

# MARXISM, FILM AND THEORY: FROM THE BARRICADES TO POSTMODERNISM

Scott Forsyth

## *Introduction*

From the sixties onwards, the study of media and culture has increasingly moved from the pages of journalism and fan mags into the expanding 'mass' universities of advanced capitalist countries. The new or para-disciplines of film, communications and cultural studies, related but usually institutionally distinct, emerged from English and Sociology departments to occupy considerable space in the academic landscape. The revitalised Marxism of the sixties and seventies was important across the humanities and social sciences; but in these new fields, Marxism – married to related radicalisms like Third World anti-imperialism and socialist feminism – was virtually hegemonic. The most influential critical work in film and cultural studies was specifically understood as Marxist (of varying strains and combinations) and located in the politics of socialist transformation. Thus an enriched Marxism helped to understand how this century's massive growth and consolidation of media and cultural industries not only transformed the face of world capitalism and the everyday lives of its peoples, but how they altered the way capitalism **rules** politically and reproduces itself culturally.

Little more than twenty years later, the 'retreat of the intellectuals' from this apparent position of strength seems a rout. Amidst the dominance of poststructuralism, postmodernism, aesthetic formalism and genre populism, academic radicals, if cultural theorists, now textually rebel with their favourite rock videos or thrillers. Vulgar anti-Marxism is common currency. And connections to social movements, let alone anything so materially crass as class, are little mentioned. What happened?

As a tale of the travails of Marxist intellectual fortunes, this has been told across various academic disciplines. Many commentators have emphasised the limited nature of the New Left built in the sixties and seventies, the passage of some of its cohorts into expanding universities and the relationship of intellectuals to the upturns and downturns of social

movements. Clearly, there have been disappointments as the movements of the sixties and seventies waned, revolutionary hopes faded and the right, with aggressive neo-liberal strategies, took government power. The collapse of the Soviet Union has doubtless reinforced any rightward and anti-Marxist trajectory among intellectuals. However, the politics of the intelligentsia cannot be simply read off the swings in direction of working class and other social movements. Ellen Wood directs attention to, among other factors, the 'sociology of the academy' which becomes the institutional context of these theoretical developments.' Additionally, the waning of cultural radicalism must be related to the limitations and flaws of the particular Marxist theory which seemed so powerful. More generally, all leftist intellectuals have been challenged by the complex transformations of global capitalism, codified as 'restructuring' and 'globalizing', but in film and cultural studies, theorists have seen their object of study radically transformed in the dramatic globalizing of cultural industries; aesthetic and cultural specificity seem obliterated by new media technologies of production, distribution and consumption. To many academic theorists, the nature of this changing cultural politics superseded the axis of class struggle which motivates Marxism.

### *Marxism in Film History*

But there are distinct features germane to the case of film studies and theory. For in this arena of modern culture, Marxism and socialist struggle are not newcomers; they are central to film history. The theory and practice of socialism have always catalysed important cultural production and Marxism has a rich and variegated aesthetic tradition, but film is unique, among all arts and mass media, in the defining role those traditions have played. Any intellectual comprehension of film required confrontation with a powerful Marxist and socialist legacy.

The Soviet cinema of the '20s has inspired artists and audiences for decades and still is the foundation for many theoretical and aesthetic debates. Those films remain crucial not because of their role as revolutionary propaganda – that was largely recuperable by Stalinism – but because they embodied the ambitions of a thriving cultural avant-garde to ally with a revolution and its vanguard. The enduring social realism of Jean **Renoir** in the thirties was specifically created within the cultural politics of the Popular Front and the French Communist Party. In the thirties and forties, an international documentary movement was built with ties to movements of international solidarity, the mass organisation of trade unions, various Communist Parties and Popular Front organisations. The traditions of the committed documentary still define contemporary work. The intense interchange between leftist workers' theatre and popular film

## SCOTT FORSYTH

in many countries in the '30s and '40s is important in historical comprehension of popular cultural radicalism. surrealism, that **archetypal** avant-garde, was shaped by bohemian anti-capitalism struggles within organised Communism and Trotskyism and by Breton's highly original cultural Marxism. At the same time, particularly in cinema, Surrealism was appropriated and popularised in commercial industries and this continues even in the present. Any historical account of the most powerful national and international industry, Hollywood, must analyse the integration of a generation of European exiles, particularly from Weimar Germany (strongly influenced by the ideals of Marxism and the various artistic avant-gardes of the '20s and '30s), as well as the successful intervention of the CPUSA in Hollywood and the profound and devastating impact of the purge and blacklist against a generation of radical film artists.

Contemporary analysis has begun to go beyond that brutal political eviction and see leftist politics shaping the transformation of genres in the '40s and their prevalent, if shaded, critique of the social order. The great filmmakers of Italian neo-realism made their finest films within the field of influence of the Italian Communist Party and the contradictory terrain of the post-war Historic Compromise. The vast and diverse movement of filmmakers and activists labelled the Third Cinema was built in the violent waves of anti-colonialist liberation struggle from the fifties onwards, shaped by Marxism and third world nationalism and most inspired by the Cuban revolution and its famed cineastes. In a more subterranean fashion, from the fifties to the early seventies, the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals attempted to fuse Dadaism and anarcho-Trotskyism in manifestos, scandalous events, sloganeering graffiti and a few rarely-seen films. In '68, Jean-Luc Godard formed the Dziga **Vertov** Group, nominally gesturing to the Soviet twenties but inspired by the events of May and specifically grounded in the Marxist film theory being developed by the famed journal *Cahiers du Cinema*.<sup>3</sup>

This listing travels through the heart of filmmaking this century, encompassing a huge array of the most celebrated artists – from Brecht and **Piscator** to Bunuel and Visconti to Chaplin and Welles – and the most successful and coherent movements and national industries. Mainstream film criticism has partially rewritten the story in humanist, aesthetic and romantic terms, but can't ignore the Marxist and socialist tradition. However, it is important to see that this 'tradition' is not linear, not a glorious red thread. Stalinism crushed the innovations of the great Soviet filmmakers. Much of the vitality of the documentary movement was absorbed and tamed in the bureaucracies of state propaganda of Canada, the United States and Britain. The Popular Front's collapse, caught between liberalism and Stalinism by the turns of Party strategy, and the subsequent Hollywood blacklist and purge, did much to destroy an

American cultural left and to make even the idea of a popular radical cinema impossible for a generation. The Situationist International dissolved in '72 (but its champions still celebrate its sparking role in May '68; and **Debord's** analysis of mass media's authoritarian spectacle remains challenging and relevant). Godard's collective collapsed in '72 in Maoist groupuscule squabbles and a disavowal of Marxism and, eventually, politics of any kind. Nonetheless, this has been a powerful tradition, not a fortunate string of geniuses or great films. The contribution of Marxism to film has been emblematic of a cultural politics defined and revitalised by activist political practice, by the interplay among intellectuals making films, both for instrumental local and internationalist use and for successful popular commercial industries, by active debate in party and related cultural journals, by experiment and ferment in acting and film workshops and schools, in cine-clubs and film societies. Generalising, we can see cultural work which traversed and negotiated – or tried to – boundaries between realist and modernist aesthetic practices, between so-called high and low culture, between cultural and political avant-gardes. Moreover, it needs to be underlined that this tradition of cinematic cultural politics developed and flourished, for the most part, outside the universities.

#### The Revolution in Theory? From May 68 to the Academy

This impressive history allowed historians, sociologists and critics influenced by Marxism to play central roles in writing about film through these decades and doubtless prepared the way for what seemed to be the intellectual hegemony of the Left in the early seventies. This was signalled by the manifestos for a new Marxist film theory and criticism announced by *Cahiers du Cinema*, the most important film journal in the world, in the late '60s and early seventies. In the fifties, that journal had influentially redefined film criticism around la politique des auteurs, the discovery and celebration of great authors within the Hollywood studio system, hitherto scorned by most cultural critics. It was largely conservative criticism which defined itself against the cinema of the Popular Front and sociological and political themes, while romanticising and promoting favoured directors and the stylistic signatures of their mise en scene. The journal's fame was secured when its key critics – Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette – burst into international success with the films of the New Wave at the end of the '50s. It was thus all the more sensational when young **Marxists** took over the journal and when Godard, newly radicalised, subsumed his celebrated auteur status into the collective of the Dziga Vertov Group. These filmmakers and intellectuals played an important role in '68, filming key demonstrations, establishing the militant Estates Generaux de Cinema, campaigning to save the Paris **Cinémathèque** and closing down the Cannes

## SCOTT FORSYTH

Film Festival. Intense debates with militant Maoist groups were held, even in some of the films of the Group. However, the relationship of this new film theory to activism and film practice proved conjunctural and its elaboration and later development occurred within the **institutionalising** of film studies as an academic discipline in the seventies.

*Cahiers'* project was strongly defined by Althusser's structuralist Marxism. While a vast historical rewriting was proposed, the project was more defined by structuralism's infamous 'exorbitation of language' (to deploy Perry Anderson's phrase), and the complex techniques of semiotics and **Lacanian** psychoanalysis were enlisted to 'scientifically' dissect film as a language. The complexities of film's narrative traditions, even its technologies of production and perceptions were reduced to a common 'realism' which repetitively fixed subjected spectators in their ideological positions. Unconscious deployments of style and form, revealed by textual analysis, allowed some films to express and expose contradictions in ideology and within this realism. In film theory, as in other fields, Althusserianism bore the faults of an emphasis on intellectualised ideological struggle, a distance from the subjects dominated by ideology and an elevation and aggrandisement of the role of **intellectuals**.<sup>3</sup> Only an interpretative cadre could unpack the ways ideology dominates, expose the gaps and 'structuring absences' and resist the 'interpellation' of the subject. However, *Cahiers'* grand synthesis proved unmanageable; while Marxism was gradually eclipsed, its theoretical ambitions and, perhaps failures, prepared the way for the endless construction of Theory itself as a hermetically obscure specialisation. An amalgam of structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis and deracinated extracts of Marxism – usually labelled poststructuralism – dominates film theory today. The last Situationist film, made in 1973 by **René Viénet**, was acerbically prescient on the political trajectory of these intellectual developments. *Can dialectics break bricks?* is a Japanese samurai epic, hilariously re-dubbed into a battle between revolutionary workers and state capitalist bureaucrats. The Situationists called this rearrangement of popular culture for political purposes *detournement*. (Readers may recall the Woody Allen film *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* which used the same formal joke several years earlier.) In the Situationist epic, the rebellious workers are warned by the most evil of the bureaucrats:

I don't want to hear any more about class struggle. If necessary I'll send in my sociologists. And if that's not enough, my psychiatrists ... my Foucaults! My Lacans! And if that's not enough I'll even send in my structuralists!

### *Institutionalising Formalism*

This theoretical project was translated, popularised and dramatically developed for the English-speaking academy in a number of influential

books, particularly by Peter **Wollen** and Noel Burch, by the journal *Screen* in Great Britain and then by journals like *CineTracts* in Canada and the more politically militant *JumpCut* in the United States. *Screen* undertook a missionary role in relationship to the advanced theories of Continental Marxism, structuralism and post-structuralism in much the same way as New *Left Review* in the same period.<sup>4</sup> While most of these new intellectuals identified with the movements and cultural politics of the '60s and '70s, particularly in the women's movement, gay liberation, anti-racist and third world solidarity struggles, the central debates rapidly became highly specialised methodological controversies, not specifically or topically political, and were largely directed into the institutionalisation of film studies in the universities of Britain, France and North America. Key articles were collected into a small number of highly influential textbooks which gave pedagogical coherence to the rapidly developing field. In the USA alone, several hundred film departments were established in the sixties and seventies; the number of film dissertations rose from several hundred to more than two thousand in less than 15 years. (Despite this growth film studies remains a comparatively small, even fragile discipline – perhaps a few thousand faculty in the relevant American associations, little more than one hundred in Canada.) A dizzying melange of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic orthodoxies hurtle through the academic mills in the form of papers, journals, conferences, graduate courses. Barthes, **Kristeva**, Deleuze and Guattari, **Metz**, Lyotard, Irigay, **Derrida**, Baudrillard, Bakhtin and lesser lights enjoy celebrity and inspire acolytes. An uncharitable observer at a film studies conference these years might find panels of idiot savants, masters of techno-linguistic jargon, exchanging truncated snippets of much grander theoretical systems, battling over dissected husks of Hitchcock or television. This was, and is, criticism whose audience necessarily becomes other like minded academics, little interested in material social processes. What is argued over is an impoverished prototype of cinema and an almost parodic reduction of the political to the textual, the radical to metatextual rhetoric. One of the key editors in the North American process, Bill Nichols, writing in the mid-eighties, decried the apolitical and obscurantist direction of much of this dominant poststructuralist theory, its lack of effect and reach outside the academy. He sees this as a regrettable, but probably necessary, part of the bureaucratisation of scientific knowledge in institutions where 'difficult' language is utilised to distinguish territory and enforce hierarchy. Debates over methodologies have supplanted any politically substantive issues, virtually as a sign of institutional status. The novelty and uncertainty of film as a distinct field of study perhaps intensified this specialisation as an institutional and professional strategy; the process involves the social positioning and commodification of both ideas and intellectuals themselves superseding any relationship to active social movements and struggles.<sup>5</sup>

## SCOTT FORSYTH

It is the fate of this self-described advanced theory to co-exist, more or less happily, with older, humbler kinds of academic practices, as in other disciplines: authorial and generic criticism, **localised** historical research, phenomenological approaches, or even with schools of filmmaking and screenwriting. Despite considerable differences – between humanist and anti-humanist rhetoric or empirical against metatextual methodologies – film studies connects them all through shared formalism, a text-centred interpretative focus that downplays social context and social transformation. A fierce critic of the discipline, **Ma'sud Zavarzadeh**, comments 'The dominant (poststructuralist) film theory . . . has institutionalized a mode of textualism that has effectively suppressed all but formalist readings of film . . . this new orthodoxy has allowed contemporary film theory to focus exclusively on the immanent negotiations of the sign in the film and to bracket the political economy of signification and subjectivity that relate the local immanent politics to global social **struggles**.'<sup>6</sup> Demarcations between approaches take on the competitive territorial divisions typical of any departments in the institution. Judiciously, a prodigious amount of interesting and challenging work has been produced but the socialist necessity of connecting the explanatory and the transformative no longer defines this disciplinary project. Rather, the field is characterised by Byzantine interpretative competition. The pretensions and cant of much of this theory have been attacked by both cautious and conservative approaches and by several strong voices who re-assert and insist on the politics of opposition, against the academic grain.'

Zavarzadeh's important denunciation needs to be qualified in a number of ways. It was the critical work, in the early '70s, of those on the Left, even though, as we shall see below, not entirely eclipsed, which prepared the ground for the formalism and obscurantism of this institutionalisation, even when the critics purported to be ultra-radical. For example, Colin **McCabe's** analysis of 'classic realism' as authoritarian narratives, irredeemably bourgeois, repetitively fixing spectators passively within dominant ideology, became an axiom of a theoretical dismissal of Hollywood and narrative itself, forestalling crucial investigations into the importance of narrative in relationship to politics. Peter **Wollen** argued that the film text makes authorship simply an effect of the text; intention and commitment are dismissed as romantic humanism. It seems that both the author and the spectator are dead. The necessity of agency for an effective politics is marginal to this cultural critique and it is obviously only steps from this towards the dominance of discursivity wholesale. In a powerful feminist extension, Laura Mulvey analysed the pleasures of Hollywood as entirely organised upon the masculine gaze and male pleasure, subsuming aesthetics to ideology and film criticism to Lacanian psychoanalysis. While this challenge to necessarily include gender and sexuality in any paradigm of

analysis was positive, psychoanalytic critiques of this **kind** were bereft of any historical context other than thousands of years of patriarchy and also foreclosed attention to the priority of social context. Noel Burch constructed a similarly reductive and hostile analysis of Hollywood's so-called realism and developed a set of formal counters to this bourgeois form, modelled on Brecht, but with a specific critique of Brecht's insistence on content and context. Wollen echoed this with a prescriptive manifesto for a **counter-cinema** inspired by Godard's Dziga Vertov Group. Burch and Wollen called for a radical modernist inversion of the reviled realism, particularly through the tropes of intertextuality and self-referentiality and their deconstruction of narrative and imagistic pleasures, their 'disruption of the dominant signifying practices'. A courageous spectator would be exposed to the **workings** of ideology – on other passive spectators; the model of this spectator is the intellectual critic himself.

When Godard's project collapsed, a few Theory films were made, notably by Mulvey and Wollen in England in the '70s. But these were films suitable only for film theorists and a viable tradition did not develop. It is worth noting that these calls for practice ascetically dismissed much of the socialist tradition in film as hopelessly bound up with bourgeois narrative and realism. Important contemporaneous work in committed documentary was similarly marginalized as naively realist by the chimera of a radical modernist counter-cinema inspired more by theory than by activism and political urgency. Even the historic avant-gardes of the '20s and '30s were seen as inspirational for their daring form not their command of narrative, commitment and political analysis. The avant-garde theories of juxtaposition and confrontation of form and content, or collage and montage, within an acute sense of the audiences' place in a dialectic of changing popular culture, were reduced to stylistic markers. All of this critical work in the early '70s proved challenging and provocative – indeed in a small discipline remained enormously influential – but its impact was entirely within the increasingly academic debates of the field, not outwards to activists, filmmakers and radicalising audiences in the traditions that Marxism and socialism had formerly brought to film. Within academic debate, its intellectual direction was to reduce the complexity of film narrative and its relationship to ideology to issues of form and textuality. Politics took place within the text itself. The institutional ground was readied for poststructuralism's more politically acceptable formalism?

### *Populism and the Postmodernist 'Thing'*

Of course, there is also a seemingly radical politics in much of the dominant academic work as well; it is, in fact, a strangely elitist brand of populism. In an anti-dialectical swing from absolutist condemnation of

Hollywood and its audiences, film studies, particularly from the mid-eighties on, is more likely to celebrate Hollywood now with taxonomic devotion. The once-passive spectator now likely negotiates a resistant reading or subcultural rebellion. Subversion is everywhere in academic comprehension of popular culture in the '80s and '90s. Most genres, and even whole decades, of mainstream cinema have been 'discovered' as belatedly transgressive, subversive, progressive – textually. The positive impulse to investigate how popular culture relates to political ideology and everyday life is diffused, with the particular influence of Foucault, into an omnipresent dance with Power. A recent authoritative textbook collection defines this populism within the rule and triumph of the market, categorising and belittling Marxist contributions as tied to an outdated ideology of the State? Much of this work has shifted attention from film to television and video and found optimistic textual politics in the constantly new choices and identifications of consumer liberties in music videos, soap operas, pornography, situation comedies. Entertainment is therefore suddenly championed, as if 'active' consumption has not always been located within capitalist social relations. The title of another collection catches the swing from elitism to populism – *High Theory/Low Culture*." The authoritarian narratives of derided realism somehow transform, as if in compensation for the earlier reductionism, through what Zavarzadeh calls 'ludic postmodernism'.

Many of the now familiar themes of postmodernism – the fragmentation of subjectivity, the antagonism towards 'grand narratives' (and narrative altogether), the discursive evacuation of material social processes, the resistance to Power, all framed by the 'epochal novelty' of the postmodern and the ways of thinking which comprehend it – reverberate, perhaps incubate, through the poststructuralist theorising in film studies. From the mid-eighties, it is postmodernism that gives a relative coherence to much of this theory, providing a narrative of change and an infinitely replenished subject matter in the endlessly novel products of expanding cultural conglomerates. The postmodernist discourse – or 'thing' as a cinematic champion inelegantly put it – has moved beyond debate." Its tropes are presented without argument or demonstration, in an arrogant idealist barrage, simply **ruling** out potential critics not at this cutting edge. As academic commodity, it has prolonged the sway of Theory fashion trends, providing exchangeable intellectual currency transnationally in an increasingly globally connected academic community. In film studies, the particular dominance of poststructuralism presaged the later importance of postmodernism.

Most Marxists have understood this postmodernist discourse broadly, as part of the rightward drift of intellectuals in the Second Cold War through the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the discourse has its own logic and

momentum within the 'sociology of the academy'. Indeed, it must be understood as the language and ideology of a fraction of the intelligentsia, sharing markers of specialisation and prestige. The rhetoric defines a stratum with little sense or hope of social influence but **universalising** its perceptions of meaninglessness and futility. When capitalist culture presents itself as more triumphant and unassailable than ever, **postmodernism** offers an exegesis of that culture; what began as scathing denunciation with Jameson or with the earlier work by Debord has become delirious celebration in **Baudrillard**.<sup>12</sup>

The most substantive issues originally raised by Jameson concerned the relationship of style and form to epoch in the Marxist lineage pioneered by Lukacs and developed by Goldmann. Drawing on a vast array of examples from architecture to films to novels, he attempted to periodize culture homologously with Mandel's famed analysis of 'Late Capitalism', that is, of the postwar boom and its extension of automation into all sectors of production, marked by technological innovation in computers, nuclear energy, electronics, chemicals and genetics. This was a serious effort to think culture historically, albeit with a sophisticated reductionism of culture to economy. Jameson insisted on the centrality of narrative to social and cultural life and to Marxism's defining comprehension of history. But the trajectory of postmodernism is now towards fashion and journalism and a rhetoric of newness, a simpler replication of the culture of consumption. Diversity and difference are now commonplace marketing strategies, in the promotional world of E. E. Schattschneider and Calvin Klein. As periodization, postmodernism now increasingly appears to be in the line of bland **techno-utopian** designations of a contemporary moment in Progress, akin to the Information Society or Post-Industrialism. Within that limitation, the postmodern is offered as stylistic shorthand for the kinds of narratives, experiences of spectatorship, complication and multiplication of modes of distribution and exhibition and diversification of products and technologies offered by the vast **media/cultural** conglomerates that have been such a central part of postwar capitalism. Postmodernism gives us, in Francis Mulhern's clever phrase, 'the theoretical self-consciousness of satellite television and the shopping mall.'"

The left's predominant political stand today, a merely defensive opposition to capitalist restructuring, obviously lacks the overarching and **transformative** vision socialism (and even social democracy) once claimed to offer. This logically fuels the inverse faith in micro-politics or individualistic rebellion that runs through so much of the postmodernist literature. It is capitalism's triumphal globalization that subordinates such residual radicalism, not its evident and ongoing crisis, or even decline, that more careful analysis reveals. Postmodernism's political posture within this rightward drift has two characteristic moves. In one, it repeatedly directs

its fire at Marxism, caricatured as necessarily totalitarian and bound to epistemological and aesthetic realisms outdated by the advance of Theory. This now resembles nothing so much as the bargain of Cold War liberalism, purchasing space for a species of radicalism by joining in the **chorus** of red-baiting. This is most telling in the ridiculous attack on 'grand narratives', a code for Marxist historicism, while the capitalism of the Triumph of Globalization, There Is No Alternative, and the Death of Socialism shows no signs of any faltering of its faith in Big Stories; it is of course the intellectuals themselves who have lost faith in socially significant and effective narratives, individually and historically.

In a second, more 'progressive' move, postmodernism identifies the new social movements as hope for social change – this has been especially important in film studies which concentrated so strongly on issues of sexual and racial identity and was inspired by those very movements of gender, sexuality and race. However, rather than directly connecting to those continuing movements, postmodernism's micro-politics has increasingly focused on the identity politics of race and gender, refracted through the competitive professionalism and bureaucracy of the universities themselves. It is hard to imagine a more suitable home for theories of discursivity, fragmented subjectivity and refusal of ambitious narratives of social change. The Foucauldian analysis of power and institutions discovers countless opportunities for limited activism and the promotion of a regulatory regime of radical liberalism. We know this phenomenon partly through the media campaign against so-called 'political correctness' – a particularly authoritarian continuation of red-baiting the minimal gains of the movements of the sixties and seventies and the modest emplacement of the Left in the academy. But the Left also knows this as damaging internecine struggle, where the **sectoral** perspectives of race, gender and sexuality battle each other, refusing traditions of solidarity and socialism. Not surprisingly, the direction of much of the academic left is to disappointment and cynicism.

### *Marxism – Why it Failed and Why it is Still Needed*

It is useful to underline how the 'radical' turn in much cultural theory and practice is distanced from most of the Marxist cultural – and cinematic – tradition's vital, if uneven, exploration of the power of the aesthetic, the social knowledge of narrative, the dialectic between producer and audience, the relationship of art and class struggle, even the concern with the audience's pleasure and involvement[even in Brecht's much referenced alienation effect). But Marxists should not smugly judge the fault lines of this increasingly faux-radicalism. Perhaps, most importantly, Marxists have not developed a convincing **anti-Stalinist** politics that has been able to

comprehend the Soviet Union, and its collapse, in a persuasive and **radicalising** fashion for new generations. The roadblock of Stalinism, and its cultural reductionism, certainly marks the stops and starts in the socialist cinematic tradition, as strong as that tradition is. Similarly, the Marxist cultural politics associated with **Trotsky** and the revolutionary modernism of, for example, Breton and Rivera, doesn't survive the '40s and the brutal twists and turns of the Left. Important work by Alan Wald and Serge Guilbault has historically analysed the disappointing retreat of anti-Stalinist cultural politics to formalism and conservatism in the United States. That thread is picked up again, by the **Lettrists** and Situationists of France, especially Debord, in the '50s and '60s, in brilliant and inspiring ways, but collapses again with an incoherent relationship to political practice and parodic comprehension of both class relations and the role of the revolutionary party in contemporary **capitalism**.<sup>15</sup> These failures find their way into the narrative of theory and the academy I have been recounting; in fact, many of the deficiencies and dead ends of the higher theory and lower postmodernism replicate or descend from the blockages and failures of Marxist cultural theory itself. The entire Western Marxist tradition can be seen to have over-estimated the power of ideology and the centrality of cultural struggle, perhaps correcting classical Marxism's neglect, but also de-emphasising the theoretical attention to organisation, movements and political economy so vital for the socialism we **need**.<sup>16</sup> A number of commentators note that the Frankfurt School's themes of cultural pessimism (denunciation of cultural industries and their production of benumbed authoritarian personalities, despair over collective agency and pallid call for the negations of theory or an idealised aesthetic) are echoed in much of the structuralist and poststructuralist cultural theory of more recent years. The critique of the commodification of culture has obviously been crucial to Marxism – in the Frankfurt School, in **Lukács**, in Benjamin – but we can see its increasing abstraction from a wider analysis of social totality and class relations in its extension to sign, image, spectacle and simulacrum in Debord and Baudrillard. Indeed, much of this cultural critique circles the dilemmas of consumption and **hyper-consumption** which characterised the postwar boom years but has failed to adapt to the capitalism of **crisis, alongside consumerism** we have faced for several decades.

Change in these decades in the media and cultural industries have been crucial to the process and mythologizing of globalization and this development is the material frame for film studies' short intellectual and institutional history. Behind the smug determinism of its ideologues, capitalism has responded to its long wave of crisis with the relentless **neo-liberal** offensive in politics, but also with immense changes in its global organisation and power: strengthened transnational corporate structures,

incorporation of new technologies into production, enhanced flexibility and mobility of capital and shifting international divisions of labour – both for national proletariats and the beginnings of transnationally connected bourgeois and petty-bourgeois. **These are certainly** familiar to Marxists, both as the culmination of the post-war epoch and in continuity with the global logic of capitalism for a very long time. They are capitalism's relentless and destructive **revolutionising** of the world.

All the media industries are **enormously** successful examples of these dramatic changes. But they are also crucial to the cultural realisation of this revolution in massive changes to consumption world-wide. That is a revolution carried by the intensified commodification of information and entertainment. Obviously, these have been pivotal to the trade negotiations of NAFTA and GATT and will continue to be at the very forefront of restructuring. These industries have introduced a dizzying **range** of technological innovations and new media over the last decades, intensifying, albeit in brutally class-riven and globally unequal fashion, all aspects of cultural consumption. All the media are increasingly interpenetrated and converging **in** corporate structure, **production**, distribution and consumption. We are witnessing the automation of culture. Much of cultural theory tracks these developments, from phone sex to the Internet and, shaped by postmodernism, celebrates the exhilarating and perpetual novelty of each commodity innovation's momentary incorporation of the techno-utopianism of capitalist progress. Ignoring the continuity of capitalist logic and the striking similarities across the history of modern **mass** media from the **nineteenth** century onwards, **theory** trails the creativity of capital; its enervation mimics the passivity long associated with both postwar consumerism and structural enhancement of corporate power."

Film, in particular Hollywood, is in the vanguard of an increasing globalization of cultural revolution. The entertainment industry, led by Hollywood's dominance in film, video and TV programming, is among the leading export industries of the United States, second only to **aerospace**.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the eighties, Hollywood dramatically widened its international dominance and increased its revenues and profits. Film studios are central in the small number of concentrated communications mega-conglomerates that increasingly dominate global culture through the '80s and '90s. Film studies' historic irony is that it attempts institutional and intellectual consolidation as its object of study and aesthetic desire seems to dissolve into this mixed and multi-media convergence of toys, videos, **CDs**, **CD-ROMs**, advertising, cable TV, books and comics, home computers and VCRs and on and on. The self-referentiality and intertextuality which the theorists of *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Screen* politically valorised is necessarily embodied in any cultural commodity as it travels across media and

industries in these widening fields of consumerism. Film aesthetics takes on the character of nostalgic lament and the categories of formalism are even further de-politicised.

However, films have not disappeared into the 'mediascape', they remain exceptional commodities which lead and organise converging, multiplied and multilayered distribution and consumption. Within the giant conglomerates, Hollywood films are central to corporate strategies which are transindustrial, synergistic and **global**.<sup>19</sup> But, for all the important changes and hype of the last decades, the cultural industries still rest on the same social relations and the same century long process of intensifying consumption that Hollywood emblemized. This continuity in capitalist logic is as remarkable as any claims to postmodern novelty. Similarly, Hollywood remains ideologically and aesthetically important to American capitalism and imperialism, and how it understands its place in the world. In fact, Hollywood films provide us with some of the most coherent constructions of the continuity of capitalism through its restructuring reinventions of itself and utopian announcement of new benevolent world orders and irresistible globalization.

For illustration, we can look briefly at a selection of action thrillers, all ready to hand at your local video store, soon to be downloaded on your home computer: *True Lies*, *Speed*, *In the Line of Fire*, *Hard Target*, *Crimson Tide*, *Broken Arrow*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *Fair Game*, *The Rock*, *Mission: Impossible*, *GoldenEye*, the *Under Siege*, *Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon* series. The list could be multiplied. As corporate productions they are typical: lavish budgets, massive promotion and distribution, investment right on screen in famous stars, spectacular special effects, aestheticised violence, stunts and explosions. Their theatrical success initiates likely sequels and imitations and cross media circulation as home videos, comic books, video games, TV shows, toys and countless inventive marketing campaigns and tie-ins from fast food to fashion. Historically, they are in a tradition of spectacular Hollywood filmmaking and marketing that is almost a century old; generically they reproduce **propulsively** simple variations on masculine adventures, hybridizing conventions historically developed in Westerns, gangster, spy and horror films, science fiction and, even, screwball comedy – consistently demanding audiences have a playful sense of the intertextual and self-referential nature of the product they are consuming. The narratives are organised to sequentially highlight the machinery of filmmaking itself, emphasising dazzling artifice, the willing immersion in believing, the expensively produced nature of the experience purchased. Most contemporary film studies dismiss these films as commodities beneath consideration or dissect them as paragons of postmodern style, but they are exemplary products of the cultural revolution of late twentieth century capital.

At the same time, as ideological narratives, these films are in striking continuity with the films of the seventies and eighties labelled as 'Reaganite entertainment'.<sup>30</sup> Those films mobilised super-masculine American heroes, most famously Rambo, in the service of the American Right's programme all over the world; invading Grenada, bombing Libya, re-fighting the Vietnam war repeatedly, fighting Communists, Arab fundamentalists and Latino drug dealers all over the world. The same, or similar heroes continue to battle a wave of threats to America in the nineties, often with similar plots or threats – to hostages, of nuclear blackmail, with several interesting changes.

Intriguingly, Hollywood has avoided dramatising the crucial events in the supposed success of globalization and the New World Order – the collapse of the Soviet Union and the destruction of Iraq in the Gulf War. Rather, these films reprise an America vulnerable and beleaguered in the world, still as insecure and threatened, beset right in its home territory with a succession of terrifying villains; they show up right in the airports and streets of America, a paranoid inversion of first world triumphalism. It has become axiomatic that America looked for new enemies as the real world threat of the Soviets gave way to detente and collapse. These films present the menace of ubiquitous terrorism. Crazy Arab fundamentalists and Latino drug dealers draw on racism historically constitutive of Western and American imperial conquest and provide satisfyingly tamed variation of the coloured hordes who have peopled imperial adventures and nightmares for generations. But America is also still fighting Russians. Post-communist social and economic disaster has produced the newest ethnic stereotype in many years, the Russian Mafia – literal characterisation of 'bandit capitalism'. In other films, plot contrivance allows a restaging of the terms of the Cold War conflict as America battles recidivist Russians; the nostalgia for the moral politics of the Cold War is palpable. Even more innovatively, many of these villains are Americans themselves. In numerous thrillers, a rogue CIA agent goes mad or mercenary and threatens the most heinous crimes against America. While the implicitly useless or unemployed institutions and bureaucracy of the Cold War produced this monstrous treason, the films uniformly exonerate and recuperate the institutions themselves in the vanquishing of these rogues.

Perpetual war against perpetual insecurity is America's post-Cold War fate in these representative films. They tell us that the Cold War's state and culture continue fundamentally unchanged, putting us in the perspective of the armed men of that state. Danger to America is everywhere but **depoliticised**, resistance mutated into criminality and madness with violence its primary motive. While the military readiness of America is dramatised as viscerally necessary to peaceful everyday life, that necessity is only circuitously connected to the instability of international relations, the gross

inequalities of wealth and power that globalization intensifies. Succinctly condensing the brutality and hubris of imperialism, the spunky heroine of *Speed* jokes about a demented villain, 'What did we do, bomb his country?'

Most powerful visually, these films represent the military technology of imperialism – its weapons, computers, surveillance trickery, satellites and especially nuclear power – as the most alluring and frightening feature of Cold War continuity. The war economy and capital investment of corporate filmmaking fuse in the ostentatious special effects, the eroticised weaponry and the amusing fright of nuclear weapons temporarily in the wrong hands. Military, corporate and Hollywood imagery, technique and ideology converge and reinforce each other. The imagery advertises the most advanced technology in filmmaking and war, overwhelming their audiences with the wealth and power of first world capitalism, even while their narratives offer an America threatened by the world it is dominating. The films neatly show what is novel, unchanging and powerful in the culture and economy of imperialism in its contemporary conjuncture. They also display some of its continuing weakness and anxiety about the resistance it inevitably produces. Perhaps *Independence Day* is the most complete and extreme culmination of these ideological and aesthetic trajectories. The most authoritarian American nationalism and egregious xenophobia – directed to the universe at large – is lionised in a pastiche of Reaganite films and themes and with the most elaborate screen pyrotechnics possible. Its cultural globalization is specifically defined as American – the whole world will celebrate July 4th – but it is still an America vulnerable to near-total defeat, whose audiences cheer when aliens obliterate the White House.<sup>21</sup>

Popular culture is tremendously complex and Hollywood, of course, offers countervailing and parallel cycles and genres as well. Any analysis must also consider what kinds of contradiction or even resistance are emerging. Changing conditions of production or evolution of genres and conventions do not allow the reading of culture to be any less confusing or ambiguous than when Marx celebrated the social realism of the novels of the royalist Balzac. Hollywood, even within the giant conglomerates of today, can still subtly market and integrate liberal feminism in women's melodramas, such as *Steel Magnolias* and *Fried Green Tomatoes* or further market 'difference' to black women with *Waiting to Exhale*. The conventions of hyper-masculine action thrillers can adapt to proto-feminist super-women, as in *Terminator 2* or *Aliens*. Or those conventions can accommodate an interesting critique of the barbarism of contemporary capitalism, as Van Damme battles heroically for the homeless in *Hard Target*. The neo-noir thrillers of Quentin Tarantino and his many imitators can be seen as white trash/underclass critiques of a media-drenched and

## SCOTT FORSYTH

degenerating America heading for disaster. The aesthetics of grisly violence – Tarantino's particular talent in the special effects of exploding blood bags and mutilated prostheses – perhaps reflects the increasing social decay and brutality of class-riven America. Film studies more typically celebrates Tarantino as stylistic postmodern auteur, pastiching the surface of Hollywood history and the detritus of pop culture, 'ironic' champion of fragmented, if not entirely vacuous, masculine subjectivity. The cycle of near-future science fiction films – from *Blade Runner* to *Robocop* to *Demolition Man* to *Strange Days* to *Escape from LA* continues to dramatise a contradictory 'New Bad Future', obliquely attacking the neo-conservative devastation of the '80s and '90s while savouring the collapse of the social order with cheerful and inventive hopelessness. The radical black nationalism of Spike Lee and John Singleton has proven popular and entertaining to young radicalising audiences, but readily amenable to neo-conservative incorporation, while the politics of the Civil Rights movement remains moribund and coded racism vitalises, and vitiates, the political discourse of the American mainstream.

### *Back to the Barricades?*

The face of imperial culture – even in its powerful globalizing dominance, in its efforts to show us, to paraphrase Marx, 'a world in capital's own image' – is powerful, but also contradictory, belligerent but fearful, homogenising but unable to silence emerging and opposing voices, images and stories. It is within and out of such complexities and contradictions of bourgeois culture that oppositional and socialist culture has developed in the past; the struggle remains as difficult and as possible as ever. The politics of dominant film remains important to understanding class rule and to the building of cultural and political opposition. Perhaps the failures of academic 'radicalism' seem worst in this realm of collective pleasure and imagination – the failure to imagine any order other than capital's dazzling domination. Beyond movies, beyond criticism, the development of a more vitally socialist cultural politics will require an articulation of intellectual work, cultural practice and the revitalisation of mass movements which can challenge imperialism, even in its apparent globalized triumph.

We can see this process maturing in the concerted opposition to the **ruling** class's crisis and restructuring solutions increasingly taking shape in the general strikes in France, in Spain, in Italy, in Greece, in Ontario, in many countries of the third world, in the peasant insurrection in Mexico. It is also apparent in the best activist legacies of the so-called new social movements – in, for example, the Canadian and American women's movements struggles around abortion rights or the gay and lesbian movements battle for equal rights and against state bigotry and indifference

to AIDS. Wider resistance is proving to be class-based and union-led, but with coalitions drawing in wide layers of the oppressed and marginalized, re-articulating the relationship between class organisation and social movements. It is possible to see the often-claimed opposition – a favourite postmodernist shibboleth – between class struggle and resistance based on social relations of gender, sexuality and race being overcome in struggle. Clearly, there are dramatic differences and deficiencies in the strategies and programmes of these emerging movements and in the cohesion and radicalism of these mobilisations, but they are rising; this is where the dialectic between defensive resistance and transformative confrontation can develop.

The challenge in filmmaking and in the intellectual study of film will be to relate to and contribute to these growing movements of resistance. Despite the might of Hollywood and the dominance of poststructuralism and postmodernism, there are grounds for confidence in the continuity of radical traditions in film. The persistence of political critics in the field, from the '70s to the '90s, as a significant 'counter-current' to poststructuralism, as Nichols puts it, will be of particular importance. Journals like *Cineaste*, *CineAction* and *JumpCut* defined themselves, with some success, against the orthodoxies of the academy. Important and withering Marxist attacks on the Lacanian and poststructuralist hegemony were made in the late '70s, particularly by Andrew Britton and Terry Lovell.<sup>22</sup> Fredric Jameson's highly original analysis of class allegories in film narratives opened up interpretative terrain neglected by the field's narrower concentration. Feminist work remains central in film studies, widening and challenging all methods of film interpretation and popularising the possibilities of alternative women's cinema. Mulvey's Lacanian feminism is debated and challenged from diverse perspectives.<sup>24</sup> Important gay critics, like Andrew Britton, Richard Dyer and Robin Wood broaden film analysis on issues of sexuality in important and innovative ways.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the focus on representation extended logically to identities of race and ethnicity in film, taking up and refining cultural critiques associated with anti-racist movements of the '60s and '70s. While some of this cultural identity politics has severe limitations, its continuity with the roots of the sixties radicalisation remains a crucial achievement for the cultural Left.

Considerable new work has begun to analyse the intricacies of popular genres, styles and conventions, to confront the historic and social contexts of films, their makers and viewers. Some of this work is directly inspired by its relationship to social movements, particularly anti-racism, feminism and gay liberation. A few historians address the historical changes in popular culture across the neo-conservative years in detailed political analysis and political economy of various national cinemas.<sup>26</sup> The many books, articles and lectures of Noam Chomsky, Michael Parenti and bell

hooks have made sharp political analysis of the media popular and accessible to wide audiences, appealing to the simmering resistance to the neo-conservative years, fostering media activism all over North America. Little remarked in the academy (with the partial exception of hooks), these public left intellectuals have helped keep the field of a leftist critique of media vital and relevant. In the 'left wing' of film and media studies, Marxism remains influential if no longer dominant and while this work may often slide into the theoretical swamps of poststructuralism or the political vagaries of liberalism, its enduring terrain is an important gain for the intellectual Left.

Much of this critical work relates to and is inspired by continuing radical film practice from the '60s to the '90s. Most important, perhaps, activists are consistently making committed documentaries intimately tied to the labour, women's, gay and lesbian, anti-racist, anti-war and solidarity movements, to liberation struggles, to celebrating and excavating the history of the Old Left. Alternative networks of production, distribution and exhibition are built and sustained. This oppositional practice continued in countries all over the world, consistent with the Left's partisan traditions in film history. Poststructuralist theory largely ignored this work or gave it marginalizing condescension. But political critics, notably Bill Nichols and Thomas Waugh, and some journals, take up the history and critical analysis of this crucial part of the Left's tradition. In more recent years, documentaries have even forged a small presence as theatrical features widening audiences even more; the successes of *Roger and Me*, *Hoop Dreams* and *Manufacturing Consent* in North America are especially notable. Perhaps no body of work stands out so strongly as the remarkable career of Ken Loach; from the '50s to the '90s, his searing film and television dramas speak to the strongest traditions of working class and socialist culture, searingly confronting the most difficult social despair, political defeats and enduring hopes. A few independent and Hollywood fiction films are inspired by and related to these radical roots, most consciously in the work of John Sayles, but also notably by women and filmmakers of colour. The new black American cinema, ranging from independents like Julie Dash and Charles Burnett to the commercial success of Spike Lee, is particularly prominent. The work of Sankofa and Black Audio Collective in Great Britain stands even more clearly in the traditions of leftist film culture. It arose in response to struggles by black communities and with a specific political analysis of culture and media, particularly indebted to the intellectuals of Third Cinema, to the traditions of Black Marxism and to the Marxist roots of cultural studies. Their films ranged formally from documentary to experimental to fiction and thematically across racial, sexual, imperial and class conflict. From these co-ops, the work of Isaac Julien (*Looking for Langston*, *Young Soul Rebels*) has been especially

inspirational to young radical filmmakers in Britain and North America. *Looking for Langston* evokes the historic avant-gardes to inspire contemporary resistance, reverently and beautifully commemorating Langston Hughes, the gay black poet of the Harlem renaissance. (The difficulties and blockages in the socialist tradition are perhaps inadvertently signalled in the film's complete silence on Hughes' intimate relationship with the CPUSA.) In the '90s, the dramatic explosion in queer – gay and lesbian – cinema and video continues this burgeoning radical sub- if not counter-culture; along with Julien, the militant and provocative films of Derek Jarman in Britain, Greg Araki in California and John Greyson and Bruce LaBruce in Canada have probably received the most acclaim. A few important critics and journals continue to promote and cheer the important developments in Third World cinema, even while brutal economics and increased Western cultural globalisation threaten the gains of earlier years. The survival and achievements of the Cuban revolution and its cinema, in the face of the post-Cold War onslaught of American imperialism, was emblemized by the international acclaim for the last films of the great Tomas Gutiérrez Alea – *Strawberry and Chocolate* and *Guantanamo*.<sup>27</sup>

In creative and intellectual work, we can see the contours of oppositional culture and the continuation of the radical and socialist traditions – sometimes in crude emergent forms, sometimes with eloquent sophistication – and some of the ways they can relate to and be inspired by active social and political struggle. This is not a simple or automatic process but this is the terrain of engaged debate and creative differences where Marxism can continue, and reinvigorate, its own intellectual and political contributions and where a cultural politics of solidarity and resistance can challenge the pictures and reality of capitalism's hollow triumph.

#### NOTES

1. See Ellen Wood, 'A Chronology of the New Left and Its Successors, Or: Who's Old-Fashioned Now?', *The Socialist Register* (London, Merlin Press, 1995).
2. See, among a large number of historical accounts: Jay Leyda, *KINO: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York, Collier, 1960); Chris Faulkner, *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986); Thomas Waugh (ed.), *Show Us Life': Toward a History and Aesthetics of Committed Documentary* (New Jersey, Scarecrow Press, 1984); Larry Ceplair and Stephen Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930–1960* (New York, Anchor, 1980); Thom Anderson, 'Red Hollywood' in Suzanne Ferguson and Barbara Groseclose (eds.), *Literature and the Visual Arts in Contemporary Society* (Columbia, Ohio University Press, 1985); John Downing, ed., *Film and Politics in the Third World* (New York, Autonomedia, 1987); Julianne Burton, *The New Latin American Cinema* (New York, Smyrna, 1983); Michael Chanan, *The Cuban Image* (London, BFI, 1986); Charles Musser and Robert Sklar, (eds.), *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990).
3. Among many works on Althusser, see Simon Clarke (ed.), *One Dimensional Marxism*, (London, Allison and Busby, 1980).

4. See Nick Brown (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinema: 1969-72 The Politics of Representation* (London, Routledge, 1990); Peter Steven (ed.), *JumpCut: Hollywood, Politics, Countercinema* (Toronto, Between the Lines, 1985); *The Sexual Subject: The Screen Reader on Sexuality* (London, Routledge, 1992); Noel Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (New York, Praeger, 1973); Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1972). Sylvia Harvey, *May 68 and Film Culture*, (London, BFI, 1980) is an excellent account of the period in Paris. James Roy **MacBean**, *Film and Revolution* (Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press, 1975), conveys the revolutionary excitement of Godard's, and others, work in that period.
5. Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods, Volume 1*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978) and *Volume 2*, 1985, contain most of the key works in this theoretical institutionalisation. He comments on the process critically in the Introduction to *Vol. 2*.
6. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films Politically* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 2-6.
7. David **Bordwell**, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Film* (Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1989), is an entertaining tour of the interpretative maze in film studies, albeit in service to his own 'neo-formalism'; Noel Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: fads and fallacies in contemporary film theory* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988) is a thorough attack on Theory, though he mistakes Althusser for Marxism *tout court* and offers a literal refutation of psychoanalysis that misses its strength as textual hermeneutic; Zavarzadeh, Faulkner, **Sklar**, *op. cit.*, and Michael Ryan and Douglas **Kellner**, *Camera Politica: Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988) hold up the lineage of political criticism from various perspectives. Zavarzadeh, Faulkner and Sklar argue strongly for the continuing importance of **Althusser's** redefinition of ideology and social totality.
8. See Colin **McCabe**, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', *Screen* 15, 2 (1974); Noel Burch, *op. cit.*; Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent'd'est, Afterimage*, no.4, (Fall 1972); Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16, no.3 (Autumn 1975). On the failures of counter-cinema, see D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988).
9. See Introduction, Manuel Alvarado and John Thompson, (eds.), *The Media Reader* (London, BFI, 1990).
10. Colin **McCabe** (ed.) *High Theory/Low Culture* (New York, **St.Martin's** Press, 1986); the work of John Fiske, Dick **Hebdidge** and E. Ann Kaplan on television, sub-cultures and music videos have been particularly influential in this populist turn.
11. In the introduction to Christopher Sharrett (ed.) *Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film* (Washington, D.C., Maitsonneuve Press, 1993).
12. See particularly, Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or: The Cultural Logic of Capitalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991); Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York, Semiotexte, 1983); Andrew Britton, 'The Myth of Postmodernism: The Bourgeois Intelligentsia in The Age of Reagan', *CineAction* 13/14 (Summer 1988), is a particularly powerful critique; also, see In Defence of History: Marxism and The Postmodern Agenda, special issue of *Monthly Review* (July/August 1995).
13. Francis Mulhern, 'The Politics of Cultural Studies', *Monthly Review* (July/August 1995).
14. See Serge Guilbault, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1983); Allan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill, university of North Carolina Press, 1987); Mexican director Paul **Leduc's** brilliant *Frida* recreates this moment of revolutionary modernism in its dramatization of the relationship of Rivera and Kahlo with **Trotsky** and with Stalinism; an important cinematic version of this passage was Maya

## THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1997

- Deren's migration from revolutionary activism in the '30s – secretary to Max **Eastman**, correspondent with **Trotsky** – to key founder of the American experimental, and deeply formalist, cinema in the '40s; her work has since been retrieved for the politics of women's cinema by contemporary feminists; see Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power and Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943–71*, (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1991).
15. On the Situationists and Lettrists, see **Greil Marcus'** famed tour de force from dadaism to punks and back, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London, **Secker and Warburg**, 1989).
  16. See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, New Left Books, 1976).
  17. Jonathan Crary, 'Capital Effects', *October*, 56 (Spring 1991), offers a lucid historical perspective on the whirl of technology and commodities characterizing this latest re-articulation of mass media and their relationship to one another. Ellen Wood, *op. cit.*, comments astutely on the importance of the consumerism of the ascendant capitalism of the '50s and '60s to the politics of the New Left in the academy.
  18. Janet Wasko, *Hollywood in the Age of Information* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 222.
  19. *Ibid.*, pp. 241–254.
  20. Andrew Britton, 'Blissing Out: The Politics of Reaganite Entertainment,' *Movie*, No.31-32 (1986); Scott **Forsyth**, 'Evil Empire: Spectacle and Imperialism in Hollywood,' *The Socialist Register* (London, Merlin Press, 1987).
  21. These comments are an abbreviation of 'The Cold War Forever? Hollywood Thrillers and Imperial Ideologies', presented to the Conference of North American and Cuban Philosophers and Social Scientists, Havana, Cuba, June, 1996. It is also useful to recall Mandel in discussing the arms race economy regarded it as a product of the decline and crisis ridden nature of American capitalism.
  22. Andrew Britton, 'The Ideology of Screen', *Movie*, No. 26; 1978–79, Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: aesthetics, politics, pleasure* (London, BFI, 1980).
  23. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York and London, Routledge, 1992).
  24. See, for example, Patricia Erens (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990); Rabinovitz, *op. cit.*
  25. See Robin Wood, 'The Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic,' in Nichols, *Volume 2, op. cit.*
  26. To cite a small sample, Greg **Waller**, (ed.), *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987); Richard Dyer (ed.), *Heavenly Bodies: Stars and Society* (London, BFI, 1982); Ryan and Kellner, on Hollywood in the Reagan years, *op. cit.*; Ted Magder, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993); Peter Stead, *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society* (London and New York, Routledge, 1989); on black film, among many key books, see Mark Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993); Vivian **Sobchak**, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New York, Ungar Press, 1988); Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992).
  27. See Thomas Waugh, *op. cit.*; Bill Nichols, *Newsreel: Documentary Film on the American Left (1970–75)* (New York, Arno Press, 1980); Bill Nichols, 'Voice in Documentary' in *Movies and Methods, Vol. 2*, is one of the initiating theoretical discussions focused on documentary. For more recent discussion of committed documentary, see Peter Steven, *Brink of Reality: New Canadian Documentary Film and Video* (Toronto, Between the Lines, 1993) and Richard Fung, 'Colouring the Screen: Four Strategies in Anti-Racist Film and Video', *Parallelgramme Vol.18*, No. 3, 1992, pp. 38-53; on gay and lesbian work, see Martha Gever, **Patribha Parmar** and John **Greyson** (eds.), *Queer Looks:*

*perspectives on gay and lesbian film and video* (Toronto, Between Lines, 1993); on black and third world cinema, see Chanan, Downing, Burton, *op cit.*, also Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982) and Michael Martin (ed.), *Cinema of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence and Oppositionality* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1995), an exceptional collection of critical articles, interviews with filmmakers and manifestoes. Journals like *JumpCut*, *CineAction* and *Cineaste* in North America consistently address committed documentary and 'Third Cinema'. On the current crisis in Cuban cinema, see Scott Forsyth, 'Cuban Films and the Crisis of Socialism' *CineAction*, 39, (Winter 1995).