1. FILM THEORY

A. A "REVOLUTION" IN FILM THEORY

There's an interesting article called "New Concepts of Cinema" in THE OXFORD HISTORY OF WORLD CINEMA (see Bibliography). In it, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues that in 1960s and '70s, there was a revolution in ways of thinking and writing about film. Until this time, there was a fairly uniform approach to film in theoretical terms: film was regarded in aesthetic (art) terms, and theory concerned itself with the status of the photographic image and the possibilities filmmaking offered for artistic practice.

Most film theory and criticism took no notice of mainstream, commercial filmmaking at all, which meant that, although Hollywood films dominated movie theatres around the world, they received almost no critical or theoretical attention. But in the 1950s European (esp. French) theorists began to look seriously at Hollywood cinema, and so to break the monopoly of European art cinema in the theory arena. Two main approaches developed:

(i) Auteur analysis ("auteur" is a French word meaning "author") - this involved a celebration of filmmakers working in the Hollywood studio system (and in other mainstream cinemas) who, by virtue of creative genius and force of personality, managed to transcend the limitations of that system and genre filmmaking. Filmmakers who tended to be discussed were ones like John Ford, Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Douglas Sirk. Example of auteur analysis can be found in Sarris (1969).

(ii) Genre analysis - another method of classification and evaluation. This approach acknowledged that the studio system and genre filmmaking offered interesting possibilities as well as limitations. It was concerned with identifying and analysing the characteristics of particular genres, and to identify genres which were progressive (eg. films noirs like THE BIG SLEEP) as opposed to conservative (eg. Westerns). It often went along with auteur analysis, as critics looked for directors working within, but also transcending, genres.

But the "revolution" didn't really kick off in a big way until the importation of structuralist and semiotic theories into film theory in the late '60s and early '70s. This importation set off a kind of massive fragmentation in film theory, with a proliferation of theoretical approaches emerging from the 1970s onwards - ideological criticism, psychoanalysis, feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism. At the same time, film studies became a common area of tertiary study in the 1970s. Then, from the 1980s, postmodernist theory emerged.

I can only give the most cursory description of some of the main theoretical approaches (which are often contradictory and fragmented themselves) - but this will give some idea of the diversity of film theory.

B. STRUCTURALIST AND SEMIOTIC THEORIES
These theories began in linguistics (with Ferdinand de Saussure) and in anthropology (with Claude Levi-Strauss) - their basic aim was to locate and analyse the ways in which meanings were produced, and to identify structures of meaning underlying language and kinship relations, respectively. It was quickly recognised that these ideas could be used to analyse almost any kind of meaning system - Roland Barthes' book *MYTHOLOGIES* has analyses of advertising images, art exhibitions, wrestling, war photos, cooking, and so on.

Applied to film, semiotic and structuralist theories tried to analyse film as a language - Christian Metz (1974) produced an incredibly detailed analysis of the way film works in terms of its units of meaning and the ways they were strung together. This kind of analysis is a bit technical and dull, and doesn't produce especially useful results on its own. Still, these approaches are vital because they form the basis of pretty much every film theory approach to come later - we'll look at some of them.

C. **IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

These are effectively Marxist-derived approaches which look at social relations and texts in terms of class structures, and usually take a politically critical approach. Early versions of ideological film theory analysed the Hollywood film industry as a capitalist system, and looked at the films it produced as supporting and sustaining bourgeois ideals. Later approaches take up the idea of ideology in a broader way. For example, Bill Nichols (1981) uses semiotics to show how all kinds of film texts (not just Hollywood ones) produce different versions of social reality, and promote particular sets of values, beliefs and ideas about the world (ie. "ideologies").

D. **PSYCHOANALYSIS**

This is probably the most complex set of theories to be used in film studies, but it dominated film theory through the 1970s and '80s and is only just beginning to lose its hold in favour of postmodernist theory. If you're going to study film theory in any detail you need to something know about psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic film theory is based on the ideas of Jacques Lacan, French academic and psychoanalyst (I've put one of his books on the Bibliography, but I don't recommend it for light reading...). Put as simply as possible, psychoanalytic theory tries to account for the way in which the individual comes into existence as a sexual and psychological being. Applied to film, it deals with relationships between the spectator and the text - how the text positions the spectator, how film produces and satisfies desire (ie. by reproducing some of the earliest experiences of the developing child; by setting up structures of looking ["gaze"]). It's this interest in the spectator which really sets this approach apart - earlier theories had focused mostly on the director and/or the text.

E. **FEMINISM**

Maybe this should now be called "Gender Theory", because there's been a recent burst of interest in looking at masculine identities (eg. Krutnik, 1993) - but interest in gender as a theoretical and analytical category began with analysis of female identity.
Early feminist theory, like Molly Haskell's book FROM REVERENCE TO RAPE, tended to look at the roles available for women in film industries and in film texts. The general consensus was that these roles were pretty dismal: there were very few women producing films, and the female characters represented a depressing array of stereotypes - little girl, mother, wife, whore. This approach was influenced by ideological theory, replacing class structures with gender structures.

Later feminist film theory was much more strongly influenced by psychoanalytic theory - and this pretty much began with Laura Mulvey's 1978 article "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema". Mulvey argued that mainstream films had gaze structures which privileged the male over the female - so that the audience was always identifying with a male gaze, usually attached to an active hero who drove the plot. Women, on the other hand, were constructed as objects to be looked at - the female body was always emphasised and put on display, and this was reinforced by the passive role of the woman in the plot (eg. Hitchcock's PSYCHO). Such psychoanalytic feminist approaches find some intriguing outlets - like Barbara Creed's analysis of horror films in terms of male fear of female sexuality (mentioned in Week 1's lecture).

F. QUEER THEORY

This approach grew out of both psychoanalytic and feminist film theory - esp. their interest in sexuality and the body. Effectively, queer theory aims to challenge accepted notions of gender and sexuality, and to analyse them as shifting, fragmentary categories rather than fixed identities.

In film theory it began, to some extent, as a critique of representations of homosexuals in mainstream cinema - like feminist film theory with women (see Russo, 1985). But later, there was a more complex, psychoanalytic response - a rereading of mainstream texts in subversive, sometimes slightly perverse ways, finding evidence of homoeroticism in images and narratives. For example, Carol Griggers reads THELMA AND LOUISE as a lesbian text - quite self-conscious that hers is an aberrant reading (ie. one which goes against the obvious meaning of the text). Also see Dyer (1993) for some queer film theory and analysis.

F. POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND RACE STUDIES

Postcolonialist theory came into its own in the 1970s, after the European empires set up in the 18th and 19th centuries had been more or less dismantled. This body of theory deals with the effects of colonial activity on colonised peoples, and with the possibilities which exist for them to express themselves, attain cultural independence, and assert their identities and cultural histories.

Studies of film from a postcolonial perspective tend to take one of two approaches (though Shohat & Stam, 1994, deal with both):

(i) Analysing the relationships between film industries around the world, usually in terms of the dominant position of the Hollywood industry, and its effects on other industries. This approach concerns itself with the possibilities for national (and sub-national) cinemas to develop and survive - the debates about the Australian film industry often fall into this category. The idea of neo-colonialism comes into play in this context - ie. colonisation not in physical terms, but in cultural and
economic terms.

(ii) Analysing representations of colonised "Others" and marginalised racial groups, and discussing possibilities for them to produce images of themselves. We saw this kind of idea in relation to multicultural and Aboriginal identities in Australian films. See also Guerrero (1993) for an analysis of representations of African-Americans in US films.

G. POSTMODERNISM

There's no real way of making this idea coherent or straightforward - the term refers to so many ideas and phenomena that any account is going to be selective. But, to make it possible to deal with now, I'll talk about postmodernism in terms of three issues:

(i) A description of contemporary society, economics and politics. From being a world economy and society based on industrialisation and manufacture, we've moved to one of information exchange, backed by advances in communication technology. The new world order is characterised by globalisation (dealt with in International Comm), transnational corporations, breakdown of national boundaries, fragmentation of identity.

(ii) A description of artistic practice and cultural production - postmodernist texts have characteristics such as fragmentation of narrative structure, pastiche ("borrowing" from other texts, genres), parody (sending up other texts/genres), a breakdown of distinctions between "high" and "low" culture.

(3) A set of theoretical propositions and approaches which can be used to analyse anything. The main approach is a deconstructive one - i.e. one which looks into texts (or whatever is being analysed) to locate their contradictions, fragmentations, etc.

2. FILM PRODUCTION

Now I want to look at some of the connections between a couple of these theoretical perspectives and certain changes in film production over the last thirty years. I'll take two of the theories - postcolonialism and postmodernism (though would be equally possible to make similar arguments in relation to, say, feminism or queer theory). What I want to suggest is that during the 1960s and '70s, a strong postcolonialist sensibility developed in world filmmaking, with countries responding both to relatively recent political independence (with all its difficulties), and to the neo-colonialist Hollywood domination of world film markets. And then, in the 1980s there were certain changes which can be linked to postmodernist theory.

A. POSTCOLONIALISM - NATIONAL CINEMAS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF RACIAL MARGINALITY

(i) National cinemas:

Hollywood films were already dominating cinema screens around the world by the 1920s, because of a number of factors: the US' vibrant economy (until the Depression of the '30s); its non-involvement in World War I until the last minute (European industries couldn't be kept up during the war); its modernised industrial system. This domination has never really
disappeared, and still operates - the table attached shows the massive share Hollywood has of European film markets in 1995, and Hollywood films also dominate African, South American, Australian/NZ, Middle East and many Asian markets. In fact, Nowell-Smith argues that the popularity of Hollywood films, together with increasingly relaxed regulations on the import of US films, is going to increase and will have a drastic effect on other countries' cinemas.

This argument is essentially a postcolonialist one, which sees America as a neo-colonialist power - ie. it "colonises" countries in a cultural way, exporting its values, ideals, images all over the world via its culture industries (TV, film, advertising, the Internet). This applies even to previous coloniser countries, esp. in Western Europe, whose film cultures are effectively "colonised" by Hollywood. In accordance with postcolonial theory, awareness of this domination has, since the 1960s, resulted in quite a wide range of oppositional moves on the part of filmmakers in many parts of the world.

In the 1960s and '70s, there were efforts by many countries to develop filmmaking styles which were entirely different to classical Hollywood film and which could effectively define national cinemas. In France, Germany and Italy, for example, "New Wave" cinemas appeared in the 1960s which deliberately countered Hollywood - they moved away from action and spectacle, and from narrative resolution, developing what came to be called "European art film" - an example is LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD. As colonial empires ended, previously colonised countries also used this strategy of establishing alternative filmmaking styles and forms to set up national cinemas. African countries provide an example - esp. Burkina Faso, which developed an art cinema influenced by France, but using very "African" subject matter (eg. WEND KUUNI).

There were also highly politicised cinemas, especially in South America (eg. Argentina, Brazil, Chile) which opposed existing political regimes for their subordination to the US, and often had a go at the US directly. They often used anti-Hollywood styles and forms, deliberately avoiding the kinds of high production values and spectacle associated with Hollywood. They often used documentary forms, polemical voiceovers, and radical montages, and they borrowed indigenous cultural notions (eg. cannibalism) as a way of asserting their specific identities - for example, THE HOUR OF THE FURNACES, MACUNAIMA.

The kind of anti-commercialism which defines all of these developments also influenced filmmaking in countries with big commercial cinemas - in India, an art film industry emerged in the 1960s, and in Hong Kong, the New Wave came in the '80s, as did the Chinese Fifth Generation. These films had the same cultural prestige as the European and other films, and often did good things for their countries' international reputations by winning awards and critical accolades.

(ii) Racial marginality - minority cinemas:

Along with the development of politicised and oppositional national cinemas, the '70s saw an increasing political and cultural activism of marginalised groups in many Western countries. In America, for example, there were civil rights marches by African-Americans; in Australia, growing Aboriginal activism and the rise of multiculturalism; in Britain and other European countries (eg. France, Germany), race riots and increasing
immigration.

Not only did these marginalised groups seek to increase their political power and social/economic status, but they also began to be more assertive in the cultural arena. They worked at getting access to equipment and finance, and at developing modes of representation which would give them some kind of space in which to express their identities. In film, this has resulted in an increasingly diverse array of images of racial groups – we saw this in relation to Australia and the representation of Australian migrant identities. A few other examples (there are many more) include:

**African-American filmmaking** – African-Americans began making films in earnest in the 1970s, largely with "blaxploitation" films like SHAFT, SUPERFLY, SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAAADASSS SONG – violent, sexually explicit, misogynistic films which aimed at asserting a powerful black masculine identity. In fact, this masculinist approach has persisted in African-American filmmaking in the 1980s and '90s – for example in the films of Spike Lee or John Singleton. But the positive thing is that these films have attracted quite substantial mainstream audiences and are increasingly able to get funding. It’s likely that film representations will become more diverse as more African-Americans get access to the industry.

**Other activity by ethnic minorities in America.** The Hollywood film industry has always been quite ethnically diverse in its make-up, but until the 1970s its film texts tended to represent the Anglo-American experience at the expense of other ethnic identities. In the 1970s, Italian-American directors like Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola began making films about the Italian-American experience, and often the mafia – THE GODFATHER series, MEAN STREETS, GOODFELLAS. There had been gangster films before, but these new ones had a kind of cultural realism which reflected the filmmakers' assertion of their own ethnic identities. There's also, very recently, been some activity by Asian-American filmmakers (THE JOY LUCK CLUB, THE WEDDING BANQUET, DIM SUM). On the negative side, Native Americans have had virtually no opportunities to make films yet.

**Pakistani and Indian filmmaking in the UK** – There are large Pakistani and Indian migrant communities in Britain, esp. in London, and since the 1980s there have been a number of films focusing on that migrant experience. For example, the films written by Hanif Kureishi and directed by Stephen Frears like MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE, and SAMMY AND ROSIE GET LAID. There was also BHAJI ON THE BEACH in 1994. These films have tended to circulate mostly in the arthouse circuit, but they get pretty good critical responses and win awards at festivals – plenty of cultural credibility.

What I’m trying to indicate with both national and marginal cinemas is that, during the '60s and '70s, a split developed between mainstream, commercial cinema on the one hand, and alternative, art cinema on the other. This was linked to a postcolonialist sensibility which associated certain characteristics (strong narrative drive, spectacle, stock characters – i.e. commercial cinema) with neo-colonialist domination, and others (complex characters, indeterminate plotting, stylistic innovation – i.e. art cinema) with opposition and resistance.

B. POSTMODERNISM – GLOBALISATION, POSTMODERNIST FILMS
Postmodernism seems to be a phenomenon which has had a definite impact on filmmaking around the world. I want to concentrate on two issues here - globalisation; and postmodernist film texts.

(i) Globalisation & breakdown of national boundaries:

This is a significant theme in postmodernist theory, and we can see evidence of the process in the world world since the 1980s. This tends to work against the kind of thing I was talking about in relation to postcolonialism (ie. national cinemas), so we can see a further shift in general trends in world filmmaking.

For one thing, co-production is becoming more and more common, with funding coming from all over the place, and producers less dependent on their governments or private investors at home. On Monday I mentioned some Australian moves in this direction, and there are many countries to whom the same thing applies. For example, Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou got French funding for his film RAISE THE RED LANTERN; Indian filmmaker Mira Nair's recent KAMA SUTRA was European-funded; Juozu Itami's A TAXING WOMAN RETURNS had Italian as well as Japanese funding; Stanley Tong's RUMBLE IN THE BRONX was financed by Canada and HK; Ang Lee's THE WEDDING BANQUET had US and Taiwanese funding, Idrissa Ouedrago's TILAI was funded in Burkina Faso, Switzerland and France.

Along with this phenomenon, we're finding many filmmakers shifting between countries to make their films - eg. Nair made MISSISSIPPI MASALA in the US, and Hong Kong filmmaking has crossed over with North American in significant ways (RUMBLE IN THE BRONX, JACKY CHAN'S FIRST STRIKE). The repetition of America in these examples could be seen as evidence of the kind of domination discussed by postcolonialist theory. But, in fact, it could also be read as indicating a new openness by the American film industry to other cultural influences. A look at the Academy Awards over the last couple of years support this view - once the only avenue for non-American films was the special "Best Foreign Film" category, but now, Australian, British, or Italian films can get a look-in. They may still be Western, but the possibilities for greater diversity are there.

The implications of this are clear in postmodernist terms - it's slowly becoming more difficult to link films straightforwardly to national cinema, and therefore to national identity (we saw this on Monday with Australian film). The postcolonialist assertion of national specificity in cinema may be gradually giving way to a kind of international cinema.

(ii) Postmodernist film texts

We can also see evidence of similar kinds of changes in the types of films being produced, which we could describe as a gradual move towards a postmodernist aesthetic sensibility. Several trends can be identified:

** Breakdown in art/commercial boundaries. On the one hand, many well-known art directors have been producing films which are aimed at the minstream international market, rather than at the international art circuit. For example, Zhang Yimou's FAREWELL MY CONCUBINE, Lee Tamahori's ONCE WERE WARRIORS, Chris Noonan's BABE, Shakhar Kapur's THE BANDIT QUEEN, Neil Jordan's THE CRYING GAME; many films by Hong Kong's New Wave directors. The same is true of American art directors, whose films are becoming increasingly commercially successful - Quentin Tarantino's PULP
FICTION, David Lynch's WILD AT HEART, the Cohen brothers' FARGO. These filmmakers have tried to reconcile the two approaches, maintaining a commitment to art cinema techniques, while adopting some of the characteristics of classical Hollywood filmmaking. PULP FICTION is exemplary of this trend - it's a film which mixes popular culture (stars, popular fiction genre) with a kind of plot fragmentation, indeterminate ending, rambling structure which are more typical of art cinema. There's also a learnedness in the dialogue which seems kind of at odds with the popular-culture extreme violence.

Some critics, like Nowell-Smith, see this as a Hollywoodisation of other cinemas, but it's also possible to see some cross-fertilisation - ie. mainstream American films strongly influenced by art cinema. Scorsese's and Coppola's films are examples, as are more recent films like SEVEN, 12 MONKEYS, BATMAN.

In both cases (non-American filmmakers going commercial, American films going art), the tendency is to blur the boundaries between art and commercial film. These boundaries have never really been absolute, but it's always been possible to talk about the two as separate categories with reasonable confidence. As this becomes more difficult, the question becomes how it relates to the issue of national cinema - to some extent the commercial/art distinction has been more or less the same as the Hollywood/alternative distinction, and national cinemas used art cinema techniques precisely to distinguish themselves from Hollywood. If the present trend continues, how will countries distinguish themselves? This question is related to the globalisation issue discussed above.

**Generic complexity.** One interesting recent habit in American filmmaking is a rethinking of generic conventions - we've seen a number of films which play with the whole idea of genre in a very self-conscious (reflexive) way. Sometimes we've seen obvious parodies of genres, or of specific films - the spoof film started in the '70s with BLAZING SADDLES, and became extremely popular (repetitive) in the '80s - eg. the FLYING HIGH, POLICE ACADEMY, HOT SHOTS or NAKED GUN series. More recently, there are things like MARS ATTACKS! which play on 1950s sci-fi conventions. In other cases, the genre play is a bit more subtle. For example, the Western got a bit of a revision in the '80s, with, say UNFORGIVEN, which worried at the idea of the Western hero-killer, or BAD GIRLS, a women's Western. I think INDEPENDENCE DAY was also a bit self-conscious and campy - I can't quite believe the flag-waving was entirely in earnest.

As well, there are many films which really don't fit traditional genre categories at all. How would you characterise, for example, films like PULP FICTION, NATURAL BORN KILLERS, FROM DUSK TO DAWN, FARGO, etc? They're often called "postmodernist films", but that's not a genre classification in the traditional sense, and seems to indicate a lack of certainty about how to talk about these films.

We can also see new generic interests developing in countries other than America. For example, in the 1980s, Japanese producers made a whole array of urban comedies, often quite black and frequently concerned with food and sex. Examples are A TAXING WOMAN, A TAXING WOMAN RETURNS, TAMPOPO, THE YEN FAMILY, THE FAMILY GAME, SUMO DO SUMO DON'T. As well as making sardonic comments about contemporary Japanese society, these films were aimed at international audiences familiar with urban comedy as a genre. And, to
give another example, the Hong Kong filmmaker John Woo makes films in the
gangster genre, a staple of Hong Kong film for some time — but Woo's films
like A BETTER TOMORROW or HARD-BOILED show signs of cross-fertilisation
with American mafia films like GOODFELLAS, CASINO, the GODFATHER series.

** Recycling, pastiche. Another trend over the last half dozen years or
so is to recycle and borrow from old texts — again, this has always been
done to some extent, but it's becoming predominant. Some of the genre
reworking I mentioned is related to this trend — playing with and parodying
older genres and texts is clearly a way of recycling them. But there are a
few other trends we could notice:

- The current obsession with Shakespeare and 19th century English
literature (esp. Jane Austen) — film has always drawn on literary sources,
but there seems to be an enormous number of recent films based on books
having major cultural prestige. And often, there's little attempt to do
anything terribly interesting with them (there are a few exceptions — eg.
Lurhman's ROMEO AND JULIET, CLUELESS, RICHARD III). This kind of nostalgia
is quite typically postmodernist — the films seem to be reproducing the
surface appearances of the Renaissance and 19th century England (the films
are often very visually lush) without any great interest in their social
critiques, etc.

- Remakes of old films and making movies of TV shows or comics —
SABRINA, CAPE FEAR, THE ADDAMS FAMILY, THE BRADY BUNCH MOVIE, BATMAN, DICK
TRACY, SUPERMAN, THE PHANTOM, THE FUGITIVE, MAVERICK, etc. TV and film
have always been kind of mutually cannibalistic in this sense, but what
interests me in the current crop is how many come from '50s and '60s
TV/comic sources, rather than the '80s or '90s — more of that postmodernist
nostalgia, connected to retro fads in music and fashion.

- Self-consciously sophisticated (and sometimes extremely tacky)
references to other texts, which aren't quite adaptations or remakes of
them. For example, BARB WIRE drew on CASABLANCA, SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE on
AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER.

CONCLUSION

Developments in film theory since the 1960s can clearly be linked to trends
in film production. However, I don't want to overstate the influence of
postmodernism; postcolonialist arguments and practices are clearly still
relevant in the 1990s (as the debate about Australian film shows). I've
concentrated on postcolonialism here, but you can pursue similar kinds of
historical change in relation to, say, feminist and queer theories and
their relationships to postmodernism — see the Bibliography for references.

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