The concept of ‘postmodernism’ is a notoriously problematic one, given the diverse ways (in both academia and popular discourse) in which it has been used. The term itself has been applied to an almost bewilderingly wide range of economic, social, and cultural phenomena, with the result that many commentators on postmodernism are not necessarily referring to, or focusing upon, the same things. Moreover, the epithet ‘postmodern’ is used not only to identify particular socio-cultural and aesthetic features of contemporary life, but also to designate new forms of theorization which are held to be appropriate to making sense of the new ‘postmodern’ condition. So, while postmodern theory and the analysis of postmodernism may go hand in hand, it is not necessary that they do so. Fredric Jameson, for example, is one of the most influential analysts of postmodernism; but he himself is not a postmodern theorist, given his commitment to conventional forms of social analysis and explanation (especially Marxism).

It is also fair to say that in relation to film, postmodernism has not led to a theoretical approach or body of critical writings in the way that other theoretical perspectives, such as psychoanalysis of feminism, may be seen to have. This is because it is in the character of postmodernism to be suspicious of unified theoretical frameworks and, if postmodern ideas have had an influence on film study, it has often been through unsettling the knowledge claims or ontological assumptions of earlier theory (as in the theory of the ‘subject’ which has underpinned much psychoanalytic and feminist film theory). Moreover, the interest in postmodernism as an object of study has often been directed towards cultural shifts which go beyond a narrow attention to film, and if film has commonly been linked with the experience of modernity, then it is generally television, rather than film, which is seen to embody the postmodern.

In order to locate some of the ways in which ideas about the postmodern have influenced the study of film, it is therefore helpful to distinguish three main strands of thinking about postmodernism. Hence, the term can be seen to have been used in philosophical debates concerned with the scope and groundings of knowledge; in socio-cultural debates concerned to assess the significance of economic and social shifts in contemporary life; and in aesthetic debates concerned with the changing character of artistic practices in the wake of the ‘decline’ of modernism. These three sets of debates are not, of course, unconnected, but they are sufficiently distinct to make it useful to consider them separately.

**Philosophical debates**

In philosophy, debates about postmodernism may be seen to demonstrate a growing suspicion towards
universal' or all-embracing systems of thought and explanation. An influential source, in this respect, has been Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). For Lyotard 'the postmodern condition' may be defined in terms of a growing 'incredulity' towards what he calls 'les grands récits' or 'metanarratives' of Western thought (1979/1984, p. xxv). In this respect, the 'modern' which the 'postmodern' is seen to be superseding is not the artistic modernism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century but the 'modern' system of thought associated with the Enlightenment (and philosophers such as Voltaire, Locke, and Hume) and its association with a project of 'scientific' explanation and mastery of the natural and social world. For Lyotard, the idea of progress characteristic of Enlightenment thought is no longer tenable, and he argues that it is now impossible to believe in either the progressive advancement of thought—the emancipation of reason—or the social and political emancipation to which it was once believed such reason might contribute. 'What kind of thought', Lyotard asks, 'is able to sublate Auschwitz in a general... process towards a universal emancipation?' (1986: 6).

Lyotard's work, in this respect, may be linked to more general strains of post-structuralist thinking and to share with them a number of features. In general terms, these may be seen to include a suspicion of totalizing theories and explanations which attempt to offer comprehensive and all-embracing accounts of social and cultural phenomena; an anti-foundationalism that rejects claims to 'absolute' or 'universal' foundations for knowledge; a rejection of the 'false universalism' of ethnocentric or Eurocentric systems of thought; and an anti-essentialism that rejects both 'depth' epistemologies which seek to lay bare 'hidden' or 'essential' realities as well as ideas of a fixed notion of identity or human 'essence'. In this last respect, a critique of Enlightenment reason is likened to a critique of the unified self which was assumed to underpin it and provide it with its foundations. Thus Stuart Hall draws a distinction between 'the Enlightenment subject', which is based upon 'a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action', and 'the postmodern subject', which is conceptualized as having 'no fixed, essential or permanent identity' but rather as assuming 'different identities at different times' (Hall 1992: 277).

Postmodern theory, in this regard, lays stress on the heterogeneity and fragmented character of social and cultural 'realities' and identities as well as the impossibility of any unified, or comprehensive, account of them. As such, postmodernism is often seen as, and criticized for, embracing both a relativism which accepts the impossibility of adjudicating amongst different accounts of, or knowledge claims about, reality and an 'idealism' or 'conventionalism' which accepts the impossibility of gaining access to 'reality' other than via the 'discourses' through which 'realities' are constructed. Moreover, it has also been a tendency of many postmodern arguments apparently to belie their own precepts and 'universalize' their claims concerning the 'postmodern condition' or erect precisely the 'grand narratives' of the transition from 'modern' to 'postmodern' which it is otherwise argued are no longer possible. As Gregor McLennan suggests, 'the progressive decline of the grand narratives is itself'an alternative grand narrative' (1989: 177). In this respect, it may be helpful to distinguish the scepticism towards grand theory which is a feature of postmodern philosophy from the more substantive sociological and cultural claims which have been made concerning the character of postmodernity and postmodern culture, even though these are often interlinked (as in Lyotard's work, which is both an investigation into the status of knowledge in post-industrial society and a polemic against totalizing theory).

### Socio-cultural debates

Thus, in sociological debates, postmodernism has been used to identify the emergence of what is often believed to be a new economic and social order. This is sometimes linked to the idea of 'post-industrialism' (Rose 1991) and designated as either 'postmodernity' (Lyon 1994) or 'postmodernization' (Crook et al. 1992). 'Postmodernism' (or 'postmodernity') is, in this respect, seen to be following a period of 'modernity'. However, this is a term which is itself disputed and whose periodization is not always agreed. Thus, while 'modernity' may be seen to have emerged with the break with 'tradition' (and feudalism) represented by the advent of capitalism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is more commonly identified with the economic and social changes characteristic of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially those ushered in by industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of mass social movements. Accordingly, the main features of the emerging 'post-
modern' social order are usually identified in terms of a transition from an old industrial order to a new 'post-
industrial' one which is, in turn, characterized by a number of features: a decline in manufacturing and
the increased importance of service industries (be they business and financial or heritage and tourism);
the replacement of old models of standardized, or 'Fordist', mass production by new flexible and geographi-
cally mobile forms of 'post-Fordist' production involving batch production and the targeting of spe-
cific consumer groups, or market segments; a decline in the traditional working class and the growth of white-
collar workers and a 'service class' (whose attitudes and tastes, some accounts claim, postmodernist culture
expresses); and therefore a diminution of the significance of class identities and divisions and an increased
importance of other forms of social identity such as those related to age, gender, sexual orientation, ethn-
icity, and region. In this respect, the shift away from the politics of mass movements towards a 'politics of
difference' may be seen to link with postmodern arguments concerning the increasing contingency and
fluidity of social identities in the contemporary era.

Such shifts are also identified with the growing importance (and convergence) of the new computing
and communications technologies to the changing economic and social order. Media output and informa-
tion services not only provide a major 'force of production' of the 'post-industrial' economy, but also
increasingly exemplify 'post-Fordist' economic practices (Lash and Urry 1994). Even more importantly,
the media and the new technologies are seen to be significantly reshaping social experience and subjectiv-
ity. Two main themes can be identified. First, the speeding up of the circulation of information and images through computer-linked systems and satellites, for example, has been seen as responsible for
an increasing compression of time and space, a 'de-
territorialization' of culture and the construction of forms of identity which are no longer strongly identi-
fied with place (Harvey 1989; Meyrowitz 1985). These processes may in turn be linked to arguments about 'globalization' and the mixing, and pluralization, of cultural perspectives and influences which the accelerated flow of people, goods, services, images, ideas, and information is presumed to permit (albeit that this is still characterized by acute imbalances of power). A second theme emerging from the analysis of postmod-
ernism concerns how the media, and media images and signs, are increasingly identified as a key, if not the
key, reality for the modern citizen. The controversial French theorist Jean Baudrillard is particularly asso-
ciated with this position.

In common with post-industrial theorists, Baudrillard identifies a transition from an old industrial order based
upon labour and the production of goods to a new social reproductive order based upon communication
and the circulation of signs (Baudrillard 1975). How-
ever, for Baudrillard, this change also provides the basis of a new cultural condition. It is not simply that
we live in a world increasingly dominated by images and signs, but that these have become our primary
reality. We now live, he suggests, in a world of simul-
tations, or hyperreality, which has no reality beyond itself. Indeed, for Baudrillard (1983: 41), it is 'now impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real': all that we have access to are signs and simulations. This provocative line of argument was pushed to extremes
when, in 1991, Baudrillard examined the representa-
tion of the Gulf War as a 'virtual' event and declared that 'the Gulf War did not take place'. Although it is
possible to read this as an argument about the changed character of contemporary warfare in the
postmodern era, it also suggests some of the weaknesses of a postmodern perspective that both displays
an indifference to the actuality of events beyond the 'simulacrum' and, under the guise of radicalism, simply
joins a lengthy tradition of social commentary in attrib-
uting an exaggerated power and effectivity to media
imagery.

Although the Baudrillardian vision of a media world of simulations is undoubtedly overstated, it does none
the less direct our attention to the omnipresence within contemporary culture of media signs and images and
their increasing detachment from exterior realities. However, it is television—given its continuous avail-
ability and presence within contemporary culture—
that is most commonly associated with the postmod-
ern condition rather than film. Thus, for Kroker and
Cook it is television that is 'in a very literal sense, the
real world . . . of postmodern culture, society and
economy' (1986/1988: 268). This is not, of course,
to say that arguments about film have not been informed by postmodern ideas. However, they have tended to
be applied to individual films rather than, in the case of
television, to the medium as a whole (albeit that this has
then led to gross generalizations about the functioning of television 'in general'). At this point, it is therefore
appropriate to look at the artistic context in which
debates about postmodern film have occurred.
Aesthetic debates

If postmodern philosophy may be linked to a failing confidence in ‘universal reason’ and ideas of progress, it is also possible to see certain kinds of cultural practice—designated as ‘postmodern’—emerging as a response to a growing lack of confidence in the value or progressiveness of modernism in the arts and design. Much of the early debate about postmodernism was linked to a consideration of architecture, and it is in relation to architecture that some of these ideas emerge most clearly.

Putting it in general terms, modernism in architecture (as, for example, in the work of Le Corbusier, the Bauhaus group, Mies van der Rohe, and the International Style) has placed a particular emphasis on function and social utility. Modern architecture, in this respect, may be seen to have demanded a ‘truth to function’, involving a rejection of ornament and decoration in favour of a laying bare of the materials employed and clear display of their purpose. These architectural principles were also linked to ‘modern’ social objectives such as the provision of mass housing (even if they were not always implemented by politicians and planners with the appropriate degree of financial investment) and seen, as in the International Style, to be ‘universal’ in application. For Charles Jencks, postmodernist architecture should be seen as a response to the failure of this modernist project. Indeed, he associates the ‘death’ of modern architecture with such events as the collapse of the Ronan Point tower block in 1969 and the blowing up of high-rise blocks in St Louis in 1972. Such events, he argues, not only signalled the failure of modern architecture as ‘mass housing’, but also its failure to appeal to, or communicate with, its inhabitants (Jencks 1986: 19). Thus, for Jencks, postmodernist architecture seeks to reconnect with its occupants by rejecting the functionalism of modernism, making use of decoration and ornamentation and mixing styles from different periods and places (including the vernacular). As such, Jencks defines postmodernism in terms of the concept of ‘double coding’, involving ‘the combination of modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects’ (14).

Jencks acknowledges that while ‘double coding’ may be a feature of postmodern culture more generally, the ‘failure’ of modern architecture is not directly analogous to other arts. Andreas Huyssen (1986), however, suggests that the emergence of postmodern art, especially in the United States, may be linked to a certain kind of failure, or ‘exhaustion’, of modernism (or, more specifically, the version of modernism which became institutionalized in the United States in the 1950s). Postmodernism in this regard may be seen as a response to what Russell Berman (1984–5: 41) describes as the ‘obsolescence of shock’ and the corresponding loss of modernism’s transgressive power. Due to its incorporation into the art market and its institutionalization as ‘high art’, modern art, it is argued, has lost its capacity to challenge and provoke as well as its capacity to communicate to a public beyond a small elite.

For Huyssen, the origins of this challenge may be found in pop art of the 1960s with its reaction against the dominant aesthetic of abstract expressionism and challenging of conventional notions of art through the incorporation of elements from popular culture. As such, pop art may be seen to embody a number of features which are now commonly associated with postmodern cultural practice. These may, loosely, be identified as eclecticism, an erosion of aesthetic boundaries, and a declining emphasis upon originality. Thus, just as postmodern philosophy and postmodern culture have been associated with pluralism, so the most commonly identified feature of postmodernism has been its eclecticism—its drawing upon and mixing of different styles, genres, and artistic conventions, including those of modernism. Postmodernism, in this regard, is to be understood as a movement beyond modernism which is none the less able to make use of modernist techniques and conventions as one set of stylistic choices amongst others. It is in this sense that Featherstone describes postmodernism as demonstrating ‘a stylistic promiscuity’ (1988: 203), while other critics have placed an emphasis upon its strategies of ‘appropriation’ and ‘hybridization’ (e.g. Wollen 1981: 168; Hassan 1986: 505).

A central component of this process has been a mixing of elements from both ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture (which may in turn be seen as an example of ‘de-differentiation’, or the breaking down of boundaries, which has been identified as a feature of postmodernism more generally). As Jameson has argued, artists of the ‘postmodern’ period have displayed a fascination with popular forms of culture such as advertising, the B movie, science fiction, and crime-writing. He suggests, however, that postmodern art does not simply ‘quote'
CRITICAL APPROACHES

popular culture in the way that modernist art once did, but that this quotation is incorporated into the works to the point where older distinctions between 'modernist and mass culture' no longer seem to apply (Jameson 1988: 113). It is worth noting, again, that the 'break' between modernism and postmodernism is in this sense relative rather than absolute. Thus, as a number of commentators have noted, many of the features associated with postmodernism (such as the appropriation and juxtaposition of diverse materials) were also a characteristic of modernism even if they did not possess quite the same significance for the work as a whole (e.g. Callinicos 1989: 12-16; Wolff 1990: 98-9).

Finally, the borrowing of styles and techniques characteristic of postmodern art may be linked to a declining premium upon originality and the personal imprint of the 'author' (who, in parallel with the 'Enlightenment subject', is seen to have undergone something of a 'death'). Thus, for Dick Hebdige, the postmodern use of 'parody, simulation, pastiche and allegory' may be seen 'to deny the primacy or originary power of the "author"', who is no longer required to "invent" but simply "rework the antecedent" or rearrange the 'already-said' (Hebdige 1988: 191). However, the opposition between modernist originality and postmodernist appropriation and replication is not as clear-cut as it is sometimes argued and, even in popular culture, the 'author' has remained curiously resilient. Thus, while a film like Blue Velvet (USA 1986) clearly exemplifies such postmodern features as eclecticism, the mixing of avant-garde and popular conventions, and an ironic play with surface signifiers, it has still been very much in terms of the presumed 'author', David Lynch, that the film has been put into circulation, discussed, and interpreted.

Postmodernism and film

However, while individual films such as Blue Velvet and Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982) have figured prominently in debates about postmodernism and film, the identification of what constitutes postmodern cinema has not been straightforward. Three main kinds of concern have been in evidence. First, the organization of the film industry itself has often been taken to exemplify 'postmodern' features. Thus, it has been argued that Hollywood has undergone a transition from 'For-
tique and negation of the status quo were redefined in non-modernist and non-avantgardist terms' (Huyssen 1984: 16).

These tensions can be seen at work in the ways in which Hollywood films since the 1970s have been addressed. Since the emergence of the New Hollywood in the late 1960s it has been common to note in Hollywood films an increasing stylistic self-consciousness, use of references to film history, and quotation from other styles (e.g. Carroll 1982). The significance of this development is, however, contested. For Fredric Jameson, in his ground-breaking essay 'Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984), it is clearly to be read negatively. Jameson defines postmodern culture in terms of a 'depthlessness' representative of 'a new culture of the image or the simulacrum'; a new kind of spatialized temporality and consequent 'weakening of historicity'; and the creation of a 'new type of emotional ground tone which he describes as 'a waning of affect' (1984: 58–61). In seeking to substantiate these points, Jameson points to the 'nostalgia film' of the 1970s (such as Chinatown (USA, 1974) and Body Heat (USA, 1981)). He argues that, as a result of their use of pastiche and 'intertextual' reference, such films may be seen to exemplify a characteristic postmodern loss of historical depth. Such films, he claims, are unable to re-create a 'real' past but only a simulation of the past based upon pre-existing representations and styles (67).

In this respect, Jameson's analysis links with other critiques of recent Hollywood cinema for both its 'emptiness' and ideological conservatism. Thus, it has been common to see the formal invention and social questioning of the New Hollywood films of the late 1960s and 1970s as giving way to a more conventional and conservative Hollywood cinema from the mid-1970s onwards, especially in the wake of the success of Star Wars (USA, 1977) (e.g. Ryan and Kellner 1988). This has in turn been associated with a decline in what Kolker has referred to as 'the modernist project' of New Hollywood filmmaking and its replacement by the 'postmodern American film' which 'has done its best to erase the traces of sixties and seventies experimentation' (Kolker 1988: pp. x–xi). In this respect, Kolker may be seen to link postmodernism with a kind of anti-modernism (or 'reactionary postmodernism') involving a return to the 'classical' conventions or 'a linear illusionist style' (p. xi). However, it is not entirely clear whether the distinction he draws is so clear-cut. For, clearly, the New Hollywood films may themselves be plausibly identified as 'postmodern', given their self-consciousness about film history and film technique, extensive use of reference and quotation, and mixing of 'high' and 'low' art conventions (such as those of the European 'art' film and the Hollywood genre film). Similarly, although there has been an undoubted return to the 'classical' conventions of narrative and character in many post-New Hollywood films, this has also been accompanied by a continued (and, indeed, growing) use of quotation and mixing of genre elements.

Fredric Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche may be helpful in this regard. Although both parody and pastiche are conventionally associated with postmodernism, Jameson argues that, within postmodern culture, it is pastiche which is dominant. For Jameson, while parody involves a sense of criticism or mockery of the text or texts which are being parodied, pastiche simply consists of 'blank parody': a 'neutral mimicry without parody's ulterior motives' (1984: 64–5). Although it is not an unproblematic distinction, it does have some heuristic value in discriminating between the films of the New Hollywood and after. Thus, while a New Hollywood film such as Robert Altman's The Long Goodbye (1973) quotes from film history and reworks genre conventions with obvious parodic intent—to debunk the myth of the private eye and the values he represents—the use of film quotations and references in a 1980s 'event' film such as The Untouchables (Brian De Palma, 1987) is largely characterized by the use of pastiche (as in the clever, but politically and emotionally 'blank', reconstruction of the Odessa steps sequence from the revolutionary Russian film Battleship Potemkin, 1925). As such, the film's use of pastiche offers less a critique of the male hero (as the Long Goodbye does) than an 'alibi' for the film's ideological conservatism by inoculating the film against being read too straight (in much the same way as the more recent Independence Day (1996) also invests its conservative militarism with a measure of tongue-in-cheek knowingness).

What this suggests is that the use of 'postmodern' conventions in Hollywood cannot simply be read off as ideologically uniform (or, indeed, that Hollywood films are all usefully labelled as 'postmodern' given the degree of aesthetic diversity which characterizes contemporary Hollywood filmmaking). Thus, for Linda Hutcheon, Jameson's 'blanket condemnation of Hollywood' is overstated and fails to take into account the 'oppositional and contestatory' potential of postmod-
emism which may be found in certain Hollywood films (Hutcheon 1989: 114). Unlike Jameson, she holds out the possibility of Hollywood films making use of irony and parody both to address history (as in Woody Allen's Zelig, 1983) and to 'subvert' Hollywood from within by their challenge to audience expectations concerning narrative and visual representation (even in such a 'light' film as De Palma's Phantom of the Paradise, 1974). Nevertheless, Hutcheon also acknowledges that postmodern films are not always 'challenging in mode', that they are often likely to be 'compromised', and that, as a result of their reliance upon irony, they may also be 'ideologically ambivalent or contradictory' (1989: 107). Hence, most of her examples are actually films which are outside the mainstream of Hollywood production (Zelig, The Purple Rose of Cairo, (1985), The French Lieutenant's Woman (1981) or not Hollywood films at all (Suzanne Osten's The Mozart Brothers, Sweden, 1986), Maximi-
liam Schell's Marlene (West Germany, 1983), and Peter Greenaway's A Zed and Two Noughts (UK/Nether-
lands, 1985)). Indeed, more generally it is typical of writing concerned to identify a 'critical' strain of post-
modernism within Hollywood that it focuses on films which tend to be unusual in Hollywood's terms (e.g. Bladerunner, Blue Velvet, Thelma and Louise (1991)) rather than ones which can be seen as typical.

Accordingly, it has often been outside of Hollywood that the 'adversarial' qualities of postmodern cinema have been most firmly located. Despite its extensive use of 'allusion', Noel Carroll (1982) argues against the application of the 'postmodern' label to Hollywood filmmaking and, in a subsequent essay, identifies 'post-
modern' film with the avant-garde, and specifically with various reactions against structural filmmaking, such as 'deconstructionism, the new talkie, punk film the new psychodrama, and the new symbolism' (1985: 103). In this 'alternative' tradition of filmmaking, the reworking of old materials and representations by postmodernism is interpreted not simply as a kind of surface play (or 'depthlessness'), but as part of a critical project to 'deconstruct' and subvert old meanings as well as 'construct' new ones through the repositioning of artistic and cultural discourses. Thus, Laura Kipnis explains postmodernism in terms of a cultural practice of 're-functioning' (1986: 34), while Jim Collins argues it involves the use of 'juxtaposition' as a mode of 'inter-
rogation' (1989: 138). Thus, for Collins, the bringing together of different discursive modes in a film such as Hans-Jurgen Syberberg's Parsifal (1984) consists of more than just pastiche, or the aimless plundering of past styles, but both a questioning of earlier traditions of representation and 'a way of making sense of life in decentered cultures' (1989: 140).

In this respect, the critical engagement with prior representations has been seen as especially attrac-
tive to filmmakers who wish to challenge the tradi-
tional ways in which particular social groups or
others' (such as blacks, indigenous peoples, women, and gays) have been represented and to do justice to the complexities of identity in the postmodern era. Thus, for Janet Wolff, the 'promise of postmodernism' for feminism is that, by employing the tactics of 'pastiche, irony, quotation, and juxtaposition', feminist cultural practice may engage directly with 'current images, forms, and ideas, subverting their intent and (re)appropriating their meanings' (1990: 88). Similarly, Kobena Mercer identifies the work of black British filmmakers in the 1980s as constituting a 'kind of counter-practice that contests and critiques the predominant forms in which black subjects become socially visible in different forms of cultural representation' (1988: 8). Despite the use of the term 'counter-practice' by Mercer, such filmmaking should, nevertheless, be differentiated from the Godardian model of 'counter-cinema' (or 'political modernism') and its apparent prescription of one 'correct' way of making political cinema which is universally applicable. Rather, Mercer argues that such films as Territories (1984) and Handsworth Songs (1987) employ a postmodern strategy of 'appropriation' which, through a reworking of pre-existing documentary footage, found sound, quotations, and the like, involves both a 'dis-articulation' and a 're-articulation' of 'given signifying elements of hegemonic racial discourse' (1988: 11). In doing so, he also indicates how such work represents a 'synchronism' or 'hybridity' which, he argues, is appropriate to the 'diasporan conditions' of the black communities in Britain (11).

In this respect, Mercer's work interlinks with postmodern and post-colonial emphases on the 'anti-essentialist' nature of social and cultural identities and what Ella Shohat describes as the 'mutual imbrication of "central" and "peripheral" cultures' in both the 'First' and 'Third Worlds' (1992/1996: 329). Although Shohat warns against any simple celebration of post-colonial hybridity, which she argues assumes diverse and ideological varied forms, she also suggests how hybridity can be used as 'a part of resistant critique' (331). Thus, she and her collaborator Robert Stam echo a number of postmodern themes (such as the breakdown of confidence in 'grand narratives' and the problematization of representation) in their discussion of how the 'post-Third Worldist' films has moved 'beyond' the anti-colonial nationalism and political modernism of films such as Battle of Algiers (Algeria/Italy, 1966) and Hour of the Furnaces (Argentina, 1968) to interrogate nationalist discourse from the perspectives of class, gender, sexual orientation, and diasporic identity, and embrace what they call 'anthropophagic, parodic-carnivalesque, and media-jujitsu strategies' (Shohat and Stam 1994: 10). In all of these cases, filmmakers in the Third World are seen to make use of First World techniques and conventions but for politically subversive ends. Thus, it is argued that, 'in their respect for difference and plurality, and in their self-consciousness about their own status as simulacra, and as texts that engage with a contemporary, mass-mediated sensibility without losing their sense of activism', the 'jujitsu' strategies of such films as the Aboriginal Babakulteria (Don Featherstone, Australia, 1988) and the Philippine Mababangong Bangungot ('Perfumed Nightmare', Kidlat Tahimik, 1977) exemplify Foster's notion of a 'resistance postmodernism' (1994: 332). However, the appropriateness of the conceptualization and periodization of postmodernism in relation to non-Western cultures remains controversial, as does its relationship to the concept of the 'post-colonial', the debate around which has now effectively overshadowed earlier arguments about the postmodern.

Conclusion: postmodernism and film studies

Although the debates about postmodernism have led to various discussions about the usefulness of the term in relation to film, it is less easy to identify a distinctive postmodern film theory. Postmodern ideas, in this respect, have tended to inform other film theories, rather than develop as a body of theory in their own right. In this respect, postmodern polemics against 'universalizing' and 'totalizing' theory has led to a certain refocusing of interest on the local and the specific which may be detected in the turn away from 'Screen theory' of the 1970s towards historical research, cultural studies, and an interest in the social and cultural specificities of non-Euro-American cinemas (and a more 'multicultural' and 'dialogistic' approach to their study). One illustration of this may be found in feminist film theory.

Although feminist film theory was crucially important in the mid-1970s in introducing questions of gender into the previously sex-blind 'apparatus theory' (see Creed, Part 1, Chapter 9), it itself became criticized for an 'essentializing' conceptualization of the 'female spectator' which failed to do justice to 'the multiple
CRITICAL APPROACHES

and fluid nature' of the female spectator who 'may be, and/or be constructed as, simultaneously female and black and gay' (Kuhn 1994: 202). As a result, Kuhn argues that 'the future for feminist work on film would appear to lie in micronarratives and microhistories of the fragmented female spectator rather than in any totalizing metapsychology of the subject of the cinematic apparatus' (202). In this respect, the convergence of feminism and cultural studies around the question of audiences has already moved in that direction. However, as Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson (1988) have argued in their discussion of the relations between feminism and postmodernism, while postmodern feminism may share a 'postmodernist incredulity towards metanarratives', it 'must remain theoretical' and hold on to some 'large narratives' if 'the social-cultural power of feminism' is to be maintained. In this respect, their recommendation that postmodern feminist theory should be 'explicitly historical' and 'attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods' (1988/1990: 34) would seem to be a good recipe for 'postmodern' analysis more generally.

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FILM AND POSTMODERNISM