# INTRODUCTION

## CHANGING TIMES

To borrow from the title of a recent publication, there is definitely "ferment in the field" of film. This phrase comes from a special issue of *The Journal of Communication,* in which communications scholars addressed the issues raised, in large measure, by the same varieties of cultural studies that have characterized recent film scholarship. Empirical, sender-receiver studies involving the measurement of "effects" have come under increased criticism, leading some communication specialists to give closer consideration to cultural theories of ideology, subjectivity, enunciation, narrative, genre, and viewer positioning—theories whose application is well established in film. But the application and establishment of such theories continue to stimulate new ideas within film study as well. The discipline is clearly alive and well, extending itself into new domains—notably television and video—and consolidating some sense of distinct historical development.

In fact, film study may now be reaching the end of one phase in its development. Between the late 1960s and the late 1970s, it separated into a continuing tradition of amateur or semiacademic writing and a widespread and by now reasonably well-entrenched academic scholarship. One indicator of the second development is that the number of Ph.D.'s in film in the United States rose from approximately two hundred in 1964 to more than two thousand today.[1] Other indicators range from the creation and growth of film departments to the increasing professionalization of the main academic film societies—the Society for Cinema Studies and the University Film and Video Association, groups that fifteen years ago were little more than pretexts for the social gathering of kindred spirits, such as filmmakers, journalists and critics, students of popular culture, humanists, and, mingling indistinguishably with them, a few academic film scholars.

This volume is itself a mark of the establishment of an institutional base for film study inasmuch as it complements the first volume of *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). The first selection of essays in the early 1970s marked the emergence of a new area of scholarship while developing its own distinctive mix of methodologies; this second selection of essays, made mostly in the early 1980s, confirms the existence of an established field of study. The methods and concepts that ten years ago were considered controversial and potentially damaging to the humanistic tradition of film appreciation (a tradition

that preserved the kinship between early university scholarship and popular, nonacademic criticism) have now become the working assumptions and principles passed on in graduate programs by the "new film scholars," who have now become part of the academic establishment. Semiotics, poststructuralism, linguistics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, Marxism, feminism, formal analysis, cognitive and perceptual psychology, anthropology, literary and rhetorical criticism, and cultural history are now the coin of the realm.

Even so, there is a paradox here. A lively, productive ferment exists in the field for several reasons. One reason is that the new methodologies just cited have not gained universal acceptance. They stand largely in opposition to a staunchly defended humanistic tradition. Moreover, many scholars, including myself, have adopted these methods without accepting them wholeheartedly and dispute the political tendencies or strategies that they often involve, some of which are discussed later in the introduction. Another reason is that these methods are not intrinsic to film. Their adoption by film scholars (partly to distinguish academic from nonacademic writing, partly because of their productiveness for research) erodes the sense of film study as a distinct discipline. Most of the articles collected here, for example, depend on a conceptual framework extrinsic to film study per se to sharpen our understanding of film. The question arises: Is film study a coherent area of study, or is it necessarily a part of that larger field—perhaps identifiable as cultural studies—from which so many of its principles come? My own view is that film study makes little sense as a distinct area (in contrast to English, say, in the period of the New Criticism) but that its essentially interdisciplinary nature has not been emphasized because of the practical need to gain an autonomous base within the academy, which is normally measured in terms of departmental status.

Other paradoxes surround the ferment in the field. The sense of a discipline with a body of knowledge, a set of diverse methodological principles, a tradition (albeit a short one), and an institutional base arises precisely at the time when the phenomenon of "the movies" is becoming anachronistic, marginal to a visual culture increasingly centered on television, video, and new forms of electronic communication and exchange. Some lag between culture and its scholarly study may be inevitable. Hence, television studies, which now have some of the excitement of film studies in the 1960s, are gaining prominence at the very moment when traditional broadcast television is beginning to be threatened by cable and pay television, videocassettes, videodiscs, computer games, and two-way information networks, such as Telidon in Canada and Prestel in England.

This lag between the prevalence of cultural forms and the study of those forms has some advantages in the university. The study of film has gained an added dimension of respectability precisely because it is increasingly aligned with one of the great missions of Western humanism: the preservation and conservation of our cultural heritage. But this gain also means that film study is losing some of the strength it once derived from its contemporaneousness, its immediate relevance to the cultural experience of students and their need to understand this experience. Instead, film study increasingly derives its importance from an historical

dimension that has, ironically, itself come under fire from the same poststructuralist theories that have been crucial to the development of film studies as a discipline in the 1970s.

In sum, film study has developed into a discipline at the very moment when traditional humanistic concepts regarding our cultural heritage have been placed into crisis, even though some of these concepts have helped film study to gain respectability inside the academy. Notions of a single, unified heritage and of an historical method that stands apart from the poetic strategies of narrative that it employs can no longer be taken for granted. For example, Hayden White, in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), proposes a purely formal taxonomy of nineteenth-century histories based on the way in which the historical field is cast into one of four linguistic tropes. White argues (p. xi) that "in any field of study not yet reduced (or elevated) to the status of genuine science, thought remains the captive of the linguistic mode in which it seeks to grasp the outline of objects inhabiting its field of perception."

Film study cannot therefore rest comfortably with its role of conservator when the theories and practices underlying the process of conservation are themselves under challenge. Poststructuralism, an approach comprising elements of structural, semiotic, Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic thought, carries White's formal challenge still further. It casts doubt on basic assumptions about human nature, subjectivity, the individual as a given whose aesthetic responses need only to be fine-tuned, and art as somehow fundamentally beyond ideology. Terry Eagleton, in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), argues that the boundaries of literary theory are undefendable because literary (and, by clear extension, film) theory merges indistinguishably with philosophy, semiotics, sociology, cultural history, and other zones of thought. But more important, such boundaries are illusory, because nothing can conclusively distinguish literature or art from discourse in general. For Eagleton and other poststructuralists, the aesthetic is subsumed by the ideological. (We will return to this point later in this Introduction.) In this view, film study can become nonillusory only by refusing to claim autonomy for its object of study.

But to deny autonomy to the object of study is also to deny autonomy to the field of study. Film study thus becomes a part of cultural studies, investigating the form and meaning of social relationships as manifested in texts (films, novels, television programs) or in everyday life (sports, dress, speech). Whatever specificity can be assigned to the study of film possesses significance only when it is drawn back into the general arena of culture and ideology. It is here that film-viewing pleasure can be related to class, race, sex, and nationality, to questions of social structure and the position of the individual (including the question of how a sense of individuality or spectatorship itself arises or is created).

Thus, we face three paradoxes: First, film study depends on non-film-specific methodologies for its research paradigms. Second, it has the academic status of a "new" discipline, although its object of study is becoming part of an "old" cul-

ture. Third, its autonomy as a discipline is partly illusory, because some of the methods that have distinguished it also challenge the traditional justifications for disciplinary autonomy.

The result, however, has been ferment, not paralysis; debate, not resignation; and diversity, not homogenization. These outcomes have occurred not within a neutral arena conducive to a pluralism of methods but within an institutional, bureaucratic structure governed by material practices, internal hierarchy, and struggles for power. (Poststructural methods have been quite central to these struggles for the past ten years, and I shall return to this point in the last section of this Introduction.)

One reason for the centrality of these methods, and one explanation for their appearance, has been the increasing importance of culture to contemporary social structure. We have witnessed not only the rise of the mass media in an industrial age but also the transformation of our economy into a postindustrial, information or service economy. Production, distribution, dissemination, and consumption increasingly function within the terms of the communication and exchange that poststructuralism has studied. Cultural study is thus not on the periphery, as it is in the conventional Marxist model, for which the economic base determines the cultural superstructure. Instead, contemporary capitalism places cultural processes at the center of any understanding of society. We live under the sign of the spectacle, as Guy Debord has argued in *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, Mich.: Black and Red, 1973), or within a prison-house of discourse, to modify Fredric Jameson's apt title *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972). Language and culture do not allow us to express our relation to the world so much as they constitute that relation.

Thus, the need to improve our understanding of the social functions of culture and ideology assumes high priority. The cultural comes to be seen less as a privatized realm of personal enrichment and more as a socializing realm of ideological significance. It is within this framework that most of the articles in this volume develop their particular position. They show that a situation rife with paradox can stimulate rigorous inquiry and meaningful debate. They overcome paradox to exhibit both disciplinary strength *and* methodological borrowing, historical awareness *and* contemporary pertinence, formal analysis *and* contextual placement. As such, these articles are cause for celebration as well as paradigms for further study. My role here is to contextualize them, to point up the debates that persist among them, to show how they are fueled by the struggle to make methods and past achievements address continuing, sharply felt needs, and how that struggle can stimulate our own experience of film and our writing about it.

## ON METHOD

Critical method in film study means something different from an analytic formula or from scientific method. Method generally involves a coherent cluster of shared assumptions about the nature of the world, what populates it, and what our relationship to it is. Scientific method subjects theory to rigid checks: If

its predictions cannot be verified, it disappears (or lies dormant at best, pending verification). Cultural theory depends on a looser form of consensus. Its success depends on generating what we might call a "comprehension effect": It replaces curiosity with a sense of knowledge; it establishes assumptions, provides guidance or protocols for analytic procedures, and facilitates mutual understanding. The results of cultural theory are shared perspectives, not provable predictions, which, of course, means that questions of ideology, purpose, and institutional context are even more crucial in cultural theory than they are in science. Cultural study is a form of purposeful social activity possessing (sometimes hidden) agendas involving class, race, or sex; self-interest; and the dynamics of group formation and maintenance. Not even in science is there anything like pure theory, and certainly there is no such thing in cultural study.

Questions of consciousness and the unconscious, of subjectivity, of intentionality, of purpose and feedback or constraint are integral to culture. Such questions are not aberrations, errors, or fallacies to be bracketed, nor are they phenomena to be reduced to simplistic formulas. The only invariable is the continually shifting relationship between meaning and context. There are no absolutes or givens, nothing finally "objective." No formula can fully describe or fix the historically variable relationship between ourselves and the traces left by others that form our culture. Each object of study must be sighted and fixed repeatedly. Times and categories change. Perspectives differ.

Certainly, methodologies themselves come and go. An imaginative, bold new perception appears with broad explanatory power and compelling arguments, such as Michel Foucault's conception of history, Lévi-Strauss's of myth, Jacques Lacan's of psychoanalysis, Saussure's of language, or Bateson's of systems theory. Other individuals adapt, extend, champion, and implement some of the original principles in relation to new problems, demonstrating the viability of these principles over a range of issues and beginning the process of establishing an institutional discourse and practice. Still others amplify, illustrate, popularize, and defend the growing body of knowledge as a received way of doing things in which questions of professional or bureaucratic status and power become increasingly central. A paradigm or method evolves and with it an institutional apparatus that supports it. Such is the trajectory of social revolutions, industries, and scientific paradigms as well as of critical methods. The success of every new method depends on two things: first, its ability to fill a perceived lack or need as well as or better than alternative proposals or paradigms (this motivates people to adopt its assumptions and procedures); and second, its success in securing a position of power that it can maintain against competitors.

## SOME COMMON THEMES

The five areas of methodological application represented by the articles collected in this volume—historical, genre, and feminist criticism along with structuralist semiotics and psychoanalytic semiotics—have all addressed perceived lacks or needs compellingly, and they have all gained positions of promi-

nence within film study. (The articles in Part 6 exemplify methods that offer compelling indications both of problems in need of address and of ways of solving them, but these methods have yet to gain a position of institutional authority.)

All the methods represented in this volume strive for consistency and rigor but often in different and sometimes contrary or contradictory ways. Phenomenology stresses the open-endedness of interpretation and the primacy of experience, while structuralist semiotics stresses operating procedures that come close to generating replicable results (on the level of structure if not of meaning, since the "rules" for the construction of meaning are less variable than meaning itself). At the same time, these alternative methods have some things in common. In fact, the articles share a number of general preoccupations, which the reader is apt to encounter in other examples of contemporary film scholarship. These preoccupations concern the status of the text as a category, the level of generalization appropriate to cultural analysis, and the contentious issue of the individual or subject: Is the subject a workable category?

*The Status of the Text*

The very term *text* signals a desire for precision and specificity at the same time as it renders a more diffuse connotation: Film criticism uses methods developed for the criticism of texts to inspect its object in the hopes of understanding its working principles better. *Text* conveys a greater sense of methodological exactitude than the terms *movie* or *film,* partly because it implies that films are manifestations of certain characteristics found across a range of works that many non-film-specific methods are adept at analyzing.

In addition, from an historical perspective, the relations between text and reality (so central to realist theorists, such as Bazin and Kracauer) and between text and author (the main concern of auteur criticism) have yielded to a new set of relations: between text and context on the one hand, particularly in the articles in Parts 1 and 2 (for example, those by Ogle, Buscombe, Gomery, Wood, Dyer, and Waugh) and between text and viewer on the other, particularly in many of the articles in Parts 3 and 5 (for example, those by Mulvey, Baudry, Metz, and Studlar). In addition, the text is a particularly important site for the examination of discourse or language. As such, it can be scrutinized as a manifestation of rhetoric (as in Nick Browne's "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach*"), of narrative (as in Charles Eckert's "The Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's *Marked Woman*"), or of ideological contestation (as in Claire Johnston's "Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses"). The text can also serve as a proving ground for general theories about cinematic codes, as in Christian Metz's analysis of *Adieu Phillipine* in *Film Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) or in the assorted essays in *Film Reader,* no. 1 (1975), which all consider *Citizen Kane* in relation to Metz's *grande syntagmatique.* Thus, textual criticism could be considered a methodological category in itself (approximately twenty of the articles in this volume pay extended attention to particular films), but the assumptions of those who use the method are so heterogeneous that it seems preferable to indicate how important the method has become to all forms of analysis.

*The Question of Generalization*

How general can generalizations be? In some ways, the question is the other face of the textual analysis coin: If we try to group texts together in order to discover some general features, how far can we go? Of course, genre study builds on the assumption that texts can be grouped in telling ways. Often, historical study does, too; in discussing the coming of sound or of color in terms of economics and technology, what early examples of sound or color film have in common carries more weight than what they do not. In his early writings, Christian Metz attempted to characterize the cinema as a semiotic system. And many writers seek to identify the characteristics of modes of film production (such as artisanal, collective, or studio), or of movements, schools, genres, and oeuvres. In these cases, general categories take priority over the properties of specific films.

Debate about ideological effects sharpens the issue. Do narrative films or the cinematic apparatus—the entirety of the system of production, exchange, and consumption—have particular ideological effects? And if we grant that they do, to what extent do they dominate local or textually specific effects? Nick Browne's use of rhetorical concepts to examine how we read *Stagecoach* "against the grain" of general rules of spectator positioning developed in the articles by Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry disputes the determining nature of any general form of positioning. Thomas Elsaesser's excellent essay, "Primary Identification and the Historical Subject: Fassbinder and Germany," in *Cine-tracts* 3, no. 3 (1980), which I was unable to include, carries the dispute from textual onto historical terrain, lending valuable specificity to the generalized use of the psychoanalytic concept of identification.

These challenges to easy generalization raise important questions about ideological determinations and aesthetic value. They cast doubt on the notion that any film, however innovative or radical, must produce certain "effects" at another, more controlling level. They also help to remind us that art gets lost in the rush to theory. Generalizations about ideological effects, semiotic features, and psychodynamics apply to every text; aesthetic merit or quality may no longer be a central consideration at all. Traditionally, critics regard the effect of a text as dependent on its distinctive qualities. When this effect is cast in terms of "textual system," as Metz calls it, tension may well remain between textual analysis and general theory or between ideology as a function of an overarching system or apparatus and as a function of a specific textual instance. Even if we choose not to formulate a canon of good taste or to enforce prescriptions for good form, we must still account for the pleasure and fascination that some texts give, pleasure and fascination that seem to be functions of aesthetic principles as well as of ideological, psychoanalytic, or semiotic ones. These problems cannot be made to vanish merely by subsuming aesthetics under ideology, as Eagleton claims they can or as Laura Mulvey does in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," where she argues that all Hollywood narrative conforms to the general requirement of providing viewing pleasure for men. Nor can we retreat to the higher ground of Art—of cinema as opposed to movies. Fredric Jameson contends that our choice is not between a crude mass culture and the refined high culture of previous generations

but between mass culture and modernism as two sides of a contemporary effort to represent the conflicts of everyday life; see Jameson's "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text,* no. 1 (1979): 130–48. But even within this slightly restricted field, questions of specificity and the link between aesthetics and ideological effect—questions ranging from issues of quality to issues of narrative structure raised by story/plot, voice, or *mise-en-scène*—remain the focus of a continuing debate. This debate also hinges on the question, For whom?—that is, who is the recipient of textual address?

### *The Death of the Subject*

Today, the desire to resurrect a bygone aesthetic tied to great works of art that we can learn to appreciate is also a desire to resurrect the subject of humanism, namely, individual man [sic]. This man exists as the homotropic center of a natural universe available to consciousness and of a social universe governable by conscience. Is this "man" dead or alive? If he is not extinct, he is at least endangered. Feminism alone has seen to that, exposing as it has the extent to which the sublime nobility of humanist study rests on the celebration of the achievements of men by men. But the severest blows come from poststructuralism, which places the determinations of system and structure over those of individual volition.

Paul Ricoeur speaks of two great critical schools: the School of Revelation and the School of Suspicion. The first belongs to a humanism that seeks in art revelations of the human spirit in material form. The second belongs to a posthumanism that sees in texts the symptomatic display of the social order that produced them. The author becomes a fictitious unity masking the patterns of regulation and control that characterize the systems or codes of which the subject is only an expression. The humanist engagement with meaning and value as part of a search for ethical models and aesthetic standards is contextualized by the poststructuralist engagement with the production of meaning and values, models and standards as aspects of the belief systems that a given social order uses to win the consent of those whose consciousness, identity, and desire it regulates. Poststructuralist thought turns away from art, aesthetics, value, and man to question texts, codes, effects, and subject positions. It argues that the subject, "I," who believes that it exerts conscious control is actually subject to the systems—verbal language, semiotic codes—through which it speaks or that speak it. "I" is also subject to that locus of being which speaks but is never recognized, the unconscious. The subject as a rational individual exercising free will and self-determination becomes a fiction that facilitates acquiescence to the determinations of language and the unconscious, and, through them, of the social order—capitalist, patriarchal society in our case. When poststructural thought is regarded as political, it is usually because of its radical critique of the fundamental conception of the individual or subject. However, the political efficacy of such a critique, like the determining nature of generalizations, has yet to be fully demonstrated.

I will have a bit more to say about poststructuralist thought later in the Introduction, but its massive consequences for criticism should already be apparent. A

gulf opens between our experience of a text and our understanding of that text, between effect and the production of effects, between the phenomenology of revelation and the psychodynamics of identification, between language as a vehicle for self-expression and language as an instrument of subject construction, between the self and other as poles of an ultimate unity and the unity of self and other as the ultimate fiction. The poststructuralist enterprise, whose influence is evident throughout this volume, situates pleasure in relation to sexuality and desire, and it situates sexuality and desire in relation to the hegemony of sexual difference, the dominance of male sexuality, the phallus, and patriarchy.

Hence, it becomes possible to say of a film that it "is constituted by a set of discourses," as Colin MacCabe does without naming the active agent ("Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," *Screen* 17, no. 3 [1976], p. 11). The use of the passive voice, like the discussion of effects, points to a problem: Can we assign an active agent to such effects? In the poststructuralist paradigm, the agency cannot be a subject, since the subject is itself an "effect." The agency can only reside in systems, structures, apparatuses, codes. To use the active voice is to anthropomorphize the analyst's abstract constructs. Perhaps a set of discourses constitutes a film, but how, by what agency? This "set,"—something akin to what anthropologists call culture—must still be placed in relation to human agency. Otherwise, poststructuralism paints itself into a deterministic corner. Humanist concepts of free will and determinism, with their limited grasp of system and structure, are no longer acceptable solutions. Film scholarship, under the influence of poststructuralism, has not found a way out of this corner. Effects just happen to us. Ideology is controlling. Hopes get pinned to counter cinema—modernist texts that produce "knowledge effects" about ideology and the cinematic apparatus. To a remarkable degree, the majority of poststructuralist writers has neglected to seek solutions from other methods, such as the systems theory concepts of goal seeking and constraints, which replace free will and determinism. The heterogeneity of research methods at work in film study may not yet be quite as eclectic as it should be.

The status of these three terms—*text, generalization,* and *subject*—has assumed a broad importance. Regardless of methodology, almost all writers today have definite assumptions about these terms in mind when they analyze the cinema. What kind of object is under scrutiny, how general can our discussion be, and what relationship does the object have to those who encounter it? Historical, genre, feminist, semiotic, rhetorical, phenomenological, and Marxist answers will vary, but, to an appreciable degree, writers using these different approaches ask very similar questions. Concern with a few central, highly problematic issues often characterizes critical inquiry and artistic practice within a given period of intellectual and artistic crisis. As a result, this volume, like the first volume of *Movies and Methods,* can be thought of not as a series of monologues by writers indifferent to each other's speech but as an extended dialogue that, through cross-references and common preoccupations, sustains a debate on most of the basic questions posed about culture today.

Poststructuralism stands at the storm center of this debate. That may well be

another sign that film study has achieved institutional status: Debates about methodology begin to predominate over debates about substance. It becomes more important to determine the writer's methodological and political orientation than it is to determine the substantive nature of an issue. Concomitantly, the sense that film represented a potent means for engaging with pressing topical issues, which motivated much of the interest in film in the 1960s, has been sustained most actively by individuals who maintain some distance from the poststructural paradigm. For example, compare these two statements about the practice of filmmaking:

> Any relation of history in cinema risks simple reactionary effects if not passed through reflection on the current reality of such a practice, which reality includes the fact—the present history and institution—of cinema. (Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981],p. 238)

> Can filmmakers afford to undertake an abstract analysis or make an educational statement *about* representation if it is politically imperative that they represent a "brutal actuality" in order to counteract its ideological version? (Jane Gaines, "Women and Representation," *Jump Cut,* no. 29 [1984]: 26)

Attempts to address an issue without formally engaging the mediating agency of discursive means can be seen as naive, amateur, untheorized, or nonacademic. And the method that has been most influential in its insistence on the theoretical primacy of language and the production of meaning is poststructuralism. Although other methods might have made the same claim, poststructural semiotics, especially psychoanalytic semiotics, has presented itself as serious theoretical scholarship of a progressive nature because of the attention that it pays to the question of how meaning and spectator positions get produced. For this reason, poststructuralism occupies a position in film study not unlike that of the existential Other. In its Lacanian, ideologically engaged form, poststructuralism has come to represent an authoritative theoretical discourse with which its alternatives must come to terms. Alternative views acknowledge their own departure from or indebtedness to this model far more often than they do for any other methodology. It is clear that such acknowledgment is due in part to the primacy that poststructuralism has claimed for itself, sometimes inappropriately.

Poststructuralism poses the question of methodological primacy on two levels. Both levels involve questions of hierarchy or logical typing, not an either-or choice. On one level is the concept that the higher logical type—a class of objects, such as a methodology or a language—constrains the lower logical type—members of the class of objects or statements made using a given method or language. This is not to say that membership in a class determines all the qualities or characteristics of the members of that class. Although this claim is often made, it is quite simply wrong. If it were correct, no process of dialectical transformation (*Aufhebung*) would be possible in either natural or social systems. Thus, method or language exerts a constraining influence on any statements made within its frame, and that influence has some important consequences. But the messages also matter, and they are not fully determined by the method or language system that organizes them. In this regard, poststructuralist critics, especially psychoanalytic critics, have overemphasized methodological orthodoxy as an evaluative criterion.

On the other level is the question of logical typing within poststructuralism. A psychoanalytic theory of the construction of the subject has a different order of generality than a social theory of the actions of constructed subjects does. Any theory of how individuality is constituted constrains any theory of how individuals engage with their world, but these are two different levels of theory, and one cannot simply determine the other. In giving priority to theories of the construction of the subject and subjectivity, especially in relation to language, poststructuralism has sometimes overstated its claims and assumed that such theories are determining. That assumption is wrong, although the limits or constraints proposed by poststructuralism for the subject may be of major consequence, as the articles in Part 5 show.

In the introductions to individual articles, I have undertaken to sharpen the sense in which poststructuralism has served as a significant Other in both positive and negative terms: as a radical challenge to received notions of individual subjects and their socialization and as a dangerous distraction from the immediate political issues that confront us as preconstituted individuals.

## THE METHODS THEMSELVES

Each of the methods represented in this volume has considerable explanatory power, and each has engendered appreciable research activity. And, although each method has addressed questions of text, generalization, and the subject, it has done so in a distinctive way. For example, the authors of the articles in Part 1 rely on concrete details to substantiate general propositions. These details are not always textual. Such scholars as Douglas Gomery and Janet Staiger use new kinds of source material to reconstruct such events as the coming of sound or the standardization of film production, and Jean-Louis Comolli turns from primary source material to the claims that others have made about the early cinema. For the most part, historical writing has benefited immensely from the development of an academic base for film scholarship, both in the study of textual matters of style or structure and in the study of contextual matters of economics or technology. Archival deposits of films and documents have facilitated extensive revision of the received wisdom of earlier film histories. In its recent, revisionist phase, film history has insisted as much on specifics as on generalizations and on the subject as an historical agent as much as on the subject as an ideological effect.

Like genres themselves, genre criticism remains remarkably durable. Interests shift—from westerns to melodrama, from genre in relation to auteurs to genre in relation to structure or history and ideology. But the need both to group films into meaningful categories that indicate significant elements in common and to follow the transformation of those elements over time remains strong. At the same time, despite the explanatory power of genre criticism and despite its ability to sustain research, its steps to resolve this need have run contrary to some of the central tendencies of poststructuralist work, which Paul Willemen described in his "Presentation" for *Genre* (ed. Stephen Neale [London: British Film Institute, 1980], p. 3) as "the need to account for cinema as a specific signifying practice involving questions regarding the relation between texts and viewers (problem of the look,

questions of address and subject construction, problem of identification/distanciation, etc.)."

Of course, genre study does account for cinema as a specific signifying practice, but the terms that it uses are more structural and intertextual than they are viewer oriented. Often, the stress on genre structure or textual strategy obtains its full significance from the implications that it is seen to have for viewers—as the articles by Wood, Nichols, MacDougall, and Penley and Bergstrom suggest—but the nature or construction of the viewer usually is not a central problematic. Genre criticism and structuralist semiotics provide an extremely valuable methodology for the derivation of general principles from specific instances, whether in relation to fiction, or documentary, or the avant-garde.

The articles collected in Part 3 show that feminist film criticism and theory have an urgently political tone that is only sometimes characteristic of other methods. Several articles in the other parts of this volume—notably those by Joyce Nelson, Robin Wood, Gaylyn Studlar, and Peter Baxter—adopt a feminist perspective, concerned as they are with sexual difference in the cinema. The need that feminist criticism addresses—to examine the representation of sexual difference and the sexual positioning of the spectator—is immediately personal and ideological. Certainly, feminist criticism has substantially improved our understanding of how meaning gets constructed within a highly charged social context that makes the notion of pure entertainment an impossible fiction.

One strand of feminist writing, represented most forcefully by Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," assumes that the sort of semiotic psychoanalytic theory associated with Jacques Lacan is a necessary prerequisite for a specifically feminist film theory. In film study generally, Lacan's work has helped to shift consideration to a high level of theoretical abstraction, where the key questions involve the cinematic apparatus, the production of meaning, representation, narrative, and the constitution of spectator positions. These operations, it is argued, explain how the commercial cinema functions to address predominantly male pleasure. Understanding these operations in turn valorizes a feminist film practice that focuses critically on these same operations—a practice associated with the work of Chantal Akerman, Yvonne Rainer, and Marguerite Duras.

Other feminists—represented here by the articles by Loader, Rich, Williams and Rich, and Turim—regard this tendency to valorize the most theoretical feminist filmmakers and to stress the determining power of the broadest generalizations as useful but constricting. These writers differentiate among specific uses of narrative, realism, spectator positioning, or the cinematic apparatus without insisting in every instance on addressing the general issues that these practices raise. Nor do they attribute determining power to abstract generalizations, although they readily acknowledge their importance. (*Jump Cut,* no. 29 [1984] offers an extremely valuable state-of-the-art summary of both tendencies.) The second tendency in feminist criticism stresses the importance of working to develop a more historically and socially specific understanding of sexual difference, a less phallocentric conception of the female than that of lack or castrating threat, and a more diverse canon of exemplary feminist filmmaking.

Structuralist semiotics originates in Metz's early efforts to describe the cinema as an object, efforts well summarized in Paul Sandro's article, "Signification in the Cinema." Metz's initial concern was with codes, not texts; with general regulating principles, not specific applications. However, this taxonomic effort flagged rather quickly and soon became attached to the analysis of specific texts—as in Charles Eckert's exemplary essay, "The Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's *Marked Woman*"—or to a psychoanalytic current that sought to account for desire, the unconscious, and the spectator, work exemplified by the articles in Part 5. Eckert has subsequently questioned whether a synthesis of structuralism, Freudianism, and Marxism is either desirable or possible. The authors of the remaining articles in Part 4 have demonstrated that an affirmative answer is possible. Stephen Heath's essay, "*Jaws,* Ideology, and Film Theory," sketches a rationale for the transition to psychoanalytic theory: An analysis of the *operation* cinema (its capacity to mark out positions and possibilities for the viewer) is a necessary complement to an anatomy of the *object* cinema.

Psychoanalytic semiotics has tended to occupy the high ground of theoretical generalization and to focus its attention on the question of the subject. For example, the very generality of Lacan's notion of woman as lack or castrating threat makes it a controlling perspective. It has a potentially large "comprehension effect," since it covers virtually all narrative film. Such a notion of the female subject also addresses a noticeable problem, since previous generalizations about cinema tended to be based on moral presumption and to lack much methodological buttress. The corrupting or merely entertaining cinema of popular writing yields to the phallocentric cinema of academic scholarship.

The two articles that make the most vivid and compelling argument for the determining power of fundamental operations underlying the great majority of films are Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema" and Jean-Louis Baudry's "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus."[2] These essays offer a powerful explanatory framework, and they have stimulated considerable research activity. Of all the articles in this volume, they best establish the terms and conditions of the poststructural Other; the movement of other writers toward and away from their assumptions and arguments—the articles by Studlar and Browne are good examples of departures—give a sound measure of the force field organized by poststructural, psychoanalytic methodology.

Part 6, Countercurrents, conveys some of the diversity now at work in film studies. The articles in Part 6 point to needs or problems not yet addressed or not satisfactorily addressed by the prevalent methodologies. Some, like Branigan's "The Point-of-View Shot," give priority to specific questions involving the text. Others, like Wood's "Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic" and Andrew's "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," give priority to general questions of methodology and the kind of results they produce. Some, like Polan's "A Brechtian Cinema? Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film," dispute the notion of broad, determining ideological effects; others, like Salt's "Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures," help to correct false generalizations about directorial style at the level of the shot. Each article indicates the explanatory

power of an alternative way of looking at films and suggests, at least implicitly, some of the research issues that its methodology might address fruitfully.

These essays also give some hint of things to come, of methods that may well gain ascendancy in the years ahead. Prominent among these, I would suggest, are empirical research, viewer-response criticism, neoformalism, and continuing efforts to find a compelling synthesis of Freud and Marx. Film study, developing as it has within a humanities context, has vigorously eschewed empirical research. The tendency for film study to align with the general field of cultural studies and the resulting overlap of interests with the objects of study and the methods of the social sciences (most notably in regard to television) make it quite likely that film studies will take up, and give special inflection to, the use of empirical methodologies. Efforts to move away from broad effects that constitute subjects and positions toward concepts of negotiation and active reading make viewer-response-oriented work an area of considerable promise, while neoformalism has introduced a vital specificity that often challenges historical, aesthetic, and ideological conclusions reached by other methods. And the need to achieve some theoretically satisfying combination of the personal and the political, the social field of interaction and the unconscious domain of desire, will certainly continue to motivate extensive effort. Together with other methods, such as phenomenology, these nascent tendencies seem to indicate that the next period will be quite different from the one that extended from the mid seventies to the early eighties, where one method, poststructuralism, proved strikingly dominant. Rather than concluding the volume with the sense of an ending, with the sense of methodological debate resolved, Part 6 serves to convey a sense of open-endedness. It acknowledges that the process of matching method to need, meaning to purpose, is a continuing one and that diversity is itself a source of the new.

## POSTSTRUCTURALISM AS OTHER: SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS

Although poststructuralism has dominated film study for the past decade or so, it has its share of internal contradictions and inconsistencies, which produce gaps or fissures where paradox shows through. They point to issues that may not be able to be resolved within the methodological frame within which they are posed. As I show in *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), poststructuralism has introduced powerful concepts of ideology, representation, and the subject. But it also has its limits. A brief survey of six points of tension can clarify both the power of the method and its limits.

(1) *Identification.* The authors of several articles in this volume liken the film experience to what Jacques Lacan has called the *mirror-phase,* although they differ about the particulars. The gist of the argument is that we enter into a primary identification with the succession of images on a screen regardless of content. "All that remains is the brute fact of seeing: the seeing of an outlaw," as Metz argues (see his article, "Story/Discourse," in this volume). In contrast to theories of viewing as a dreamlike state expressed in early Freudian accounts of the cin-

ema, this argument establishes a relationship that pivots on voyeurism, fetishism, and narcissism to establish a controlling, ahistorical relation between viewer and screen. To that identification, viewers then add a secondary identification with particular images, namely characters, especially with their faces.

Poststructuralism asks what are the consequences of these conditions of relation to the screen and the representations that appear on it. Through the notion of suture (discussed in Dayan's "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema" in the first volume of *Movies and Methods*), identification becomes understood as a process, a continual displacement of positions that undermines the traditional notion of identification as a simple attachment between subject and object, viewer and image. And yet the consequences of such identification remain deeply engrained in the Lacanian model that produced them. Individuals become positioned as viewers or spectators. Their collective relation to the screen as an audience, with the accompanying particularities of class, race, sex, and place—in short, history—is suppressed by the particularities of individual subject formation. Poststructuralist work claims political value for its insights into this formation process, but, because it remains historically dimensionless, that political value is in acute need of supplementation.

(2) *Analogy*. Poststructuralist work draws a number of analogies regarding the cinema and also raises the issue of analogy as an analytic procedure in its own right. The sheer number of analogies is striking. In recent years, cinema has been likened to Plato's cave, the Lacanian mirror-phase, Freudian dreamwork, and Lévi-Straussian myth, to name only a few. All have served a valuable, stimulating role, broadening the range of comparisons by which we can come to know cinema. However, analogies are imprecise, because they propose likenesses, not identities. Charles Altman's article, "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Discourse," pursues this point quite vividly. Altman argues that we risk creating an imaginary unity and coherence to cinema by likening it all to a single thing. In an exceptionally polemical and prolix critique of Stephen Heath's work not included in this volume, Noël Carroll disputes the rigor of all analogies, which he describes as primarily rhetorical devices designed to persuade the reader that a certain perspective is useful.[3] To liken the cinema to something else is one thing, but, in the absence of an adequate elaboration of differences, it leaves us with allegorical or formulaic readings: The cinema repeats the experience of the mirror-phase, primary narcissism, or the dream without transforming these experiences into a pattern peculiar to its own historical conditions of existence. The articles in this volume by Browne, Andrew, and Jameson all seek to provide some redress by calling for greater textual and historical precision.

(3) *Effects*. As already noted, poststructuralism tends to speak more frequently of effects than of causes. Cinema is said to produce ideological effects. There are effects of the basic cinematic apparatus and of narrative, suture, point of view, and an *énonciation* that masks its own production. There is the effect of producing a subject position for the viewer—through linear perspective, or scopophilia, or illusionism. Poststructuralism seeks to describe more general, nonmeasurable effects that usually involve the construction by films of the very con-