption of the 'ideological necessity of erecting and maintaining exclusive standards of the literary and the artistic against the constant threat of incursion or contamination' remains unquestioned.⁵ Thus, while displacing most of the differentiations

of speculative Modernism, emancipatory Modernism must necessarily retain both the differentiation of art as a specific form of knowledge and, with it, the political viability of the critical function of avant-garde knowledge. A more coherent understanding of the epistemological shifts I have subsumed under the label 'postmodernism' must include consideration of how the field of film knowledge is to be conceptualized without recourse to the High Art/mass culture binary. This raises possibly the most contentious challenge that postmodernism offers to traditional Left or feminist 'use' of aesthetics in the service of emancipation: if the aesthetic knowledge/mass culture distinction is dissolved, how is it possible to retain a concept of the avant-garde which is delivered by that differentiation? A full collapse of the binary would, I suggest, leave no means for retrieving a space of critique 'outside' of mass cultural productions and the question of whether postmodernism is inevitably a 'post-avant-garde' condition must be investigated. If, however, one turns to Lyotard this issue cannot be settled easily as incompatible analyses can be made of his notion of post-narrative dissensual paralogy.

Performativity, Paralogy and the Avant-Garde

The course of this work has suggested that film Modernism is defined by the unity of two rationality imperatives which are manifested in a) the reduction of aesthetic knowledge to medium-specific knowledge and, b) the tendency to instrumentalize art for totalizing political projects. If Modernism is understood

according to the force of the two rationality imperatives, it is easier to grasp why some post-structuralist thinking celebrates instead an aesthetics of the 'irrational' as a postmodernist alternative to the 'terroristic' claims of instrumentality and domination. Dumm is accurate in pinpointing that the 'use' of aesthetics is problematic for postmodern artists who 'understand its deployment as a rhetorical subordination of aesthetics to the imperialism of rationality, and who see the taming and containment of aesthetic expressiveness as reflective of the exhaustion of modernism'.⁶ But, coming after The Postmodern Condition, one could be forgiven a certain bewilderment on reading the addendum 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism' and finding the avant-gardist statements:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable.

(PC, p. 81)

and:

Modernity, in whatever age it exists, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without the discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities.

(PC, p. 77)

As statements upon a postmodern 'condition', which must logically formulate the sphere of the aesthetic without the epistemological resources of the Modernist metanarratives, these are highly problematic. However, the theoretical continuity between Lyotard's explanation of the paralogical notion of aesthetic avant-gardism

and the condition of post-narrative science is not difficult to grasp, and it worth establishing how this continuity is maintained.

As suggested earlier, post-narrativity subrogates both metanarrative models of the social bond and importantly, the forms and uses for knowledge that they specify; delegitimation calls for 'language' pragmatics of a quite different order. It is precisely against these that he proposes the idea of postmodernism as the condition of knowledge that is now legitimated by performativity, but also by paralogy. Performativity prescribes a systems-led 'informationalization' of knowledge and, to recall Lyotard's earlier proposition:

Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be end in itself, it loses its use-value.

(PC, pp. 4-5)

In post-narrative terms, scientific endeavour loses its speculative or emancipatory validation and instead becomes identical with the production of technologies. The predominance of a technological criterion at the same time imbricates proof, validity and truth criteria within the discourse of power (PC, pp. 41-53):

... since 'reality' is what provides the evidence used as proof in scientific argumentation, and also provides prescriptions and promises of a juridical, political and ethical nature with results, one can master all these games by mastering 'reality'. That is precisely what technology can do. By reinforcing technology, one 'reinforces' reality, and one's chances of being just and right increase accordingly.

(PC, p. 47)

Lyotard is careful to maintain that the hypothesis of determinism upon which performativity is based, which presupposes 'that the

system into which the input is entered is stable... so that an accurate prediction of output can be made' (PC, p. 54), does not describe the real conditions of the development of scientific knowledge: 'science itself does not function according to this theory's paradigm of the system... [which] excludes the possibility of using such a paradigm to describe society' (PC, p. 61). It is evident that immanently-legitimated scientific performativity cannot obscure its origination in the modern production of autonomous knowledges supervised by the narrative of speculation: classical determinism is an 'ideology' which 'continues to work within the framework of the unreachable - but conceivable - limit of the total knowledge of a system' (PC, p. 56):

Consensus is a horizon which is never reached. Research that takes place under the aegis of a paradigm tends to stabilize; it is the exploitation of a technological, economic, or artistic 'idea'. It cannot be discounted. But what is striking is that someone always comes along to disturb the order of 'reason'. It is necessary to posit the existence of a power that destabilizes the capacity for explanation, manifested in the promulgation of new norms for understanding or, if one prefers, in a proposal to establish new rules circumscribing a new field of research...

(PC, p. 61)

Thus science should be understood as an 'unstable' system which develops ('and it surely does develop') by dissensual challenges to the self-definition of systemic performativity. It is this 'agonistics' of science which keeps performativity from exercising the 'terror' of 'eliminating, or threatening to eliminate a player from the language game', of repressing or discounting new 'moves' which challenge scientific consensus as to what counts as good science (that is, science adapted to performativity):

The pragmatics of science is centred on denotative utterances, which are the foundations upon which it builds institutions of learning (institutes, centers, universities, etc.). But its postmodern development brings a decisive 'fact' to the fore: even discussions of denotative statements need to have rules. Rules are not denotative but prescriptive, which we are better off calling metaprescriptive utterances to avoid confusion (they prescribe what the moves of language games must be in order to be admissible). The function of the differential or imaginative or paralogical activity of the current pragmatics of science is to point out these metaprescriptives (science's 'presuppositions') and to petition the player to accept different ones. The only legitimation that can make this kind of request admissible is that it will generate ideas, in other words, new statements. (PC, p. 65)

Hence the parallel for construing aesthetic avant-gardist 'subversion' in terms of paralogical 'moves': the modern (as metanarrative) constitution of aesthetic experience must be counteracted. It is the role of avant-gardes to question consensual game rules to keep the sphere of aesthetics open and resistant to both emancipatory and speculative claims on one hand, and from performativity on the other. One should not mistake this for a plea for artists simply to be innovative because, for Lyotard, 'innovation is under the command of system, or at least used by it to improve its efficiency' (PC, p. 61). Rather, paralogy is the search for instabilities which effect transformations of the game rules (by continually contesting consensual definitions of what art 'is'). Thus paralogy escapes the game of prescription and prevents the ossification of rules which turn denotative utterances into performatives.

It seems consistent, then, for Lyotard to use the paralogical as a metaphor for aesthetic subversion but I find it open to criticism on three interrelated accounts: firstly, that the 'paralogical' is a highly inappropriate concept for understanding

shifts into the 'conditions' for a postmodernist legitimation of film 'knowledge'; secondly, that it fails to secure adequate theoretical resources for construing the terms of feminist engagement in a post-narrative sphere of the 'aesthetic' and, thirdly, that an alternative reading of Lyotard would conclude that the very metaphor of the avant-garde is itself bankrupted along with the postmodernist fragmentation of the social bond. The next section, then, will examine the relevance of Lyotard's use of the metaphor of the 'paralogical' avant-garde for defining the post-narrative 'conditions' for postmodern film knowledge.

Avant-Garde Knowledge and the Postmodern Condition

For Lyotard, postmodernism, as the 'unpresentable in presentation', now becomes not a chronological marker of difference from modernism but a condition of possibility within it: 'Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant' (PC, p. 79). So what kind of modernism is Lyotard affirming if he cannot appeal to avant-gardism as specified by the grands récits of liberty or speculation? Lyotard's proposition for an 'agonistic' avant-gardism which searches for paralogical 'moves' against the 'rules' of art is highly redolent of the anti-art programme of Surrealism. In my exposition of Surrealist film above, it was concluded that Surrealism, although temporally Modernist, did not sit well with the narrative orders of either emancipation (as conventionally

construed) or speculation (as autonomous medium-specific knowledge). From Lyotard's proposals for a postmodernist-modernist avant-garde, it now becomes apparent why that difficulty occurred. By my reading, because Surrealism does not fall easily under the metanarratives, it is possible to redeem it as the saviour of post-narrative avant-garde aesthetics. Indeed, Lyotard's view of 'postmodernist' avant-gardism closely follows the terms of Peter Bürger's analysis of Surrealism. For Bürger, Surrealism is the only 'true' avant-garde movement, set apart from mere Modernist or 'artistic' innovators, by a declared intention to destroy the concept 'art', to de-differentiate the social specialization of art practices by collapsing the distinction which separates life from autonomous art and its social institutionalization. With some historical perspective, Surrealist/Dada ready made, objets trouvés, automatism and aleatory collage mounted what can now be grasped as the 'self-criticism' of art as autonomous institution, challenging both the 'work of art' (produced by an original individual of genius) and its reception within the framing category 'art'. Similarly, Surrealist film's anti-art, or better, anti-Modernist, critique is manifested, firstly, with the utilization of the conventions of 'logical' narrative and 'illusionist' representation which refuse speculative claims that for film to be art it must concern itself with 'specificity': Surrealism certainly does not exhibit the Modernist's anxiety about the putative ideological dangers of mass cultural industrial cinema. Secondly, the 'instrumental' use made by emancipatory film of art's autonomy is refused: exploiting film's 'reality effect' for the liberation of irrational forces of unconscious desire/fantasy and the

production of the disorientating spectatorial effect of 'depaysement', Surrealist film resists claims that art should be 'at the service' of rational, political programmes. Surrealism, then, seems to meet most of the criteria Lyotard sets out for a 'paralogical' form of avant-gardism. But Bürger's is, I think, a far more sophisticated and realistic investigation of the fate of this type of avant-gardism in contemporary culture; what Lyotard fails to consider is that 'the avant-garde is already historical'⁷ and hence not available for appropriation and re-presentation in the form of paralogical subversion. In other words, it is manifest that historically Surrealism failed in its project, and did not put an end to the production of Modernist works of art, nor to the social institution of art. This has special consequences for succeeding 'avant-gardes' who claim a paralogical function for artistic innovation.

For Bürger, the most significant effect of Surrealist anti-art calls for 'art in everything' (including mass commodities such as Duchamp's urinal, bicycle wheel/stool or spiked iron constructions) was to 'make art recognizable as an institution', that is, to bring into focus how the production, consumption and exchange of 'works of art' were effectively isolated from the praxis of life by the category of autonomy.⁸ It is only by a kind of cultural 'forgetting' that speculative and emancipatory avant-gardes have resisted Surrealism's systems-immanent critique and ignored the fact that keeping hold of a category of the aesthetic (as specificity or as political tool) is at the same time to remain within the parameters of institutional art which inevitably delimits art as institutional, and which circumscribes the Modernist

differentiation of 'aesthetic experience'. If the historical development of avant-garde film after Surrealism is reviewed, it can be quickly established how deeply this forgetting is translated into the expansion and strengthening of art as institution. My own analysis should have exposed this. Structural and structural/materialist film (c. 1960's) emerge well after Surrealism (c. 1920-30) while the didactic line of emancipatory film commences at approximately the same time as Surrealism, but feminist deconstructionist film is clearly immune to Surrealism's paralogical critique.

It must be said that the institutionalization of Modernist and avant-garde film is certainly less obvious or well-known than the institutionalization of twentieth-century movements in painting as charted by Suzi Gablik (1984), Diana Crane (1987), and Christine Lindey (1990). But it is possible to propose a few indicators to support Burger's contention that 'art as an institution continues to survive as something separate from the praxis of life' and that 'all art that is more recent than the historical avant-garde movements must come to terms with that fact'.⁹ For instance: the emergence of an avant-garde 'art' film apparatus created through a proliferation of critical anthologies, journals, archives, theoretical analysis, academic inquiry, journals, catalogues, conferences and lectures; specialized financing, distribution and exhibition for films contextualized as 'works of art' by screenings within the gallery/museum/Fine Art film club circuit; and the construction of chronological traditions of influence and succession, secured partly through film retrospectives which construct the paradoxical concept of a history of 'avant-gardes'.

And taking account of the development of this institutional-cultural context places a quite different slant on the potential success of an anti-art or 'paralogical' critique as offered by Lyotard:

To the extent that the means by which the avant-gardist hoped to bring about the sublation of art have attained the status of works of art, the claim that the praxis of life is to be renewed can no longer be legitimately connected with their employment... the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-gardist intentions. This is true independently of the consciousness artists have of this activity...¹⁰

The central thrust of Burger's observation, then, would suggest that the properly avant-gardist endeavours of Surrealism (to renew the 'praxis of life' by de-differentiating Modernism's art/life binary, and thus questioning the 'game rules' which hold them apart) have themselves become part of the institution 'art'. Further, the 'anti-art' project of questioning what art 'is' has paradoxically become the main category for understanding contemporary art practice. This would in part explain how and why the concept 'avant-garde' is often difficult to separate from that of 'Modern art'. The terms have become synonymous, I would suggest, because the activity of questioning and challenging the 'rules' of art no longer threatens but only works to intensify the conceptual 'institution' of art. For 'systems-immanent' or anti-art avant-gardes more recent than Surrealism, this poses considerable difficulties for construing them as 'postmodernist'.

To elucidate film avant-gardism and its institutionalization a little more, it is interesting to note that one of Noel Carroll's five 'postmodernist' film forms, punk film, is characterized by an explicit rejection of the institutionalization

of film avant-gardes.¹¹ In terms recalling Rosalind Krauss's influential essay on the postmodernist 'repetition' of Rodin's sculptures,¹² punk film - once tellingly billed as 'a 1960's underground movie happening today' - recalls Surrealist intentions of subverting institutional art.¹³ Closely tied to the punk music scene in New York of the late 1970's, intentionally amateurish and 'raw-cut' super-8 footage was screened to new audiences for 'underground' film, outside of orthodox 'art' film exhibition circuits in bars, clubs and popular rock club venues as well as briefly at the 'storefront' New Cinema. Hoberman and Carroll's analyses suggest that punk film is profoundly 'cannablistic', structured around subversive 'repetitions' of both Hollywood 'pariah genres' ('low-budget crime films and shoe-string sci-fi') and the avant-garde 'ghetto' films of structuralism. Of the former tactic, Carroll argues that the purpose was to utilize 'their bad taste, outrageous logic, and crudity' and exaggerate them in such a way that 'the cheapness and mindlessness of these wretcheds of the film industry' are 'intensified to the point where they could function as symbols of the punk self':

At the stylistic level, the exaggerated adaptations of pulp genres stated themes of transgression of norms, of outsideness, of the valorization of the authentic, even romantically heroic, significance of bad taste. The punk filmmakers exploited the brazenly antireflective address of the genres while also expropriating the raw if rather crude energy available in their structure. At the same time the violence endemic to Hollywood genres could be rechanneled in stories that plotted revolutionary acts against the bourgeois culture.¹⁴

The point of appropriating pariah genres of popular culture is thus to construct a subversive vision of/for alienated urban-guerillas,

not from some 'aesthetic' point apart from mass culture but from within the fragmented detritus of that culture; 'art as the practice of referring to shards of a once-vibrant civilization, art in the ruins'.¹⁵ As Carroll concedes, the parodic dimension of recyclings of genres 'both resembles deconstructionism and does not'. The didacticism of anti-Hollywood, emancipatory anti-illusionism is certainly refused but, nonetheless, punk film can be seen as a 'means of expressing disdain and a superiority for an established culture' thus making punk's dominant theme of 'outsiderness' a 'repetition' of underground film before its incorporation into the High Art parameters of Modernism. For its ironic/parodic interpretation of previous institutionalized avant-gardes, Eric Mitchell's Kidnapped (1979) is especially pertinent.

Hoberman writes:

Modeled on Warhol's Vinyl (one of the few early Warhols available in New York), Kidnapped makes blatant use of real time - splicing together fifteen unedited super-8 rolls - and overdetermined camerawork. While Warhol's film is static, Mitchell's pans continually around a barren Lower East Side apartment, remorselessly chopping off torsos at the neck. A few jittery extroverts - Mitchell's 'superstars' stimulated by drugs, the filmmaker's on-screen direction, and the rock music blaring from a plastic phonograph on the floor - jostle each other for dominance. Everything in Kidnapped is proudly second-hand, even 'Satisfaction' is sung by Devo. Other films - Nares' Rome '78 (1978) and John Lurie's Men in Orbit (1978) - also suggested Warhol pastiches, while Mitchell's Red Italy (1978) was a clever parody of Fellini and Antonioni. Mitchell was also active as an actor and in Harold Vogel's Dear Jimmy - a self-conscious chronicle of the new underground - he appears as a super-8 director who appropriately asserts the impossibility of doing 'anything new in films'.¹⁶

However, while offering a critique of the high seriousness of both speculative and emancipatory Modernism, punk film remains within

the terms which define anti-art avant-gardism in Burger's sense. The 'repetitions' of punk film at the level of content are thus also symptomatic of a larger historical/cultural repetition - through an anti-intellectual 'anaesthetic' blankness 'raised to the level of style' (rather than through Surrealist strategies of critical 'dépaysement'), punk film replays dada/Surrealist endeavours to break from 'traditional' institutional art and to authenticate the concerns of an anti-bourgeois counter-cultural enclave.

What, then, is 'postmodernist' about a postmodernism which can encompass a film practice which adheres so closely, in fact returns to, the failed anti-art programmes of the historical avant-garde? Punk film exemplifies another paradox generated by locating postmodernism within the context of the avant-garde: the view that the impulse for renewal and challenge, of 'doing anything new' (the impulse which sustains Modernist avant-gardes) has become 'impossible' or exhausted, is explicitly denied by a rebellion against previous metanarrative avant-gardes (against High Cultural 'traditions'). This inevitably returns punk film to another 'tradition': the 'anti-art' or paralogy of Surrealism. As Huyssen has observed:

... the paradox of the 1970's is not so much... the inherent contradiction of the postmodernist avant-garde itself, i.e. the paradox of an art that simulatenously wants to be art and anti-art... The paradox of the 1970's is rather that the postmodernist search for cultural tradition... and continuity, which underlies all the rhetoric of radical rupture, discontinuity and epistemological breaks, has turned to that tradition which fundamentally and on principle despised and denied all traditions.¹⁷

This is an accurate description of Lyotard's postmodernist aesthetic in which 'all that has been received, if only yesterday... must be suspected' (PC, p. 79). But Carroll's analysis, which defines film postmodernism by a plurality of avant-garde film forms, would suggest that the linear, future-orientated temporality implied by a 'constant state' of paralogical subversion is no longer applicable. The recent proliferation of post-speculative film forms (New Talkies, New Psychodramas, Punk, Deconstruction, New Symbolism) would indicate a splintering or spatialization of the temporal dimension informing the concept of 'avant-garde'. In Bürger's terms:

Through the avant-garde movements, the historical succession of techniques and styles has been transformed into a simultaneity of the absolutely disparate. The consequence is that no movement today can legitimately claim to be more historically advanced as art than any other...¹⁸

Thus, Bürger's observation on the meaning of such late twentieth-century avant-garde 'repetitions' is an acute one: in 'a changed context, the resumption of avant-gardist intentions with the means of avant-gardism can no longer even have the limited effectiveness the historical avant-gardes achieved'.¹⁹ Similarly, with Huyssen, it is possible to argue that the 'postmodernist' repetition of historical avant-gardism represents instead its 'endgame'. Placed within the context of the 'failure' of Surrealism's anti-art programme and the incorporation of avant-gardism into institution 'art', Lyotard's proposal for defining postmodernist critique by a resumption of 'paralogical' avant-gardism is not a convincing one upon which to pursue an analogous theory for postmodernist film.

Taking the preceding points into account, 'Answering the

Question: What is Postmodernism?' is a frustratingly orthodox account. According to my analysis, I do not see how Lyotard's notion of the paralogical escapes from falling back upon one of the most definitive Modernist differentiations which carves out the space of art as specific form of knowledge and grants avant-garde artists the role of the 'subversion of reality'. As John Tagg has wittily observed:

Like John Wayne, out of the smoke and dust of the postmodernist explosion, we begin to see the familiar chunky outlines of a rough but redeeming modernism. There is the singleness of purpose, the showdown on the frontier of the possible, the fearless interrogation, the high-noon drama on which hangs the fate of social, psychological and epistemological renewal, the restless need for change, now stripped of any illusions of progress, but with eyes fixed on a horizon which is endlessly different yet somehow always the same.²⁰

To object to particular theories simply because they are 'modernist' is a weak criticism, but the 'modernism' of Lyotardian postmodernist aesthetics does foreground two issues which I feel are effaced by defining postmodernism within the framework of the 'paralogical': firstly, how film 'knowledge' is to be construed and, secondly, where feminism is to be located with the terms of his analysis. With these in view, I want to raise two main objections - to Lyotard's preservation of a Modernist differentiation which is apparent in his treatment of contemporary film and, relatedly, to his adherence to a Modernist avant-gardism.

The postmodernist 'paralogical' challenge to both performativity and metanarrativity is a 'constant state' of rebellion against forces working to supply 'reality' with the 'fiction' of its transparency. What then, could this formulation mean if applied to film? Given that Lyotard's view of cinema does

not extend beyond that of a crudely monolithic 'classical realism', the short answer is that it cannot be applied:

Industrial photography and cinema will be superior to painting and the novel whenever the objective is to stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning, to reproduce the syntax and vocabulary which enable the addressee to decipher images and sequences quickly, and so to arrive easily at the consciousness of his own identity as well as the approval which he thereby receives from others - since structures of images and sequences constitute a communication code among all of them. This is the way the effects of reality, or if one prefers, the fantasies of realism, multiply.²¹

(PC, p. 74)

While this does not absolutely exclude the theoretical possibility for paralogical film avant-gardism, the terms of Lyotard's anti-media stance do suggest a nostalgic 'repetition' of Modernism's High art/popular culture dichotomy, in fact of the very conditions of Modernist avant-gardes as I have defined them. As he does not specify what 'non-industrial' film and photography might be, Lyotard leaves himself open to a reading which would suggest that film and photography are not available for appropriation in the 'presentation of the unpresentable'. And this 'story' is an old one: a theory of postmodernism which can preserve a Modernist role for the unsullied avant-gardes of theory, painting and literature while leaving the mass manipulations of the 'fantasies of realism' to proliferate undisturbed. Thus, at a stroke, Lyotard obviates any further investigation into what critical resources are available for the analysis of film after the dissolution of the metanarratives. Lyotard's critique of metanarrative Modernism thus dispenses with the conceptual resources of both speculative and emancipatory 'knowledge' in order to secure a 'free' sphere for

'sublime' aesthetics, but then appeals to definitively Modernist differentiations (autonomous art/popular culture; aesthetic knowlege/pleasure; avant-garde/mass consumption) to define the epistemological conditions in which it may function.

Does this, then, imply that film is exempt from the critique of modernist metanarrative knowledge propounded in The Postmodern Condition? Lyotard's schema would suggest that it is exempt, but for reasons that offer little comfort for those who would wish to retrieve Modernist functions (speculative or emancipatory) for avant-garde film. Rather, the High Modernist terms of his analysis exclude film from the 'paralogical' because, it would seem, film has never been part of modernism. As I hope the course of this study has shown, this is a remarkably ill-informed and crude proposition, showing little regard for the historical and epistemolgical diversity of avant-garde film histories which contest the view that film works monolithically to 'stabilize the referent'. Evidently, the 'rules' of metanarrative modernism have governed the production of avant-garde film as 'knowledge', and a consistent analysis must address what becomes of the 'conditions' for film knowledge after their demise. Perhaps it is unnecessary to state that the 'anti-realist' addendum to The Postmodern Condition does not attempt this and therefore cannot sustain further investigation into what 'postmodernism' might mean for film.

I have argued that if postmodernism is to define a set of shifts in the 'game rules' that validate the broader epistemological and social constitution of film 'knowledge', then it should de-differentiate the conceptual categories which have

permitted film to function under the Modernist metanarratives. And so, leaving Lyotard's evasion of the issue to one side, it is important to consider what full de-differentiation does imply for film. I would suggest that it is the Modernist or 'modernist-postmodernist' metaphor of the avant-garde as the locus of adversarial, critical and transformatory 'knowledge' per se which must be reconsidered along with a set of shifts in the constitution of the 'condition' of postmodernism, and this inevitably questions the validity of any theory of postmodernism which maintains its viability. In this respect, I would agree with Lyotard that paralogical avant-gardism is not an appropriate tool for defining postmodernism in film though, importantly, not for the Modernist 'anti-realist' reasons presented by him. Rather, I do not see that an analogous theory of 'paralogical' avant-gardism is at all appropriate for construing film 'knowledge' since post-narrative postmodernism is better understood without recourse to a notion of the avant-garde at all. I would suggest instead that it is not because film has never been Modernist that it cannot be subject to legitimation by paralogy, but rather because the 'conditions' under which film were sanctioned as Modernist have changed. In other words, the shift into postmodernism can be more properly traced in the loss of the Modernist binary which secured a space for film to function as autonomous, avant-garde knowledge. My point is that contemporary developments in the cultural production and consumption of 'the visual' make it very difficult to accept the modernist differentiation (namely, the autonomy of the sphere of art from popular culture) upon which this kind of analysis is based and, therefore, to accept avant-gardism as the saviour of

postmodernist aesthetics.

It is clear that a widespread loss of faith in the historical role of avant-gardes to make undoubted aesthetic transformations consequential for a broader audience (which characterizes much thinking on postmodernism) is attributable to the 'institutionalization' of the transformatory potential of 'Heroic' Modernist avant-gardes, and this, clearly, is a crucial factor in arguing for a deliberate and conscious rethinking of its viability as a postmodernist mode for 'knowledge'. But also profound changes in the wider cultural context of film can be identified to support the view that conceptualizing film 'knowledge' within the Modernist mode is 'played out'.

Primarily, I would suggest, it is the developments in the technological context of image production and consumption which has severely contracted the potential for effective avant-garde strategies. Witness the exponential growth in power and pervasiveness of image technologies and image-producing media - satellite and cable television, video, fashion, advertising, magazines, commodity packaging, graphic computers and computer games, 'real time' simulators, virtual reality, camcorders, interactive CD and CD photography, laser disc and multi-media 'edutainment' packages. In Huyssen's view, a critical factor in Surrealism's 'paralogical' anti-art subversion was its incorporation of popular cultural media:

... the historical avant-garde's appropriation of technology for high art (e.g. film, photography, montage principle) could produce shock since it broke with the aestheticism and the doctrine of art's autonomy from 'real' life which were dominant in the late 19th century.²²

But such shock tactics are hardly available today. More importantly, as noted in Chapter Two, in a postmodernist 'technologized' society, the nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged: such proliferation of image technologies has radically altered both the effectivity of avant-gardist strategies, and the ways in which the consumption of film is socially situated. Firstly, the evident success of dominant capitalist culture in accommodating and incorporating avant-garde art within a commodified art market in which 'innovation' is functional for its maintenance. The form that co-option takes for film avant-gardism is slightly different than that, say, for painting or sculpture where financial value can be attached to the scarcity value of an Artist's 'original' (as Benjamin argued, it makes no sense to think in terms of 'originals' with mechanically and now electronically reproduced images). I have yet to discover, and doubt, if any corporate investment has resulted in collections of Abstract or Anti-illusionist film on the scale of the painting collections of, say, Saatchi & Saatchi. Rather, the appropriation of avant-garde film for dominant culture can be traced in the use of strategies which originated as tools of critique in the most conventional and banal of contexts. For instance, the use of avant-garde (especially Surrealist) juxtapositional techniques to invigorate commercial commodity aesthetics, photographic advertising imagery and televisual advertising narratives. More crucially, one only has to spend a morning watching children's/youth television or a slice of MTV to recognize that what were once considered tactics for critical distantiation are now mainstream: abstract graphics, frenetic editing, anti-realist camera zooms and pans, images

manipulated by repetition and distortion, cinema verite/documentary 'shaky' cameras, 'jump cuts' use of intertitles at odds with visual information, sound/image dysjunctions, non-'closure' of narrative, and 'laying bare the device' by revealing the 'artifice' of camera-people, studio and directors. To recall the core of MacCabe's argument for using Brecht as model for Godardian film practice:

What is important, therefore, is that in the separation of the elements the spectator gets separated out of this unity and homogeneity - this passivity - in order to enter into an active appropriation of the scenes presented to him. This active appropriation is the aim of epic theatre - it is the production of knowledge. ²³

Even allowing for the view that television requires a more 'distracted' and passive mode of spectatorship than either theatrical or cinema viewing, the incorporation of avant-garde film techniques suggests that the mainstay of radical emancipatory cinema, the Godardian/Brechtian 'separation of elements', can be employed without political consequences of any kind. The Modernist tenet, that the formal separation of film 'elements' 'will automatically produce a disunity disturbing to the audience, and that that disturbance is itself a process of psychological 'separation' conducive to learning'²⁴ seems wholly inappropriate for audiences habituated to these techniques outside of cinema. These issues have immediate bearing on the strategies available for film avant-gardism. Artists using montages of televisual sequences, incorporating elements from advertising, utilizing video, rephotography, repetitive loop circuits, etc. for gallery 'installations' or multi-media 'performances' often, as Tagg also notes, result in artworks which are barely distinguishable from the products of the 'commodity' aesthetics they intend to 'subvert'.²⁵

The massive expansion of the domestic consumption of film on satellite, Pay-TV or more particularly on video, also bears significantly upon the reception of film in that the conditions of its consumption are less and less those of the institution 'cinema'. Many film theorists have argued that it is as much the 'illusionist' conditions for spectatorship of industrial cinema as the ideological content of individual mainstream films that conspire to structure passive spectatorship through the 'relay of looks' (which imbricates the Imaginary 'looks' of projection, audience, identification and 'the gaze'). But the altered circumstances offered by domestic video suggest that film may be viewed without such 'metapsychological' investment in the 'wilful suspension of disbelief'. One could argue that relatively new technologies such as video have increased individual control over the conditions of spectatorship: spectatorship need not be bound to the ideological repression of linear, temporal narrative flow when 'identification' is so often 'broken' by the use of pause, fast forward, rewind and, of course, stop. Instead, if cinema's 'imaginary' conditions are no longer the dominant ones of film reception, it is worth asking what status can be granted to avant-gardist programmes based on similar 'anti-narrative' tactics of spectatorial disruption and fragmentation.

More broadly, the shift in image-culture that these technologies indicate are accompanied by processes which 'spectacularize' or aestheticize the everyday, again making it difficult to maintain an 'apartness' for film avant-gardes to function as loci of critical aesthetic knowledge. Huyssen is again to the point in arguing that through the course of the twentieth

century, it is mass media popular culture which has transformed and revolutionized life experience for Western industrial nations, and not avant-garde film art. For example, the aestheticization of commodity consumption, the all-consuming notion of life as 'lifestyle', the reality of news 'events' articulated by the 'performance' of electronic communication, popular music video, the aestheticization of politics, charity 'spectaculars', or sports coverage - now found lacking without accompanying video replays, slow-motion and pop music soundtrack. The undoubted 'aestheticization' of contemporary urban life is an important indication that Modernism's art/life dichotomy, which secured the autonomous space for legitimating film as 'art', is no longer functional in that the differentiation of an 'aesthetic' use of film is increasingly also the modus operandi of 'dominant' visual culture. Another route to the conclusion that avant-garde film art movements have approached their historical endpoint is thereby suggested: it can be argued that Surrealism does indeed prefigure 'the postmodern', though not because of an analogy between its anti-art programme and Lyotardian paralogy. Rather, Surrealism anticipates the postmodern condition in that its 'mode of signification' collapses Modernism's real/representation binary in a manner which neatly illustrates how the 'aestheticization' of everyday life has been underwritten by a 'loss of the real'.

To expand on this a little, I argued in Chapter Two that Modernist film avant-gardes functioned under the principle of autonomy in which art was bracketed from 'reality' either for the pursuit of specificity, or for securing a space for critical

knowledge. It was also noted that Surrealist film signification is not wholly amenable to this categorization because it de-differentiates the binary which sets art apart from life. More specifically, Surrealist film does not attempt to invoke a 'real' behind its representation but instead aims to persuade the spectator of the reality of its fiction. This clearly distinguishes Surrealist film from emancipatory avant-gardism in that there is fundamental divergence on the question of what function film signification should perform: within the framework of emancipatory 'knowledge', film functions as both ideological misrepresentation of the 'real' but also, in its Modernist form, functions as an instrument for 'tearing the veil' of mystification. Surrealism, in contrast, makes no such distinctions and offers no means for a Brechtian 'return from alienation' as spectatorial 'depaysement' cannot be enlisted for the purpose of conscious critical knowledge. This provides a useful parallel for the de-differentiated signification apparent in the 'aestheticization' of quotidian life: in this sense, Surrealism has become the cultural dominant of the late twentieth century, and hence is not available as an individuated, subversive aesthetic option. Scott Lash has similarly argued for this reading of contemporary visual culture and theorizes postmodernism as a 'regime of signification' which functions without the 'reality principle' sustaining modernist theory (for him, Marx, Freud and Brecht).²⁶ Postmodernist visual culture for Lash is defined, like Surrealist film, by a mode of signifying which problematizes relations between signifier, signified and referent so that the 'referent functions as a

signifier'. In other words, the 'real' of everyday life is 'already a representation', experienced as a 'spatio-temporal configuration of signifiers': reality becomes 'spectacular', that is, composed of/by images. Again, analysis of this kind makes a Modernist separation of art from life a highly problematic one to entertain. De-differentiating Modernism's formal, rational 'discursive' conceptual formation which privileges writing over images and textual depth over surface appearance, Lash suggests that postmodernism denotes a 'figural' regime in which hermeneutic interpretation and 'depth' models of textual meaning are replaced by a conceptual configuration dominated by the 'surface' aesthetics of the visual image. Thus, quite unlike Modernism, which draws attention to the internal conditions of its specificity or to cinematic conventions, film postmodernism suggest that the 'real' is itself coded and conventional - there is no 'real' laying beneath the surface of signs since the 'outside' of representation is similarly constituted by the play of signifiers. In this context, in what sense is it possible to hold that there is an inalienable 'real' to which avant-garde film can return the spectator? Further, Dana Polan has suggested that film as 'spectacle' functions in a way that is not amenable to the kind of structural narrative analysis which understands narrative to be the primary mechanism or 'bearer' of dominant ideology. With both anti-narrative avant-gardism and Marxist analyses of the ideological function of narrative in mind, critical theories of narrative which explain such genres as Westerns, kung fu, James Bond, and the detective in terms of the 'mythological resolution' they operate may have to confront the possibility that:

There might well be an ideological practice of the spectacular, a politics of the kinetic, in which one's role as spectator is not to take up myths but to avoid all myths, to fall for pure looking that offers no critical representation of social relations, that works precisely to trade analysis of the world for a kinetic experience of it.²⁷

Similarly, for Baudillard, without the concept of 'representation' (which is predicated on the existence of a 'real'):

... the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but a simulacrum, never exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. So it is with simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. The latter starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Conversely, simulation starts from the utopia of this principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as aversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.²⁸

I cannot here explore Baudrillard's provocative theories on the shift from the 'drama of alienation' to the imploded 'ecstasy of communication' but it is evident that the loss of the category of 'representation' is a profound one, and from this perspective the chances of avant-garde film mounting a successful 'subversion of reality' in the society of the 'simulacrum' look pretty slim. But perhaps it is from this perspective that one should read Burger's statement as an epitaph for film avant-gardism, and not from Habermas' optimistic programme for the 'appropriation of the expert's culture from the standpoint of the lifeworld':

When art and the praxis of life are one, when the praxis is aesthetic and art is practical, art's purpose can no longer be discovered, because the existence of two distinct spheres (art and the praxis of life) which is constitutive of the concept of purpose or intended use has come to an end.²⁹

If the cultural and institutional context of film has been redefined by these developments, it is important that a reevaluation of the epistemological resources appropriate for their analysis be attempted. In short, I would suggest that the Modernist context in which Lyotard defines the paralogical, which continues to split the sphere of art from life, to differentiate knowledge and to propagate the notion that critical knowledge can function only by subverting the 'game rules' of art, makes his analysis of the 'conditions' for postmodern knowledge a difficult one to defend. This is more especially the case as it is founded upon a refusal to engage with film per se.³⁰ For Lyotard, film is always on the side of 'realism' which makes him ill-placed to consider the possibility that many recent 'industrial' films do not work to 'stabilize the referent'. Once again, this would imply that Modernist categories for constructing film as an object of 'knowledge' must be reconsidered. There are enough instances of mainstream films to support this view, for example: Repo Man (Cox, 1984), Robocop (Verhoeven, 1987), Kiss of the Spider Woman (Babenco, 1986), Eraserhead and Blue Velvet (Lynch, 1976 & 1986), Stranger Than Paradise (Jarmusch, 1984), Stardust Memories, Zelig, and Purple Rose of Cairo (Allen, 1980, 1983 and 1984), Brazil (Gilliam, 1985), Dead Ringers (Cronenberg, 1988), etc. This is not to claim that the use of 'anti-realist' elements - parody, self-relexivity, distantiation, mixing of genres, non-closure of narrative, ironic quotations from and intertextual references to film history - automatically constitutes an unmitigated 'radicalization' of commodified film. But nor, on the other hand, do I want to imply that any film exhibiting such 'postmodernist'

tendencies will ultimately be recuperable for dominant ideology. Instead, I would hold that these films 'figure' the collapse of the Modernist binaries and trouble the assumption that films which do not 'stabilize the referent' are thereby engaged in an aesthetic 'subversion of reality'. Of course, exactly how, for whom and to what extent the 'destabilization' of 'realism' is enacted by particular texts is not open to generalization, and would require detailed textual analysis to determine the broader ideological contexts in which anti-realist components are situated. Nonetheless, I would venture to say that a more coherent postmodernist construction of film 'knowledge' should accept a shrinkage in, if not abandonment of, the avant-gardist space of critique (theoretically secured by Modernist legitimation), and engage instead with the contradictions and 'undecidabilities' of cultural forms. If postmodernist critique cannot have recourse to the 'guarantee' that avant-gardism has a privileged status in regard to 'knowledge' claims, a postmodernist politics of representation must ground claims upon a different set of 'conditions'.

More specifically, I would hold, a notion of subversion structured upon the metaphor of the avant-garde actually runs counter to the main concerns of Lyotard's thesis, and this is important for a consideration of where feminism is to be located in the 'presentation of the unrepresentable'. In order to demonstrate this proposition, the final Chapter will examine the consequences for feminism of thinking of postmodernism within the framework of paralogical avant-gardism.

NOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

1. Laura Kipnis, '"Refunctioning" reconsidered: towards a left popular culture', in ed. C. MacCabe, High Theory/Low Culture (1986), pp. 11-36 (p. 28).

2. Hal Foster, Introduction to Postmodern Culture (1985), p. xii. For the most vociferous 'old conservative' anti-modernism, see Daniel Bell's The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (1976).

3. E. Ann Kaplan, Introduction to her edition of Postmodernism and its Discontents, (1988), p. 3.

4. Kaplan (1988), p. 3.

5. Lipkis (1986), p. 21.

Performativity, Paralogy and the Avant-Garde

6. Thomas L. Dumm, 'The Politics of Post-Modern Aesthetics: Habermas Contra Foucault', Political Theory, 16: 2 (1988), pp. 209-28 (p. 213).

Avant-garde Knowledge and the Postmodern Condition

7. Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant Garde (1984), p. 57.

8. Bürger (1984), p. 57.

9. *ibid.* p. 57.

10. *ibid.* p. 58.

11. Noel Carroll, 'Film' in Trachtenberg (1985), pp. 101-31

12. Rosalind Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition', in ed. B. Wallis (1984), pp. 13-29.

13. J. Hoberman, 'After Avant-garde Film', in ed. B. Wallis (1984), pp. 59-73 (p. 69).

14. Carroll (1985), p. 121.

15. *ibid.* p. 121.

16. Hoberman (1984), p. 69.

17. Andreas Huyssen, 'The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970's', New German Critique, 22 (1981), pp. 23-40 (p. 32).

18. Bürger (1984), p. 63.

19. *ibid.* p. 58.

20. John Tagg, 'Postmodernism and the Born-Again Avant-Garde', Block, 11 (1985/6), pp. 3-7 (p. 4).

21. Lyotard here closely follows Bazin's view that the historical emergence of industrial photography and film 'freed' painting from the ontological burden of mimesis thus instigating the 'crisis of representation' (Cubism, Abstraction etc) characteristic of early twentieth-century Modernist art (see Andre Bazin, in What is Cinema? esp. 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in Vol 1 (1967), pp. 9-16. Compare with Stephen Heath's 'Narrative Space' which argues that realist cinematography attempts to simulate the Quattrocento rules of perspectival spatial composition in Questions of Cinema (1981), pp. 17-75. Where Lyotard does address the 'popular' media, he rather weakly offers the following:

The question everybody raised was that of knowing how to introduce resistance into this culture industry. I believe that the only line to follow is to produce programmes for TV, or whatever, which produce in the viewer or the client in general an effect of uncertainty and trouble. It seems to me that the thing to aim at is a certain sort of feeling or sentiment. You can't introduce concepts, you can't produce argumentation. This type of media isn't the place for that, but you can produce a feeling of disturbance, in the hope that this disturbance will be followed by reflection.

in 'Brief Reflections on Popular Culture', ICA Documents on Postmodernism, in ed. L. Appignenisi (1989), pp. 181-82:

22. Huyssen (1981), p. 30.

23. Colin MacCabe, 'The Politics of Separation', Screen, 16: 4 (1975/6), p. 49.

24. Kirsten Thompson, Breaking The Glass Armor (1988), p. 111.

25. For evaluations of 'art' video 'deconstructions' of film and television, see David Ross, 'Truth or Consequences: American Television and Video Art', pp. 167-78, and Rosalind Krauss, 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism', both in ed. J. Hanhardt, Video Culture (1986). Krauss's is the more sophisticated reading in that she identifies that video artists recapitulate the medium's dominant mode of non-critical, self-absorption :

... the feedback coil of video seems to be an instrument of a double repression.: For through it consciousness of temporality and of the separation between subject and object are simultaneously submerged. The result of this submergence is, for the maker and the viewer of most video art, a kind of weightless fall through the suspended space of narcissism. (p. 186).

Krauss does, though, offer readings of video art which she contends work in a variety of ways to:

- 1) exploit the medium in order to criticize it from within;
- 2) represent a physical assault on the video mechanism in order to break out of its psychological hold;
- 3) use the medium as a subspecies of painting or sculpture (pp. 186-87).

26. Scott Lash, 'Discourse or Figure? Postmodernism as a "Regime of Signification"', Theory, Culture & Society, 5 (1988), pp. 311-36.

27. Dana Polan, 'Postmodernism and Cultural Analysis Today', in ed. E. A. Kaplan (1988), pp. 45-58 (pp. 52-53).

28. Jean Baudrillard, Simulations (1983), p. 11. See also Baudrillard's The Evil Demon of Images (1984); and Jonathan Clary, 'The Eclipse of the Spectacle', in ed. B. Wallis (1984), pp. 283-94.

29. Bürger (1984), p. 51.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONSEQUENCES OF POSTMODERNISM (2)

For feminists who regard engagement with mass media to be an important and legitimate site of analysis and critique, the value of Lyotard's 'anti-realist' notion of Modernist-postmodernist 'paralogical' avant-gardism is highly debatable for it rules out such engagement from the outset. It is made still more questionable by the fact that Lyotard's definition of 'realism' extends beyond the 'fantasies' of transparent communication, spawned by mass cultural image technologies, to include the 'fictions' of organic unity and consensus called forth by demands that artists must function in the service of the social 'community'. Repeating his earlier objections to the metanarrative of liberty, Lyotard's idea of the 'paralogical' is clearly concerned to counteract the 'terrorism' of the strong state's repression of aesthetic 'play' demanded in the name of the People:

Realism, whose only definition is that it intends to avoid the question of reality implicated in that of art, always stands somewhere between academicism and kitsch. When power assumes the name of a party, realism and its neoclassical complement triumph over the experimental avant-garde by slandering it and banning it - that is, provided the 'correct' images, the 'correct' narratives, the 'correct' forms which the party requests, selects, and propagates can find a public to desire them as the appropriate remedy for the anxiety and depression that public experiences.

(PC, p. 75)

Similarly, for Lyotard, even the 'consensual' attempts of artists to establish links between art and the politics of the 'community' are haunted by a suspicion that behind them lies an illiberal homogeneity, the 'terror' of the Politically Correct. If 'paralogical' subversion can be concerned only with the systems-immanent critique of the 'game rules' of aesthetic practice, it is thus freed from all rational and instrumental imperatives. And by this, feminist relations to the (now) postmodern sphere of the aesthetic are made problematic: for how is it possible to conceive of feminism without its essentially political claims upon the production and reception of 'art'? Further, how can such a notion of paralogy answer Lyotard's own guiding question - 'Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?' (my emphasis):

The operativity criterion is technological; it has no relevance for judging what is true or just. Is legitimacy to be found in consensus obtained through discussion, as Jurgen Habermas thinks? Such consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension.

(PC, p. xxv)

It would seem that 'justice' for Lyotard can only be secured negatively, that is, by the dynamic movement of paradoxological challenges which perpetually subvert the mechanisms which deny heterogeneous 'play' in favour of the 'transparent' instrumentality of political 'realism'. This is an initially attractive argument but not, finally, a convincing one as it does not identify the conditions upon which feminism may articulate post-narrative 'petition(s) for justice'. This returns discussion to some of the issues raised in Chapter Four relating to the potential dangers for feminism in rejecting a Modernist social bond in favour of

multiplying 'difference'. Having jettisoned the 'terrorist' or even mildly 'consensual' epistemological foundations of the metanarrative of emancipation, how can feminists then 'legitimate' claims to knowledge? It would appear that avant-gardism, now construed without the metanarratives and thus relieved of the constraints of political and social responsibility, is open to the charge that Lyotard's postmodern 'sphere of the aesthetic' conspires to marginalize the hard-won 'right' for feminists to challenge the construction of 'reality'. In other words, a feminist politics of representation is largely informed by 'petitions' for 'correct' images and narratives because, crudely, images and narratives are understood to contribute significantly to ideologically oppressive constructions of female 'reality'. Alternatively, the feminist activity of 'subverting' reality might indeed be read as a legitimate inflection of paralogical 'moves'. But my point is: if aesthetic practice cannot be enlisted to propagate political projects, what is the function or purpose of such 'subversion' if it is necessarily limited to the critique of the 'rules of art'? When aesthetic subversions of both performativity and political 'realism' cannot be 'ravaged' by 'closing down the heterogeneity of language games', I find it difficult to envisage what meaning an 'aesthetics' absolutely freed from 'social and institutional practice' could have. Absolute freedom is vertiginous - but also meaningless. Thus, although I take seriously his concern to avoid the traps of domination and control embedded within metanarrative constructions of aesthetics, I do not see that Lyotard's notion of paralogy leaves much upon which to re-construct a post-narrative politics of feminist

aesthetics, and on this ground I would question whether this does not in fact cause Lyotard to eliminate feminist 'players' from the agonistics of language games. Seyla Benhabib has also identified the contradictory outcome for feminism of Lyotard's attempt to sketch 'the outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown' (PC, p. 67):

His defense of the morally uncompromising gesture of the aesthetic avant-garde, his insistence upon the spirit of innovation, experimentation, [and] play... could be constituents of a Marxist radical, democratic politics... Yet, insisting upon the incommensurability of language games, in the name of polytheism, may generate moral and political indifference; the call for innovation, experimentation and play may be completely dissociated from social and institutional practice, and activation of differences may not amount to a democratic respect of the right of the other to be, but a conservative plea to place the other, because of her otherness, outside the pale of our common humanity and mutual responsibility.¹

Where Modernist metanarrative thinking is construed as a conceptual 'instrument' for domination and exclusion, postmodernist 'incredulity' offers a valuable opportunity for reconceptualizing both theoretical and political strategies within a 'language pragmatics' consonant with a politics which both respects and 'activates' difference. But granting that, Lyotard's vision of postmodernist avant-garde paralogy offers little upon which to reconstruct a replacement for the politics of metanarrative film which can at the same time remain identifiably feminist - it is far from clear that aesthetic paralogy is an adequate mechanism for securing 'justice'.

This, I think, is symptomatic of much wider divergence between the political agendas of some forms of postmodernism and of feminism. As Peter Dews notes, the 'radical credentials of post-structuralism should not be so readily taken for granted' if it is

'driven into an abandonment of systematic cognitive claims, indeed, because of its hostility to the universal, frequently into a quasi-aesthetic suspension of truth claims as such'.² In the light of this, one cannot help but feel that Habermas's observation of some post-structuralist/deconstructivist thinking is aptly applied to Lyotard's 'sublime' aesthetic:

The 'young conservatives' recapitulate the basic experience of aesthetic modernity. They claim as their own the revelations of a decentred subjectivity, emancipated from the imperatives of work and usefulness, and with this experience they step outside the modern world. On the basis of modernistic attitudes they justify an irreconcilable antimodernism. They remove into the sphere of the far-away and the archaic the spontaneous powers of the imagination, self-experience and emotion. To instrumental reason they juxtapose in Manichean fashion a principle only accessible through evocation...

('Modernity', p. 14)

In short, I do not think that Lyotardian 'presentation of the unpresentable' paralogy is a sufficient concept on which to base a post-narrative politics of feminist film and, if feminism is to be persuaded to give up legitimation by the metanarrative of liberty without regret, then a better set of 'conditions' needs to be forged from The Postmodern Condition than are suggested by the postmodernist recourse to notions of the 'sublime'. In this sense, it is not admissable for the loss of legitimation by the Modernist metanarratives to be replaced by what is also Modernist. For, only once the Modernist remnants of Lyotard's thinking are dispensed with, can his most important insight into the 'conditions' for post-narrative knowledge be appropriated: 'Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (PC, p. xxv). I would suggest that feminism is in

a stronger position to define postmodern knowledge and demonstrate a 'sensitivity to differences' if it scraps what Tagg calls the 'fable' of the avant-garde as repository of critical or 'paralogical' knowledge, and dispenses with a differentiated notion of the aesthetic. The epistemological gains for feminism in construing postmodernism without recourse to a mass culture/avant-garde binary can be shown to far outweigh its epistemological 'loss'. It should also provide some ground for envisaging a politics of film in the light of the previous Chapter which indicated that contemporary image culture militates against the success of film as 'tool' of avant-gardist 'subversion'.

In short, I wish to retrieve the valuable core of Lyotard's thinking on difference to situate a feminist reading of the 'postmodern condition' with regard to its consequences for the politics of film spectatorship. To anchor this requires further consideration of feminism's relationship to the 'social bond' and of the meaning of post-narrative 'dispersal'. For the way in which feminism construes the 'social bond' is evidently crucial in determining whether postmodernist 'fragmentation' is at the same the dissolution of feminist emancipatory claims.

The Conditions for Postmodernist Knowledge

My earlier examination of feminist avant-gardism arrived somewhat pessimistically at the conclusion that the loss of the Modernist metanarrative of liberty might pose a serious threat to

feminist emancipatory claims. It was suggested that a postmodernist theory of 'the subject' as splintered and fragmented would remove the ground upon which Modernist 'totalizing' grands récits are founded. Extending this, it was noted that a post-structuralist, radical destabilization of a binary mode of 'gender analytics' might similarly be held to invalidate feminism's critical project. But the truth of this depends very much upon how one understands the concept of 'difference'.

Taken as an absolute, where differences are wholly incommensurable, the concept of 'difference' is led to a vertiginous, and I would hold, a-political situation in which attempts to ground even a non-totalizing radical politics are nullified: without assuming a coherent and identifiable notion of female subjectivity, on what basis is it possible to ground a politics founded upon the capacity of subversive agency? It is on this point that the divergence between feminist and 'mainstream' postmodernist deconstructions of 'the subject' becomes explicit. There is a huge discrepancy between identifying Lyotardian post-narrative fragmentation with postmodernism defined as a 'destabilized world' of the 'infinitely perspectival' (cf. Nietzsche), and the quite different set of shifts named as 'postmodernist' within feminism. It is important to be clear about this distinction: for the latter, the purpose of dissolving the 'liberal-humanist self' in favour of decentred subjectivity is understood as a feminist one, explicitly concerned with dismantling the culturally oppressive synonymy of masculine identity with feminine identity as its Other. Contrarily, as Patricia Waugh argues, Derridean post-structuralism:

... situates itself epistemologically at the point where the epistemic subject characterized in terms of historical experience, interiority, and consciousness has given way to 'decentred' subject identified through the public, impersonal signifying practices of other similarly 'decentred' subjects. It may even situate itself at a point where there is no 'subject' and no history in the old sense at all. There is only a system of linguistic structures, a textual construction, a play of differences...³

Several feminist commentators have been provoked by this to ask: why is it that, just when feminism enters to challenge patriarchal concepts of identity, to threaten the 'neutral' masculine privilege in theory and politics, in order to formulate visions of new conditions for female subjectivity, is the very idea of a unified and coherent 'self' dissolved? It is difficult to give a precise answer to this without suggesting that deconstructivist theory is a highly sophisticated parallel to the 'backlash' against feminism being articulated at less conceptual levels, though several commentators have argued that this analysis can be sustained.⁴ Nonetheless, Waugh is absolutely to the point in arguing that early feminism was distinguished by calls for new identities and subjectivities to counter dominant patriarchally-prescribed versions of the female 'self', a feminine 'self' exclude from the realm of symbolic signification. As noted in the last Chapter, the emergence of Modernist feminist epistemology was necessarily defined by attempts to seek 'a subjective identity, a sense of effective agency and history for women which has hitherto been denied them by the dominant culture'.⁵ But, crucially, this should not be taken to mean that feminism simply reproduced a notion of female subjectivity in terms of an individual, isolated and essential ego; rather, analyses of the ideologically and socially

constructed 'nature' of feminine 'identity' insisted that subjectivity is not 'owned' by a self but is historically situated and discursively 'placed'. This does not sit easily with theories of 'difference' which celebrate the 'loss' of self:

In the dialectical relationship between traditional humanism and the postmodern anti-humanism emerging in the 1960's, women continue to be displaced. How can they long for, reject, or synthesize a new mode of being from a thesis which has never contained or expressed what they have felt their historical experience to be?⁶

Within feminism, the concept of subjectivity emerges out of a dialectical relationship between an anti-essentialist recognition of the profound impersonality of social power structures, of discursive and institutional placement, and, importantly, the 'necessity for assuming a self-concept which recognizes the possibility of human agency, the need for personal history... and the consolidation of human connectedness'.⁷ In other words, a feminist radicalization of 'the subject' does not simply disperse the concept to the point of its absolute dissolution, but grasps the fact that 'subjectivity' is, above all, defined relationally, emphasizing instead the 'provisionality and positionality of identity'.⁸ It is with this non-ontological or non-essentialist understanding of 'self' that it is possible to suggest that The Postmodern Condition could be utilized theoretically to ground a post-narrative politics of film that respects the post-structuralist tenet of 'difference' but which does not in the process remove the 'right' to articulate feminist claims to knowledge. A careful reading of Lyotard's thesis will actually demonstrate that he can offer a way between Modernist homogeneity or absolute postmodernist dispersal.

Lyotard is mindful to retain the idea that the dissolution of the social bond does not mean the 'disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion'. He argues:

Nothing of the kind is happening: this point of view... is haunted by the paradisaic representation of a lost 'organic' society.

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at 'nodal points' of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be.

(PC, p. 15)

It is worth recalling Lyotard's statement noted in Chapter One:

'most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative. It in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity' (PC, p. 41).

Lyotard is clearly concerned to argue that a post-narrative network model of the social bond must recognize the 'situatedness' of its nodal points: the bankruptcy of the grand récit does not mean that individuals are free from all 'bonding'. Ignoring the gender of the following, he suggests that:

... there is no need to resort to some fiction of social origins to establish that language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist: even before he is born, a human child is already positioned as a referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he inevitably charts his course. Or more simply still, the question of the social bond, insofar as it is a question, is itself a language game, the game of inquiry. It immediately positions the person who asks, as well as the addressee and the referent asked about: it is already the social bond.

(PC, p. 15)

In this there is room for construing The Postmodern Condition more positively for feminism than has been suggested so far. I would take from Lyotard the notion that the play of 'difference' is

historically and socially limited and circumscribed: 'selves' are always located 'subjects', embedded and situated in the social 'fabric of relations' which define and place them in 'specific' communication circuits, in 'differences' which are materially (socio-economically, racially, politically, culturally) grounded. And this is important for reflecting upon the meaning of 'difference' within a feminist framework: 'difference' is not an absolute, but a relational condition which appeals neither to a 'unified' or 'authentic' feminine 'self', nor to that mirror image of the liberal non-gendered subject, the postmodernist subject, destabilized and resigned to the perpetual instabilities of differential 'play'.

Lyotard's network model of identity is wholly consonant with a feminist politics which understands that gender identity is constructed through a network of other power relations: race, class, sexual orientation, religion, geography, etc. In itself, this is not a profoundly new insight for feminism. However, some postmodernist feminists have taken this further to argue that 'postmodernist' deconstruction of Modernist feminism's 'unitotalism' must inevitably call into question the validity of the very concept of 'gender'. It is argued that the most effective way of clearing space for the expansion of decentred and partial claims is to deny the subject 'fixity' inscribed by early feminist notions of the 'authentic' female 'self', even if it includes a thorough-going 'gender scepticism'. This is not considered to be a cause for regret. For Flax, Young and others, the loss of the epistemological bond upon which metanarrative feminism depends is compensated by the simultaneous loss of related epistemologies

viewed as instruments of domination and control:

Feminist theories, like other forms of postmodernism, should encourage us to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity as well as expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these needs may be.⁹

I would agree that it is of paramount importance that often radical 'differences' between women are represented without being effaced 'under some larger category labelled femaleness, femininity, womanhood, or in the final instance, Woman'.¹⁰ Nonetheless, it is important to be clear about what 'gender-scepticism' implies: how far can the dissolution of female 'identity' in favour of analysis of other power structures determining subjectivity be pushed before feminism relinquishes the 'object' of its politics - gendered subjects? In this respect, I share Di Stephano's concern that subjecting feminism to the critique of totalization in favour of the proliferation of multiple differences runs an extraordinarily high risk - of losing the very principle of difference without which the political project of feminism is very difficult to sustain:

To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centred inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad based movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency.¹¹

Readily accepting Sandra Harding's proposal that feminism requires a 'principled ambivalence' to both Modernism and postmodernism, I would hold back from fully embracing 'gender-septicism' if, in the rush to remove the vestiges of domination and exclusion from feminist discourses, postmodernism feminists confuse a laudable desire to avoid univocal and universalizing theories within

feminism with a potentially anti-feminist position that forswears analysis built on Modernist insights into the undeniable 'cultural fact' of gendered power relations. Put another way, understanding that women's oppression does not operate monolithically but is constituted through a nodal or relational model of equally (and perhaps more oppressive) power relations certainly results in the break-up of a 'unitotal' Modernist concept of patriarchy which holds that all women are subjected to male domination in the same way: sexually oppressive mechanisms clearly do specify gender difference 'differently' for Black, Third World or lesbian women. But to extrapolate from this that the only response to the loss of 'unitotal' feminism is to 'delegitimize a priori the exploration of continuity and structural common ground between women'¹² is not a conclusion I would wish to embrace. My admittedly pragmatic and 'partial' critical perspective would want to keep the fragmentation of identity from splintering beyond the point at which it is no longer 'useful' for a broader political project of a heterogeneously construed feminism thus denying the potential for articulating aspirations to common resistance and shared responsibility for change. The real strength of a relational model of subjectivity such as Waugh's is that it permits a critical position which remains 'Modernist' enough to argue that gender difference is still a major determinant of social/discursive placement for women, but not necessarily the only or, in specific circumstances, the primary discursive location of female subjects. Offered a choice between a) gender and the risk of 'totalization' or b) fragmentation and dissolution of the political 'self', I would want to question the need for aligning with either side of

this too neatly formulated binary, and suggest instead that it is precisely because feminism has been defined by a relational and non-essential understanding of identity that the delegitimation of the 'unitotal' Modernist metanarrative of emancipation does not invalidate post-narrative feminist claims to knowledge. By retaining a feminist 'social bond' posed only as necessarily and perpetually provisional, vestigial, perhaps even 'fictive',¹³ I would suggest that feminism can legitimate its claims without resorting either to a notion of the fixity of gender binarism, or investment in maintaining 'unitotal' visions of gender difference. This position does not preclude a full recognition of the splintering of homogenized Woman that postmodernist attention to the multiple determinations on the forms of gender differentiation demands, and a relational model of identity must accept that 'unity', like consensus, is a 'horizon' which will never be reached. Feminist 'pluralism' (as advocated by Fraser and Nicholson) begins from the view that 'gender forms only one axis of a complex heterogeneous construction, constantly interpenetrating, in historically specific ways, with multiple other axes of identity'.¹⁴ Evidently, an important insight but, viewed tactically, acknowledging that other structures which 'locate' female subjects within 'communication networks' should not thereby invalidate analysis of the sites where the exercise of power relations is founded upon gender differentiation: family, state, medical provision, division of labour, gender socialization, education, reproduction, sexuality, personal violence, legal practice and, of course, the politics of film representation.

In many ways, this is to accept as inevitable the need for

adopting a dual perspective: on one hand, acknowledging that holding on to a gendered framework of enquiry and attempting 'to occupy a place as a speaking subject within the traditional frame' is to become 'complicit in the discourse one wishes to deconstruct'. On the other, recognizing that dispensing with the notion of gender in favour of the 'troubling and multiple permeabilities of boundary and subject positioning' leaves feminism bereft of politically agential subjects.¹⁵ Post-structuralist, or, better, deconstructivist dissolution of feminism's 'Modernist' gender binary is indeed a powerful tool to employ in order to escape the 'dualistic logic' which is characteristic of Western phallogocentric discourses. Similarly the seductive 'utopia' of 'a dream of the innumerable... a desire to escape the combinatory... to invent incalculable choreographies'¹⁶ is a potent weapon for keeping the 'dead hand of ordering' at bay. However, to 'adopt a political position is of necessity to assume for the moment a consistent and answerable identity'¹⁷: a post-narrative condition of 'difference' clearly should challenge what are undoubtedly unitotal perspectives derived from the Modernist feminist emancipatory narrative, but it does not necessarily follow that critical analysis must dispense with an epistemological frame which takes gender as its primary 'axis'. This suggests that what the process of deconstructing 'the' feminist subject' can do':

... is to reveal the inauthenticity of the goal of 'personal unity', expose the contradictions of the liberal definition of subjectivity (particularly as they operate to oppress women), and thus act as a starting-point for the alternative projection of a society founded on a dispersed but rational rather than individualist understanding and construction of the subject.¹⁸

Thus within a network model of the social bond in which its nodal

points are discursively situated and located, it is possible to restate my argument that the grand récit of liberty does collapse under pressures for representation, but that:

... the object of attack should not be identity as such but its dominant construction as total, non-contradictory and unchanging. We need representations that take account of identities - representations which work with a degree of fluidity and contradiction - and we need to forge different identities - ones that help make productive use of the contradictions in our lives.¹⁹

Gledhill's proposal indicates that two post-metanarrative avenues are open to feminism: firstly, and one which is compatible with the political implications of post-structuralist theories of 'self', to seek a destabilization of 'total' and 'non-contradictory' constructions of female identity and, secondly, and one which seems to run counter to it, to reconstruct and represent new identities. It is within this framework that my reading of the consequences of the delegitimation of emancipatory metanarratives for feminism is confined to an assessment of post-narrative challenges to perspectives derived from 'unitotal' feminist thinking. The course of the next section will address why calls for 'difference' have contested a) the Modernist constitution of film as 'knowledge', and b) the conceptual resources through which female (which is not equivalent to feminist) film spectatorship is theorized.

Postmodernist Difference and Feminist Film Theory

For my analysis, it is only by dispensing with Modernist categories that the field of 'difference' can be opened up, and this is a primary requirement for feminism if critique of the

metanarratives is to serve as the precondition for a positive project of evolving new modes of analysis which aim to accommodate this. There is, then, a much wider issue to be considered as a result of this proposition which relates to the broader constitution of feminist aesthetics under Modernism, and, further, to feminism's relation to a concept of 'the aesthetic' itself.

My examination of the consequences for feminism of the loss of the metanarrative social bond concluded that a proliferation of 'difference' should place a question mark over the potentially homogenizing 'use' of aesthetics by feminist avant-gardism, especially in its deconstructionist form. It was suggested that, from a postmodernist position, the 'unitotal' perspective secured by the metanarrative of liberty must give way to theories which can adequately accommodate 'difference'. In this respect, feminist deconstructionist text-determined politics of spectatorship exhibit a fundamental complicity with male-defined canons of traditional Modernist definitions of 'the aesthetic', as Claire Johnston notes:

... women's art that poses itself as 'other', as negativity, as essentially feminine - a cultural feminism which is unified, non-contradictory and exclusive - could be seen as no longer a threat to the institutions of art and could be a way in which male dominance in art can be maintained.²⁰

Stern likewise points out that the Modernist model of transgressive spectatorship:

... can also institute linguistic strategies which may well be subversive within certain contexts (eg. academia) but which are nevertheless institutionalised and legitimised by a class structure which reproduces oppression in a different guise.²¹

Stern's remark is an indication of the undoubted class-cultural and educational exclusivity which has informed the notion of

'decentred' spectatorship within the Modernist emancipatory avant-garde as I have defined it, and the charge of cultural elitism is easily laid against the arcane 'difficulty' of theoretically informed avant-garde experimentation which seeks spectatorial 'displeasure'. Feminist deconstructionism's audience:

... participates in the comforting identity of critic or cognoscente, positioned in the sphere of 'the ideologically correct', and the 'radical' - a position which is defined by its difference from the ideological mystification attributed to the audiences of the mass media.²²

Hence, if the Modernist search for a 'feminist aesthetic' falls too easily into the trap of univocality:

Feminist art, on the other hand, which asserts a woman's discourse about her position and the inter-subjective relationships which constitute her as a female subject in history, is far more problematic and far less easily assimilated into the conception of women as irrevocable 'other' by which patriarchy is maintained.²³

It is interesting to note that de Lauretis's reading of Jeanne Dielman... and Born in Flames is similarly informed by a larger concern to question feminism's relationship to film Modernism. She argues that these films operate in terms of a 'de-aesthetic' since they resist entrapment in the snare of positing a 'feminist aesthetic' within Modernist parameters:

To ask of these women's films: what formal, stylistic or thematic markers point to a female presence behind the camera?, and hence to generalize and universalize, to say: this is the look of and sound of feminist cinema, that is its language - finally only means complying, accepting a certain definition of art, cinema and culture, and obligingly showing how women can and do 'contribute', pay their tribute, to 'society'. Put another way, to ask whether there is a feminine or female aesthetic, or a specific language of women's cinema, is to remain caught in the master's house and there, as Audre Lorde's suggestive metaphor warns us, to legitimate the hidden agendas of a culture we badly need to change.²⁴

It might be possible to argue that challenging the inscribed 'tradition' of film Modernism (that is, redefining the 'rules' which constitute film as art) is a neat formulation of a postmodernist paralogical 'move' in the 'game' of art. However, this is clearly untenable if attempts to escape from the totalizing vision of a 'specifically feminist aesthetic' are replaced by a 'de-aesthetic' which is itself tied to 'realist' political claims which 'ravage' the radical heterogeneity that Lyotard reserves for paralogical 'sublimity'. The most pertinent aspect of both Johnston and de Lauretis's analyses, though, is that it brings sharply into focus that a fragmentation of the feminist social bond must entail a revaluation of the categories used to conceive of the relations between film, politics and 'knowledge'. De Lauretis's view suggests that it is the search for an 'aesthetic' which needs to be reconsidered along with the shift into postmodernism because a feminist aesthetic will necessarily unitotalize a plurality of female spectators: the real question at issue, then, is not how feminism can construe the terms of its intervention in the 'sphere of the aesthetic', but whether feminism even needs this conceptual category. If the 'master's tools will never dismantle the master's house',²⁵ are a postmodernist politics of film better conceived for non-monolithic feminist aims without the ideological weight of Modernist differentiations which, I suggest, have necessarily constricted the potential effectivity of feminist film-making? This question, I think, indicates most clearly the existence of contradictory readings of The Postmodern Condition which are highlighted by reading from a feminist perspective: there is an irreconcilable tension arising from Lyotard's attempt to hold on to

a Modernist metaphor of the avant-garde with a model of the social bond which cannot sustain it.

If Lyotard's analysis is pushed to its logical conclusion, both speculative and emancipatory modes of Modernist avant-gardism are dependent on perspectives derived from unitotal thinking: both define a 'space' for art outside of dominant commodified forms of industrial film produced and consumed by a social mass. It is only possible to retain a concept of the 'avant-garde' if it is defined against the idea of a homogeneous mass, and this mass must be addressed without reference to the heterogeneity of its constituents. The relationship between paralogical 'destabilization' and 'realist' mass cultural film is similarly structured. But this is surely quite contrary to his thesis that the post-narrative social bond is multiple and fragmented, and a strong reading of Lyotard's thesis would stress the point that without a unitotal epistemology, there is quite simply no way of defining a 'garde' or body from which to be structurally or temporally 'avant'. How, then, from Lyotard's proposition that the post-narrative model for thinking the postmodern social bond is as a nodal network or fractured multiplicity of language games (which defy overarching command by metaphors of unitotality), is it possible to arrive at a notion of 'the mass' against which the enclave of avant-garde knowledge is structurally defined? Further, what can a concept of avant-gardism mean within a fractured and heteromorphous nodal model for which the unitotal differentiation of so large and amorphous category of 'mass' is theoretically impossible? Again, the politics of fragmentation demands a radical

rethinking of the epistemological assumptions carried by the Modernist concept of the avant-garde. If the pressures which delegitimize the 'use' of feminist film under the metanarrative of emancipation derive from a homogenous conception of its social bond, it is only consistent to extend this critique to the concept of an undifferentiated 'mass'. Once the notion of 'the mass' is similarly fractured and spatialized, it makes little sense to continue to assume a bifurcated structural relationship between different orders of knowledge which is implicitly inscribed by the metaphors of 'avant-garde' and 'mass'. The splintering of the Modernist social bond must entail the end of the conceptual network which supports Modernist differentiations that a) secure an epistemological function for the notion of an advance party of intellectual/aesthetic innovators capable of challenging tradition, 'realism' and order; and b) protect the distinction between mass culture and high art required to define the space of its operation. In sum, it is not conceptually consistent to maintain the categories for understanding 'art' if the model of the social bond which furnishes them is no longer epistemologically legitimate. This has two important implications for the way any film text - documentary, mainstream, experimental, 'cult' etc. - is constructed and positioned as 'knowledge'. Firstly, without the Modernist notion that emancipatory critical knowledge is located in the 'institutionalized' margins of the enclave, the 'field' of film is opened to a much greater diversity of forms that 'knowledge' may take. Secondly, the fragmentation of the 'mass' suggests that spectatorial positions must also be multiplied.

The main advantage gained by dispensing with the concepts of the avant-garde and the 'aesthetic' is that this clears a space which permits a heterogeneous approach to cultural practices which does not predetermine their status as, or potential for, critical knowledge. John Tagg has succinctly defined the value of such an approach:

Cultural products and practices have significance precisely because of their place in that non-unitary complex of social practices and systems of representation which construct, evoke, maintain, or subvert the relations of domination and subordination in which social position and identity are produced. Such practices and representations must therefore affect and be in turn affected by political and economic conditions and conflicts, though they cannot be seen as their expression. Nor can they be evaluated by reference back to their origins or sources. Their only measure is the calculation of their specific social consequences - which is not to say they determine their condition or that these don't have effects. Cultural practices always involve mobilization of determinate means and relations of representation within an institutional framework whose organization takes particular historical forms - marked in the west, no doubt, by what Stuart Davis called 'cultural monopoly'. There is no meaning outside this framework but it is not monolithic. The institutions which compose it offer multiple points of entry and spaces for contestation - and not just on the margins. The nature of the resistance will depend on the nature of the site.²⁶

In view of the observations made earlier upon contemporary image-culture and the fate of film avant-gardism, this is an acute analysis of the 'space' left for political critique after the loss of the Modernist metanarratives.

Firstly, this formulation confronts the issue that Modernist film avant-gardism has signally failed in its historical mission to effect radical revolutionary change. If 'marginality guarantees nothing', the terms of engagement with cultural practices cannot be

construed with the view that speculative or emancipatory avant-gardes function to produce 'real' knowledge outside of the 'institutional framework'. Evidently, this is to accept that the teleological or politically utopian dimension of metanarrative avant-gardism must also be given up, but as I do not think that feminism (defined diversely) has been served well by 'transgressive' Modernist aesthetics, it is easy to resist temptation of 'nostalgia' for the lost narrative which sustained Modernist feminist avant-gardism.

Secondly, in view of my concern for 'difference', Tagg's formulation is useful because it cannot be implicated in the trap of 'totalizing' either the 'meaning' of film texts, or of predefining the reception of cultural products by spectators: it is postmodernist in that its space for critique is limited but conditional upon locality and context, refusing Modernism's broad demarcations of knowledges in favour of a negotiated production of knowledge through the mechanisms of reception and appropriation.

Taken together, these have important implications for the development of a politics of multiplicity which might be formulated against the Modernist 'traps' of unitotal thinking. The politics of Modernist film avant-gardism may now be severely limited, but that does thereby entail an end to feminist film politics per se. And it is with spectatorship that theories of multiplicity must begin. A 'negotiated' model avoids eliding 'conceptually distinct notions: the "feminine spectator", constructed by the text, and the female audience, constructed by the social-historical categories of gender, class, race, and so on'²⁷ This, as E. Ann Kaplan notes,

suggests that:

... any reading is a result of a delicate, perhaps unconscious, negotiation between the historical positions/ideologies the text is seeking to present, and the frameworks/codes/local ideologies and individual psychoanalytic constructs that spectators bring to texts...²⁸

Acknowledging that 'meaning' is produced at the point of audience reception, and that readings are informed by a network of determinants conditioning the reception of film, clearly shifts the politics of spectatorship from 'instrumental' notions of 'appointed' spectatorship to a complex notion which cannot conceptually prioritize 'textual' positioning. If the experience of spectatorship cannot be determined a priori, the 'culinary fallacy', the 'economistic' assumption underlying the view that spectators of mainstream films are passive 'consumers', must also be reviewed where the 'consumer' is taken to be 'one who, meeting with the media product as a discrete object, swallows it whole, an already processed textual package of the same order as a television dinner'.²⁹ Rather, Gledhill advances the view that a more mobile and complexly construed theory of the experience of spectatorship, a theory which permits audience interchange with textual process, suggests that spectatorial negotiation is characterized by 'flux, discontinuities, digressions, rather than fixed positions' across or through a film text:

It suggests that a range of positions of identification may exist within any text; and that, within the social situation of their viewing, audiences may shift subject positioning as they interact with the text.³⁰

And this cuts across the unitotal assumptions that underpin Modernist theoretical positions in two ways: on the one hand, a

negotiated model which includes a heterogeneity of receptions offers potential for critical and resistant readings of mainstream film and, on the other, it throws into the doubt the validity of avant-garde practices for which critical knowledge is produced to counter the putative 'unifying' operations of mainstream film narrative. However, as Gledhill's exegesis of Coma would suggest, it would be foolish to conclude from this that film spectatorship is simply a matter of Lyotardian polymorphic 'play', in which all spectators are free to adopt subjectivities at will. As Tagg is concerned to note, it is evident that social position and identity are constrained by 'relations of domination and subordination'; this again suggests caution in underestimating the extent to which cultural practices are implicated in the institutionalization of gender in-difference. Gledhill does not lose sight of the fact that while audiences may shift subject positioning, the intersection between 'social' and 'textual' subjects is overdetermined by the ways in which gender is culturally and filmically constructed, which necessarily sets limits upon spectatorial mobility. But if 'gender' is not singular or monolithic, a notion of the heterogeneity of 'negotiations' available within this seems to be a necessary theoretical 'tool' for feminist film theory to employ if class, race, and sexual 'differences' between women are to be opened up.

For feminism, when film is understood as a cultural space in which diverse subjectivities can contest from a plurality of perspectives the 'meaning' of representations of the 'figure of woman', it becomes evident that:

... the look of the camera, the gestures and signs of human interaction, are not given over once and for all to a particular ideology - unconscious or otherwise. They are cultural signs and therefore sites of struggle; struggle between male and female voices, between class voices, ethnic voices, and so on.³¹

It is not surprising, then, that one of the main targets of critiques aimed at 'totalizing' theories of female spectatorship has been the monolithic binarism of the Mulveyian model of visual pleasure.³²

The chief weakness of the exclusive definition of sexual desire in terms of masculine heterosexual desire is not only that it assumes a deterministic equivalence between male/female spectators, masculine/feminine identities and sadistic/masochistic positions, but that the spectator is 'presumed to be an already fully constituted subject and is fixed by the text to a predetermined gender identification'.³³ Thus to avoid the 'essentializing' problems noted above, and to respect the notion that subjectivity is not fixed but relational, a processual understanding of visual pleasure is needed. Here, the primary requirement is the separation of gender identification (masculine/feminine) from sexual subjectivities and, in her analysis of Blue Velvet, Barbara Creed has demonstrated that film texts can and do offer multiple 'pleasures' which cut across the gender binary. She argues that feminist film theory has paid attention to only one of Freud's 'primal fantasies' which describe the origination of identity and sexual difference, that of castration, but when the scenarios of copulation and seduction are also incorporated, multiple points of identification are offered

(masochist/sadist, autoerotic, seducer/seduced, voyeur/object of desire). She is also careful to maintain that the interchangeability of subject positions is not entirely free from constraint. For instance, in the section of Blue Velvet in which the investigative male protagonist (Jeffrey) is caught sneaking into Dorothy's flat:

The representation of the seduction fantasy is overdetermined by the theme of castration: Jeffrey voyeuristically views Dorothy as woman, signifier of castration; Dorothy strips Jeffrey naked and threatens him with a knife. Because castration (having and not having a penis) means such different things for women and men, the freedom of the female and male spectator to enter into the scenario via the processes of identification cannot be unbiased.³⁴

The next sequence in which Jeffrey is hidden in a cupboard and witnesses the disturbing sexual encounter between Dorothy and Frank, the fluctuation of positions, Creed suggests, enacts the primal scene 'from various perspectives: the primal scene as parental coupling and the primal scene as birth', which 'merges into a scenario marked by Oedipal desire and castration'.³⁵

Creed's use of psychoanalysis for theorizing the 'gendering' of filmic space does suggest a much more complex notion of spectatorial identification which should prove useful for future detailed textual analyses of filmic economies of pleasure. However, arguing for a mobility of subjectivities within a revised Freudian paradigm does not wholly escape from the 'reification of modern sexual categories' in that the issue of how female homosexual desire is textually 'figured' is not addressed. Jackie Stacey's essay is a particularly useful survey of theorists who have indicated that Mulvey's theory - that the female spectacle is

'subject' to the dominance of the male gaze - can only address the 'pleasures' of a woman spectator in terms of a masochistic identification with 'the' female image as seen by the 'bearer of the look'.³⁶ Within this theory, active female desire can only be 'masculinized'. Stacey draws upon Mary Ann Doane to suggest that such psychoanalytical binarism is extremely limited if it is forced to explain female homosexual desire in the following terms:

The woman's sexuality, as spectator, must undergo a constant transformation. She must look as if she were a man with the phallic power of the gaze, at a woman who would attract that gaze, in order to be that woman. The convolutions involved here are analogous to those described by Julia Kristeva as the 'double or triple twists of what we commonly call female homosexuality': 'I am looking, as a man would, for a woman'; or else, 'I submit myself, as if I were a man who thought he was a woman, to a woman who thinks she is a man.'³⁷

For Valerie Traub, an analysis of a 'mainstream' text such as Black Widow would conclude that, despite the accommodation of a variability of positioning, psychoanalytic theories of filmic subjectivity are ultimately framed by a heterosexual conceptual system which necessarily closes down the heterogeneity of gay receptions:

By employing multiple transpositions of identity to produce homoerotic tension between two female leads, Black Widow solicits a 'lesbian' gaze at the same time that it invites male heterosexual enjoyment. 'Lesbian' viewing pleasure, however, like male and female heterosexual pleasure is constructed around a set of overdetermined relations between gender and identity; it does not exist outside of, but in complex relation to, the 'deployment of sexuality' dominating contemporary discourse. 'Lesbian' appropriation of the 'gaze' comes only at the price of acquiescence to a system of sexual (gender and erotic) regularization that reproduces dominant taxonomies of sexual (gender and erotic) difference.³⁸

And this is an important consideration for acknowledging that calls

for a heterogeneous model of spectatorial difference must be tempered by an awareness that both filmically and culturally some subjectivities are currently precluded from representation. Traub argues that the film, like psychoanalysis and ideologies of gender-binarism, assigns 'lesbian' viewing pleasure to a position of ambiguity, ambiguous, that is, from the point of view of 'heterosexual hegemony'; within a 'binary telology that upholds a structural heterosexuality', 'lesbian' desire cannot be represented except by its 'unrepresentability' (the paralogical 'sublime' revisited?)³⁹ Thus, a 'lesbian' viewer's negotiation of textual pleasure is determined by the conditions in which:

... as much as 'lesbians' independently walk into the theater, they are also constructed within the space the film affords them. That this space is precisely a locus of ambiguity - both potential and constraint, affordance and limitation, a space open for representation and a space denied - suggests that the contradictions within Black Widow bear some relation to the status of 'lesbian' representation more generally. Ambiguity not only informs this film but constitutes the very possibility of 'lesbian' desire within a predominantly heterosexual (and heterosexist) ideology.⁴⁰

Traub's use of quotation marks around the term 'lesbian' is significant for signalling the heterogeneous relations of homoerotic looking and for forestalling the imputation of a fixed identity which the following passage confirms:

Race and class stratification within the 'lesbian' spectator are further complicated by differences in gender identification and erotic practice. The 'lesbian' who identifies as 'butch' may respond differently to Alex or Reni than would a 'femme' or 'rough-fluff', and not all 'butches', 'rough-fluffs', or 'femmes' would respond alike. The bisexual who has chosen a monogamous gay relationship may respond to other erotic cues than would the woman who has multiple partners. The 'feminist' who has adopted a 'lesbian' identity as a political necessity may feel differently about her desires than would the woman who feels she has been 'gay' from birth. Needless to say, those involved in S/M have different erotic tastes from those preferring what has come to be called

(reductively, I think) 'vanilla' sex. And, finally, it must be said that, dominant ideology to the contrary, 'lesbian' desire is extant within many putative heterosexuals. Indeed, despite the linguistic imperative underlying the division between 'homo' and 'hetero', 'lesbian' desire is not oppositional to female heterosexual desire - though what its relation might be (contiguous, tangential, interstitial, distermine) is yet to be theorized beyond the psychoanalytic narrative that poses 'lesbian' desire as that which must be repressed.⁴¹

Within this narrative, however, the space for the representation of lesbian 'difference' is paralleled by the larger 'logic' of closure in Black Widow which first articulates 'lesbian' desire, rendering it visible, then reencode(s) it as invisible, inarticulate':

Black Widow is constructed around two mirroring inconsistencies - Reni's desire for Alex and Alex's desire for Reni - and it is only within these gaps that the representation of anything 'lesbian' can emerge. Moments of textual excess - moments not required by the logic of plot, but instead functioning to upset the coherence of the narrative - instantiate 'lesbian' desire in the film.⁴²

'Lesbian' viewing pleasures, her argument suggests, must be negotiated in the absence of full subjectivity or coherent lesbian identity. It is interesting to compare this with Dana Polan's observation that an Althusserian definition of ideology, founded upon the assumption that the reproduction of dominant ideology rests on the 'unifying' function of subject-interpellation, needs to be reconsidered in the light of spectators who are actually 'depositioned, cut off from transcendental control, given no sense of power, no logic': that is, offered 'no interpellative space'.⁴³ Once again, this reflects a critical light upon transgressive avant-garde strategies aimed at the dissolution of the 'unified' self: for 'many women there can be no prior subject or self whose fragementation becomes a political necessity, source of nostalgic

regret, or hedonistic jouissance'.⁴⁴

But even granting that the proliferation of potential filmic subject-positions within a psychoanalytic framework circumvents the worst excesses of 'unitotal' theories of female subjectivity (which for lesbian viewers it evidently does not), it nonetheless elides the issue that female spectators are also 'placed' by discourses of 'self' which relate very specifically to race and class 'difference'. Alile Sharon Larkin argues that white feminism must grasp the consequences if it fails adequately to recognize the 'totality of oppression' (economic, racial and sexual) that black women and women of colour are 'subjected' to/by:

Feminism succumbs to racism when it segregates Black women from Black men and dismisses our history. The assumption that Black women and white women share identical or similar histories and experiences presents an important problem. Historically, white women have also been our oppressors. Historically, Black men have abused us, but they have never held the kind of power that white women hold in this culture. Both historically and currently, white women participate in and reap the benefits of white supremacy. Feminism must address these issues, otherwise its ahistorical approach towards Black women can and does maintain institutional racism.⁴⁵

This perspective certainly throws into relief the extent to which feminist film theories of spectatorship have proceeded under 'unitotal' 'white' assumptions which disregard 'the position white women occupy over black men as well as black women'.⁴⁶ Black women and women of colour 'live in a culture in which the dominant gaze is not only male, but white',⁴⁷ and Jane Gaines has considered how filmically 'racial difference structures a hierarchy of access to the female image'. In an analysis of Mahogany, Gaines argues that the positioning of a less privileged black male gaze overrides 'the patriarchal scenario feminists have theorized as formally

determining'.⁴⁸ She draws upon the historical formation of white discourses on black sexuality during the period of post-slavery Reconstruction to identify the structures of 'looking' that the film enacts. Gaines argues that the lynching of black men on imagined or trumped-up charges of raping white women while white men habitually violated black women offers:

... a sexual scenario to rival the Oedipus myth: the black women sexually violated by the white man, but the fact of her rape repressed and displaced on to the virginal white woman, and thus used symbolically as the justification for the actual castration of the black man.⁴⁹

Thus the monopolization by the film's white photographer of Tracy/Diana Ross's sexualized image (the 'classic patriarchal look controlling the view of the female body') repudiates - symbolically castrates - the black protagonist's look.

At a broader level, Manthia Diawara has argued for the heuristic device of an 'interchangeability of the terms "black spectator" and "resisting spectator"' where 'black spectators may circumvent identification and resist the persuasive elements of Hollywood narrative and spectacle'⁵⁰ because they are often already, to recall Polan, 'depositioned, cut off from transcendental control'. Diawara's analysis, like Gaines's, proposes that even where Hollywood utilizes black actors as protagonists (for instance Eddie Murphy), their 'textual deracination or isolation' and narrative/visual 'punishment' thwarts the possibility of positively coded identification. These analyses relating to identification exceed the confines of traditional psychoanalytic film theory which rests on the 'constitutive moment' of Lacanian 'difference' with the entry into

language:

The position of the spectator in the cinematic apparatus has been described by recourse to the mirror phase, suggesting that the metapsychology of identification (with the camera or point of enunciation) entails a narcissistic form of regression which leads to the infant's illusion of a unified ego. But since spectators are socially and historically as well as psychically constituted, it is not clear whether the experiences of black spectators are included in this analysis.⁵¹

As Gaines notes: 'How can the formative moment of one's entry into language be the one condition overriding all other determining conditions of social existence?'⁵² This sets up a complex series of questions about identification and spectatorship. For instance: what does the notion of a subordinate black male gaze imply for the pleasures of white female spectatorship? Can white male (or even female) spectators take pleasure in looking at a white female character via the gaze of a black male character? How do some black spectators identify with white representations of blacks in dominant cinema? Does experiencing oppression in terms of race before gender cut cross the assumption that women are invariably forced to adopt the positionality of the objectification and fetishization of their like when their 'like' is white? Or, how do black female spectators identify with the structures of looking and desire that promise the image of a white woman as its object? Again, a homogeneously construed notion of black spectators should not obscure the potential multiplicity of responses to these questions.

As with 'lesbian' challenges to psychoanalytical binary-defined models of patterns of spectatorial pleasure, film theories of black spectatorship begin from a position of absence:

How is the black subject sutured into a place that includes it only as a term of negation? What does the black spectator identify with when his/her mirror image is structurally absent or present only as Other? In the past, it was assumed that all social subjects acceded to the narcissistic pleasure of the 'mirror phase' in their misrecognition of themselves as the subject of enunciation, returned thus normalised and passified 'subjects' of ideological subjection (this was the basis of Barthes' distinction between 'pleasure' and 'bliss'). But what if certain social categories of spectator do not have access, as it were, to the initial moment of recognition?⁵³

It is partly for this specialized reason that I have argued that the metanarrative of emancipation must break-up under the pressures for a representation of 'difference' in both mainstream cinema and the dominant theories used to analyse them.

These theoretical perspectives suggest that the multiplicity of ways of 'being female' must be matched by theories which respect the different determinations acting upon a feminist consciousness. However, within the context of this study, I cannot hope to do justice to the sheer complexity of issues resulting from challenges to what are undoubtedly unitotal perspectives derived from the Modernist feminist emancipatory narrative. What can be said, though, is that a post-narrative politics of film cannot sustain the privileged position of a 'unitotal' conception of the feminist 'social bond', and, from the position of 'multiplicity', theories of spectatorship produced from the discursive emplacement of white, heterosexual feminism must accept a more 'partial' status than has hitherto been evident from feminist film theory. But, again, this is not to suggest that accepting 'partial' status is equivalent to invalidation. By way of a Conclusion, I want to reflect upon this study to situate some remarks on the meaning of a postmodernist 'incredulity towards metanarratives'.

NOTES: CHAPTER SIX

1. Seyla Behabib, 'Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard', in ed. L. Nicholson (1990), pp. 107-30 (pp. 112-22).

2. Peter Dews, 'From Post-Structuralism to Postmodernity', in ed. L. Appignanesi, ICA Documents, pp. 27-40 (p. 35 & p. 37).

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3. Patricia Waugh, Feminist Fictions: Revisiting The Postmodern (1989), p. 7.

4. On feminist responses to the 'sour grapes' phenomenon, see Di Stephano (1990), pp. 75-77.

5. Waugh (1989), p. 9.

6. *ibid.* p. 9.

7. *ibid.* p. 210.

8. *ibid.* p. 13.

9. Flax (1990), p. 56.

10. de Lauretis (1988), p. 186.

11. Di Stephano (1990), p. 76.

12. Bordo (1990), p. 142.

13. A tentative notion of feminism being bound across heterogeneity by an 'imaginary' or 'fictive' unity was initially expressed, though not developed, by Claire Johnston (1980) and discussed by Stern (1979) esp. p. 90. (Johnston's paper was originally delivered at the 1979 Edinburgh Event though not printed in Screen until 1980).

14. As defined by Bordo (1990), p. 139.

15. Sandy Stone, 'The Empire Strikes Back; A Posttranssexual Manifesto', in ed. Epstein & Straub (1991), pp. 280-304, (p. 295 & p. 297).

16. Jacques Derrida, 'Choreographies', cited in Bordo, (1990) p. 143.

17. Christine Gledhill, 'Pleasurable Negotiations', in ed. E. Pribram (1988), pp. 64-89 (p. 72).

18. Waugh (1988), p. 210.

19. Gledhill (1988), p. 72.

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20. Claire Johnston, 'The Subject of Feminist Film Theory/Practice', Screen 21: 2 (1980), pp. 27-34 (p. 34).

21. Lesley Stern, 'Feminism and Cinema - Exchanges', Screen 20: 3/4 (1979), pp. 89-105 (p. 93).

22. Gledhill (1988), p. 66.

23. Johnston (1980), p. 34.

24. de Lauretis (1988), p. 178.

25. *ibid.* p. 178.

26. John Tagg (1985/6), pp. 6-7.

27. Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres: Melodrama, Soap Opera and Theory', Screen, 25: 1 (1984), pp. . Cited in Gledhill (1988), p. 67.

28. E. Ann Kaplan, 'Response', Camera Obscura, 20/21 (1989), p. 197.

29. Gledhill (1988), p. 73.

30. *ibid.* p. 73.

31. *ibid.* p. 72.

32. As Stacey notes in 'Desperately Seeking Difference', eds. Gamman and Marchment (1988), pp. 112-29, there have been attempts to theorize masculinity as sexual spectacle: see Richard Dyer, 'Don't Look Now - The Male Pin-Up', Screen, 23: 3/4 (1982), pp. 61-73; Stephen Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema', Screen 24: 6 (1983), pp. 2-16; Richard Meyer, 'Rock Hudson's Body' in ed. D. Fuss (1991), pp. 259-90.

33. Stacey (1988), p. 118.

34. Barbara Creed, 'A Journey through Blue Velvet: Film, Fantasy and the Female Spectator', New Formations, 6 (1988), pp. 97-117 (p. 103).

35. *ibid.* p. 107.

36. Stacey (1988). However, the feminist concept of 'woman-identified woman' relations, which Stacey argues for in her reading of Seidelman's Desperately Seeking Susan (1984), should be kept distinct from the dynamics of an eroticized gaze that Traub (see below) insists is a fundamental component of 'lesbian' spectatorship.

37. Doane citing Julia Kristeva in 'Caught and Rebecca: The Inscription of Femininity as Absence', in Stacey (1988), p. 121.

38. Valerie Traub, 'The Ambiguities of "Lesbian" Viewing Pleasure: The (Dis)articulations of Black Widow', in eds. J. Epstein & K. Straub (1991), pp. 305-28, (p. 308). For a broader context of lesbian and gay cultural perspectives, see Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, ed. Diana Fuss (1990) (especially Patricia White, 'Female Spectator, Lesbian Spectator: The Haunting', pp. 142-72), and New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings, ed. Sally Munt (1992). For other analyses of film representations of lesbians, see Mandy Merck, 'Lianna and the Lesbians of Art Cinema', pp. 166-78; Linda Williams, 'Personal Best: Women in Love', pp. 146-54 - both in ed. C. Brundson, Films for Women (1986); de Lauretis, 'Guerilla in the Midst: Women's Cinema in the 1980s', Screen, 31: 1 (1990), pp. 6-25. For an assessment of the politics of 'positive' lesbian images, see Edith Becker, Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage & B. Ruby Rich, 'Lesbians and Film', in ed. P. Steven, Jump Cut Anthology (1985), pp. 296-314.

39. Traub (1991), p. 308.

40. *ibid.* p. 309.

41. *ibid.* p. 323-24.

42. *ibid.* p. 321 & p. 319.

43. Dana Polan (1988), p. 53.

44. Waugh (1988), p. 10.

45. Alile Sharon Larkin, 'Black Women Film-makers Defining Ourselves: Feminism in Our Own Voice', in ed. E. Pribram (1988), pp. 157-173 (pp. 158-59).

46. Jane Gaines, 'White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory', Screen 29: 4 (1988), pp. 12-26 (p. 17).

47. Jacqui Roach and Petal Felix, 'Black Looks', in eds. L. Gamman & M. Marchment (1988), pp. 130-142 (p. 131).

48. Gaines (1988), p. 24.

49. *ibid.* p. 24.

50. Manthia Diawara, 'Black Spectatorship - Problems of Identification and Resistance', Screen 29: 4 (1988), pp. 66-76, (p. 66).

51. *ibid.* p. 66.

52. Gaines (1988), pp. 14-15.

53. Isaac Julian and Kobena Mercer, 'De Margin and De Centre: Introduction to the Last Special Issue on Race', Screen 29: 4 (1988), pp. 2-10 (p. 9).

CONCLUSION

My application of the thesis of The Postmodern Condition to the politics of film began with an attempt to formulate some means by which a concept of Modernism might be grounded. Having identified that, retrospectively, the epistemological resources of Modernism could be bifurcated along the axes of Lyotard's grands recits, my interest in locating feminism somewhere against these poles suggested that the radical claims of speculative film were undermined by the fact that its model of spectatorship was a properly 'unitotal' one. The pursuit of anti-representational medium specificity, theorized as a mode of cinema to counter dominant narrative realist forms, could take no account of the view that the ideological forms of 'Hollywood' oppression are gender specific. Hence feminism's need for emancipatory film practices which could address, and potentially break with, dominant cinematic mechanisms of masochistic identification: 'suture', narrative, frame composition, visual signification of the female body, etc. From my reading of Lyotard and other theorists of postmodernism, it became evident to me that these film practices were themselves subscribing to metadiscursive homogeneity. This recognition has encouraged recent feminist theorists to rest a Lyotardian critique of 'totalization' on the basis that Modernist feminism has not been free from its own forms of 'unitotal' power politics. Shelagh Young, in her contribution to The Female Gaze (1988) takes a tough line on the assumptions which determined that the liberational strategies of early feminism were primarily defined by a privileged

(white, middle-class, intellectual) cohort.¹ Young uses Foucault to argue that early feminism constructed a 'unitotal' feminist 'subject' through the production of a feminist 'discourse' of resistance (taking 'discourse' to be the imbrication of power, knowledge and domination). Hence, for Young, the emergence of dissenting Others (Black, Third World, Irish, working-class) have shaken the 'power' base of white feminist politics and thrown into relief the extent to which feminist resistance to patriarchy quickly hardened into a feminist orthodoxy:

The irony of this feminist resistance is that in opposing the privileges of knowledge and the construction of women as 'feminine' subjects, a form of feminist knowledge, a feminist discourse which actually excludes and oppresses some women has evolved with its own regime of governing the individual.²

Further:

In clinging on to the idea that a relatively privileged minority of women could concoct a plan for liberation for all women, Western feminism deludes itself. Founded on a startling ignorance of questions of age, race, sexuality and class, the shared assumptions of a relatively small number of politically active women on the Left came to form the basis of a feminist discourse that defined the parameters of feminist politics, practices and subjectivity.³

I would, however, question the recent retrospective tendency of some to regard feminism of the 1960's/70's as a wholly monolithic and oppressive theoretical/political movement, and hazard the view that feminism has exhibited a sensitivity to its constituents which can be found in no other politically orientated social theory/practice. But more importantly, I have not found a coherent body of 'Modernist' feminist 'orthodoxy' which claims to be in a position to enforce homogeneity and forbid the right of Others to speak. A more historically grounded sense of Second Wave

feminism's emergence would suggest that gender theorists:

... cleared a space, described a new territory, which radically altered the male-normative terms of discussion about reality and experience; they forced recognition of the difference gender makes. Academic traditions were challenged, sometimes in their most basic self-conceptions - as in philosophy, which has made an icon of the ideal of an abstract, universal reason, a reason without race, class, gender, or history (the 'view from nowhere'...). There is no view from nowhere, feminists insisted; the 'view from nowhere' may itself be a male construction of the possibilities for knowledge.⁴

In other words, feminism was defined by its demands for recognition of the locatedness and partiality of critical perspectives formulated from the margins of cultural power: feminism emerges out of the experience of exclusion and thus, in principle, has little invested in universalizing theories which reproduce invisibility and repression at other levels. As a marginal discourse within society as a whole, it has never equalled the taken-for-grantedness of the institutional and theoretical dominance of the 'view from nowhere'. While Young's position lucidly highlights the (necessarily) 'unitotal' pitfall of early feminist epistemologies, turning Lyotard's critique of 'totalization' upon feminism conceals one vital fact - that not all totalizing narratives are equal; for 'feminist theory - even the work of white, upper-class women - is not located at the centre of cultural power'.⁵ The form or degree of feminist 'domination' that Young's analysis is concerned with is of quite a different order than the real historical 'terrorisms' perpetrated in the Name of 'master' discourses. My own analysis has recognized the validity of claims that the work of 'white, upper/middle class, intellectual' feminists can be criticized for not taking adequate account of the heterogeneity of its constituents. From this perspective, the 'High Theory' assumptions

of theories of both mainstream and Modernist avant-garde practices need to be challenged for offering as transcendental assumptions and emancipatory strategies which are clearly historically and culturally limited. But this is not enough to ground a full-scale delegitimation of feminist claims per se. Feminism, however construed, has not achieved anything like 'compulsory' status. I think it is very important to recognize that this points to a larger problem with Lyotard's critique of 'totalization', and with a post-narrative theory of language 'pragmatics', if it cannot:

... distinguish between raising a validity claim and forcing someone to believe in something, between the coordination of action between participants on the basis of conviction generated through agreement and the manipulative influencing of the behaviour of others.⁶

In linguistic terms, a demand is of a different order than a petitioner's request, and a theory which 'regards language as an evocative medium, in which validity and force, reasoned belief and manipulated opinion can no longer be distinguished' will inevitably lead to the view that 'claims to validity are at best pious wishes, at worst illusions fabricated to deceive'.⁷ It is crucial to distinguish between metanarratives which are coercively and compulsorily maintained, and those that cannot claim (and do not seek) this authority. As I have already indicated, feminism does not have to be premised on a monolithic notion of patriarchy, nor confine gender analysis to the 'object' of oppression in terms of bi-polar male/female, white, heterosexual economies of 'self'. I would hope that the force of an epistemological frame in which identity (set against 'fixed' and 'unitotal' notions of a female or a feminist 'self') is construed relationally can be employed to

deny the conceptual grounds upon which hierarchical positions of privilege, dominance and exclusion are constructed. Again, I would be wary if this formulation is taken surreptitiously to invest feminism with the status of primary interpretative discourse. Jane Gaines has addressed the issue that a sensitivity to the diversity of ways in which women of different racial, sexual and class groups experience oppression should encourage the analyst 'not to do what middle-class feminists have historically done: to assume responsibility for everyone'. Drawing upon Marilyn Frye, she states:

To take it upon oneself to rewrite feminist theory so that it encompasses our differences is another exercise of racial privilege... and therefore all one can do with conscience, is to undertake the study of our own 'determined ignorance'.⁸

I wonder, then, if my observations on a politics of multiplicity that might be formulated against the Modernist 'traps' of unitotal thinking (which suggest that there are a plurality of possibilities for being positioned as a female spectator), remain embedded within the discourse of 'privilege'? In one sense, as a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman, the terms of my analysis of the meaning of Modernism and postmodernism which situated them has inevitably been a 'partial' one. Perhaps this is to do no more and no less than to recognize that critical positions are limited, and that theorists need to signal clearly the 'partiality' of their perspectives within feminism. Nonetheless, this also brings into focus that there is a negative register to a politics of heterogeneity: postmodernist 'incredulity' towards metanarratives of emancipation can be allied to a form of discursive repression in

which to 'speak to' or 'on behalf of' is tantamount to 'terrorism'. This aside, it is indisputable that cultural domination is exercised on the assumption that female identities (white, black, women of colour, lesbian) are limited and 'fixed' by gender determinations: it is for this reason that I cannot see that dispensing with a gendered framework of enquiry which provides conceptual resources for analysing and contesting highly specific modes of the polymorphous deployment of power is the precondition for empowering 'Others'. Pursuing the delegitimation of all emancipatory metanarratives in the belief that this will lead to a comfortable scenario of the happy co-existence of equal 'partial' differences is naive. The geo-political break-up of totalitarian States in Eastern Europe serves as a reminder that the fragmentation of 'metanarrative' bonding does not automatically bring with it freedom from repression and the right to self-determination but also nationalistic separatism, ethnic intolerance and a refusal of the 'Other's' right to speak.

Lyotard's critique of emancipatory metanarratives such as Marxism was based on the view that without a Modernist 'unitotal' model of the social bond, its liberational claims were 'reduced to the status of a 'hope' or 'utopia' (PC, p. 13). I would suggest that Lyotard's notion of the consequences of a fragmented bond is similarly underwritten by utopian thinking. In this, I find myself anticipated by Seyla Benhabib who has argued cogently for a more salutary understanding of Lyotard's vision of a 'just' society, founded upon a post-metanarrative polytheism. His position 'either assumes that culture and society are harmonious wholes or that the struggles within them are plays only':

The assumption that language games would be games of perfect information suggests that language games do not compete, struggle with, and contradict one another, not in the sense of jousting in a tournament but in the actual sense of struggling to delegitimize,⁹ overpower, and silence the language game of the other.

I share wholeheartedly Benhabib's conclusion that 'in the absence of radical, democratic measures redressing economic, social, and cultural inequalities and forms of subordination, the pluralistic vision of groups Lyotard proposes remains naive'.¹⁰ Consequently, the idea that simply petitioning for representation in film practice and theory is enough to have that petition met is cynical. To suggest this is to ignore the very real financial, institutional, cultural and ideological inequalities which exclude from the means of representing 'Other' cultural identities (including feminist) in non-oppressive forms. Perhaps, then, disaffection with the 'radical' capacities of art and the recent shift in attention to notions of the heterogeneity of spectators, to instabilities and to moments of contradiction within contemporary film, is a pragmatic acknowledgement of unequal access, making a virtue out of the necessity that it is only in the reception of texts that inequalities can be represented.

The call for heterogeneity does suggest other implications for the fate of Modernist avant-garde practices: the political need for representation proposes a different agenda than the anti-narrative, anti-illusionist, anti-representational and formalist avant-garde practices sanctioned either by Modernist speculative practices or feminist deconstructionism. Larkin's article suggests that a primary concern of independent black women film makers emerging in the late 1970's was for 'self-defining' representations of black

female identities to counter institutionalized cinematic and televisual racist stereotypes (e.g. Contented Slave, Local Colour Negro, Exotic Primitive, Tragic Mulatto) - the formularized denotations of an absence of identity. Andrea Stuart's reading of Spielberg's film of Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1985) suggests that the politics of black film spectatorship cannot be theorized within a model of postmodernism which does not acknowledge the need for identity, and for representation. Stuart concludes:

Because it is only when we have more varied, indeed just more, images in the mainstream that negative reductive stereotypes can begin to be effectively challenged. And it is only when we participate in the creation of these images of ourselves that we can expect to see our reflections in the mirror of popular culture.¹¹

Similarly, the collective authors of 'Lesbians and Film' emphasize the need for films which are concerned with 'the affirmation of identity', which 'reclaim history, offer self-definition and create alternative visions'.¹² This would lend support to my earlier conclusion that the Modernist aesthetic of displeasure and deconstruction of the 'self' are only options for a few: instead, the postmodernist 'condition' of excluded and culturally oppressed identities (black, gay, lesbian and, I would still insist, most white, heterosexual women) can be theorized in terms of 'requests' for theories and film practices which produce narratives, images and textual languages which answer the need for identification, for desire, for pleasure - for difference. But this opens up another set of issues which returns discussion to the debates which also characterized 'unitotal' feminist film making during the 1960's and 1970's: what filmic discourses, methods or strategies are most appropriate for articulating political, emancipatory cinema?

Realism? Documentary? Narrative? Textually transgressive?

Parallel debates have been held in the context of lesbian, gay, women of colour and black film politics: for instance, the 'social and political imperatives' that have motivated black independent film makers to utilize documentary cinema verite 'do not dissolve their dependency on ideologically problematic forms':

Realist methods... operate within aesthetic values central to dominant film and media culture... While such films can offer an immediate source of alternative information, 'such communicative efficacy in providing counter-information exhausts itself once the political terrain changes'. In addition, the tenet of authenticity is virtually incompatible with the strictures of narrative drama, since 'typical' experiences are presumed to stand for every black person's perception of reality.¹³

Or, the notion that positive lesbian images can be articulated within basically unchanged narrative realism is limited by the 'fact that positive images, like negative images, suppress contradiction and are thus static'.¹⁴ On the other hand, as outlined in Chapter Three with regard to feminist debates on the possibilities for political film, black, gay or lesbian film makers and critics have argued that formal inventiveness and textual strategies of disruption need to be employed to avoid complicity with the dominant cinematic structures which consistently function to oppress and silence them: hence the 'objective alliance' with Modernist avant-gardism. But, several critics have indicated that the adoption of avant-garde strategies for those groups and cultures I have ambivalently labelled 'Others' cannot be a question of an easy assimilation into the Modernist avant-garde/mass media position of 'oppositionality'. I argued in the last Chapter that cultural and technological shifts in the image culture of Western

societies should radically challenge the strategies of avant-gardism defined against 'mass' culture. In this context, it is important to recognize that the institutionalization of the 'avant-garde' has other implications for those 'Others' who can legitimately claim that, historically, Modernist avant-gardes have also operated as a site of domination, control and exclusion. Coco Fusco's review of a proliferation of conferences, exhibitions and screenings of black and Latin American film within the institutionalized avant-garde locations of Boston and New York is particularly poignant:

The 'avant-garde' and 'socially conscious' institutional engagement in the 'discovery' of the 'other' is also, however, collective amnesia of past entanglements and, in more recent memory, of dismissive rejection. Although the promotional mechanisms would have it otherwise, there is nothing new about the so-called 'other' or its discovery. Western cultural institutions such as the avant-garde have a history of rejuvenating themselves through the exploitation of disempowered peoples and cultures.¹⁵

Similarly, in 'Two Kinds of Otherness: Black Film and the Avant-Garde', Judith Williamson echoes de Lauretis's observations on feminism's relationship to the institutionalized avant-garde by questioning what I have argued are Modernist metanarrative differentiations: 'to be productively oppositional, the place occupied by the avant-garde as the structured-in opposite of the mainstream is something we have to be aware of'.¹⁶ Several critics have observed the process by which the 'Otherness' of gay, black and Third World cinema is recuperated for its 'avant-gardeness' rather than for its political or critical import (a fate I would argue characterized feminist avant-garde film making). The politics of fragmentation suggest that a vision of 'objective alliances' within the institutionalized avant-garde is itself caught within Western Modernist discourses which are empowered with

the ability to position the production of films by culturally ex-centric 'Others':

The attention to the 'others' stresses 'otherness', reaffirming the role of the intellectual who interprets those experiences. Not only does the institutional preference for ethnic testimony confirm the dependency of Third World artists on intellectual intermediaries, it also functions to create an illusion of authenticity - that 'real' others are called to speak for the category they represent, producing a spectacle of identity, atomised, stereotyped, and fetishised by the setting and structure of the event.¹⁷

From a wider perspective, one important element to be considered in the dissolution of the 'narrative' of Western avant-gardes is the 'potential break-up or deconstruction of structures which determine what is regarded as culturally central and what is regarded as culturally marginal':

Ethnicity has emerged as a key issue as various 'marginal' practices (black British film, for instance) are becoming de-marginalised at a time when 'centred discourses' of cultural authority and legitimation (such as notions of trans-historical artistic 'canon') are being increasingly de-centred and destabilised, called into question from within.¹⁸

It is at this point that a delegitimation of 'instrumental' perspectives must be taken to mean that debates upon which film practices are radical, and which are not, is beyond the recuperation of metadiscursive prescription. The logic of my observations on spectatorial heterogeneity suggests that, unlike in Modernist avant-gardist philosophies, it is simply not possible (or desirable) to make any a priori claims about the political capacity or effectivity of film, mainstream or experimental, to establish theoretically how a single film language or 'aesthetic' practice can determine its reception. Put another way, in the absence of 'unitotal' guarantees, a postmodernist politics of representation

needs to take into account that criteria for the 'validity' of knowledges are provisional, contextual and local: specific film practices are not political, but they can be and are politicized by 'communities' of cultural readers. Admittedly, this is an inconclusive and unresolved position but a principled one: I believe that it is only in this way that a space for heterogeneous 'petitions for justice' can be secured.

NOTES: CONCLUSION

1. Shelagh Young, 'Feminism and the Politics of Power: Whose Gaze is it Anyway?' in ed. D. Pribram (1988), pp. 173-88, (p. 183).
2. *ibid.* p. 183.
3. *ibid.* p. 183.
4. Bordo (1990), p. 137.
5. *ibid.* p. 141.
6. Benhabib (1990), p. 114.
7. *ibid.* p. 114 & p. 116.
8. Gaines (1988), p. 13.
9. Benhabib (1990), p. 123.
10. *ibid.* p. 123.
11. Andrea Stuart, 'The Color Purple: In Defence of Happy Endings' in ed. L. Gamman and M. Marchment (1988), p. 75. For an 'audience response' assessment of the film's politicized value for black feminists, see Jacqueline Bobo, 'The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers', in ed. D. Pribram (1988), pp. 90-109.
12. Edith Becker, Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage & B. Ruby Rich, 'Lesbians and Film', in ed. P. Steven, Jump Cut Anthology (1985), pp. 296-314 (p. 306) where the issue of appropriated 'subtextual' lesbian readings is also addressed.
13. Coco Fusco, 'Fantasies of Oppositionality: Reflections on Recent Conferences in Boston and New York', Screen, 29: 4 (1988), pp. 80-93 (p. 88).
14. Becker, Citron, Lesage & Rich (1985), p. 298.
15. Fusco (1988), p. 81.
16. Williamson (1988), p. 108.
17. Fusco (1988), p. 88-9.
18. Isaac Julian and Kobena Mercer (1988), p. 2.

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