effects. MacCabe’s notion of the classic realist text embraced both the novel and the fiction film, definable as a text in which a clear hierarchy regulates and adjudicates between the discourses composing the text, and where this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth. Dominant cinema inherited from the nineteenth-century novel a precise kind of textual structuration which positioned the reader/spectator as a “subject who is supposed to Know.” The alternative is to fracture and disperse this Knowing subject. The classic text, whether literary or filmic, was reactionary not because of any mimetic “inaccuracies” but rather because of its authoritarian stance toward the spectator. Stephen Heath, in his analysis of realism as “narrative space,” carried this further by examining the ways that this same hierarchical logic pervades the formulaic conventions of orthodox film technique, for example those defended by filmmaking manuals (the 180 degree rule, movement, position, eyeline matches, and so forth), all of which promote the surface appearance of seamless continuity (Heath, 1981). Yet it may be argued that such a one-size-fits-all account totalizes and oversimplifies a very variegated field. David Bordwell (1985) argued that MacCabe’s analysis could benefit from the more nuanced Bakhtinian notion of the novel as the privileged site of heteroglossia (many-linguagedness) or the competition of discourses. Even in the most realistic novels “the narrator’s language will interact dynamically with several discourses, not all of them attributable to direct character speech” (ibid., p. 20).

Bordwell delineated with great empirical precision the procedures of the classical Hollywood cinema. Combining issues of denotative representation and dramaturgical structure, he highlighted the ways in which classical Hollywood narration constitutes a particular configuration of normalized options for representing the story and manipulating style. The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals as its principal causal agents. These agents struggle to solve clear-cut problems or to attain specific goals, the story ending with either a resolution of the problem or a clear achievement or non-achievement of the goals. Causality revolving around character provides the prime unifying principle, while spatial con-

The Presence of Brecht

Leftist film theory of the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the Third World continued an aesthetic discussion begun in the 1930s by Bertolt Brecht, who developed a strong Marxist-inflected critique of the dramatic realist model operative both in traditional theater and in the Hollywood film. The performances of Mother Courage by Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble at the Theater of Nations in Paris in 1956, attended by many French critics and artists, and the laudatory essays penned by Roland Barthes and Bernard Dort, fueled enthusiasm for Brecht. In 1960 Cahiers du cinéma dedicated a special issue to the German playwright, marking the first stages of a politicizing tendency which reached its apogee in the early 1970s. In his essay “Towards Brechtian Criticism of the Cinema” theater critic Bernard Dort argued that a Brechtian film criticism would place politics at the center of discussion. The Brechtian critique influenced not only film theorists (Jean-Louis Comolli, Peter Wollen, Colin MacCabe) but also countless filmmakers around the world (among them Welles, Godard, Resnais, Duras, Rocha, Straub-Huillet, Makavejev, Fassbinder, Alea, Tanner, Oshima, Sen, Ghatak, Herbert Ross, and Haskell Wexler).

There are many possible ways to approach the subject of Brecht
and cinema: Brecht’s own use of film in his theater work (for example, productions of *Mother Courage* featuring footage from *October*); the influence of cinema (e.g., Chaplin) on Brecht’s work; Brecht’s own work on film (*Kulte Wampe, Hangmen Also Die*, his many unpublished film scripts); and filmic adaptations of Brecht’s work (by Pabst, Cavalcanti, Schlöndorff, and others). What interests us here, however, is Brecht’s aesthetic relevance for film. In the various essays collected in *Brecht on Theater* Brecht theorized certain general goals for the theater which are equally applicable to film. These goals can be summarized to include the following:

1. The nurturing of the active spectator (as opposed to the dreamily passive “zombies” engendered by bourgeois theater or the goose-step automatons generated by Nazi spectacle).
2. The rejection of voyeurism and the “fourth-wall convention.”
3. The notion of *becoming* rather than *being* popular, i.e., transforming rather than satisfying spectatorial desire.
4. The rejection of the entertainment–education dichotomy, seen as implying that entertainment is useless while education is pleasurable.
5. The critique of the abuses of empathy and pathos.
6. The rejection of a totalizing aesthetic where all the “tracks” are enlisted in the service of a single, overwhelming feeling.
7. The critique of Fate/Fascination/Catharsis typical of Aristotelian tragedy in favor of ordinary people making their own history.
8. Art as a call to praxis, whereby the spectator is led not to contemplate the world but to change it.
9. Character as contradiction, a stage on which social contradictions are played out.
10. Immanence of meaning, whereby the spectator has to work out the meaning of the play of contradictory voices in the text.
11. Dividing the audience, according to class, for example.
12. Transforming production relations, i.e., critiquing not only the system in general but also the apparatuses that produce and distribute culture.

13. Laying bare the causal network, in spectacles that are realist not in style but in terms of social representation.
14. Alienation effects (*verfremdungseffekt*), which decondition the spectator and “make strange” the lived social world, freeing socially conditioned phenomena from the “stamp of familiarity,” revealing them as other than “natural.”
15. Entertainment, i.e., theater as critical yet fun, in some ways analogous to the pleasures of sport or the circus.

As well as these general goals Brecht also proposed specific techniques to achieve them, techniques transposable, up to a point, to the cinema. These include the following:

1. Fractured mythos, i.e., an anti-organic, anti-Aristotelian “theater of interruptions” based on sketch-scenes as in the music hall or vaudeville.
2. The refusal of heroes/stars, a rejection of the dramaturgy which constructs heroes through lighting, mise-en-scène, and editing (for example, the way Hitler is constructed as hero in Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*).
3. De-psychologization in an art more interested in collective patterns of behavior than in the manes of individual consciousness.
4. *Gestus*, the mimetic and gestural expression of social relationships between people in a given period.
5. Direct address: in the theater, direct address to the audience, and in film, direct address by characters, narrators, or even cameras (as in the famous opening of Godard’s *Contempt* where the camera, or at least a camera, is trained on the spectator).
6. Tableau effects, easily transposable to the cinema in the form of freeze-frames.
7. Distanciated acting: a distanciation between actor and part, and between actor and spectator.
8. Acting as quotation: a distanced style of acting, as if the performer is speaking in the third person or the past tense.
9. Radical separation of elements, i.e., a structuring technique
which sets scene against scene and track (music, dialogue, lyric) against track, so that they mutually discredit rather than reinforce one another.

10 Multimedia, the mutual alienation of “sister arts” and parallel media.

11 Reflexivity, a technique whereby art reveals the principles of its own construction.

Peter Wollen was very much influenced by Brecht in his formulations of “counter-cinema.” Wollen’s schema mapped the contrasts between mainstream cinema and counter-cinema—best exemplified by the work of Godard—in the form of seven binary features:

1 Narrative intransitivity versus narrative transitivity (i.e. the systematic disruption of the flow of the narrative).
2 Estrangement versus identification (through Brechtian techniques of acting, sound–image disjunction, direct address, etc.).
3 Foregrounding versus transparency (systematic drawing of attention to the process of construction of meaning).
4 Multiple versus single diegesis.
5 Aperture versus closure (rather than a unifying authorial vision, an opening out into an intertextual field).
6 Unpleasure versus pleasure (the filmic experience conceived as a kind of collaborative production/consumption).
7 Reality versus fiction (the exposure of the mystifications involved in filmic fictions).

Other theorists aligned Brechtian materialism with Derridean poststructuralism, arguing for films which deconstructed and made visible the operative codes and ideologies of dominant cinema. Jean-Louis Baudry spoke of the revolutionary “text of écriture” as being characterized by (1) a negative relation to narrative; (2) a refusal of representationality; (3) a refusal of an expressive notion of artistic discourse; (4) a foregrounding of the materiality of signification; (5) a preference for non-linear, permutational, or serial structures.

Many such schemas, while they were suggestive, could also be seen as simply up-ending old dyads rather than moving beyond them. Indeed, in retrospect we can see a number of dangers within Brechtianism itself:

Scientism, an exaggerated faith in the progressive narrative of science.
Rationalism, an exorbitant faith in reason and suspicion of identification.
Puritanism, the valorization of the “working” as opposed to the “enjoying” spectator.
Masculinism, a bias against “feminine” values linked stereotypically to empathy and consumerism.
Classocentrism, the privileging of only one axis of social oppression to the detriment of other axes such as race, gender, sexuality, and nation.
Monoculturalism, in that Brechtian theater might not necessarily “work” for non-European cultures.

Other dangers have to do with the way that Brechtians departed from some of Brecht’s own axioms. While Brecht endorsed popular forms of culture such as sport and the circus, the new theories offered only a festival of negations of the dominant cinema. While Brecht revelled in stories and fables, Brechtians rejected narrative. While Brecht assumed that his theater was a form of entertainment, Brechtians rejected entertainment altogether. In this sense they echoed Adorno’s call for an austere, formalist, and difficult art. Some of the theories were built on the idea of destroying spectatorial pleasure. Peter Gidal (1975) spoke of “structural materialist” films which would refuse all illusion, representing nothing beyond their own fabrication. Peter Wollen spoke positively of “unpleasure,” while Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” called for “the destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon,” adding that it was her explicit intention to analyze pleasure, or beauty, in order to destroy it. But while such a move is understandable in the light of feminist anger at masculinist representations, and while it is fine to denounce the alienations provoked by dominant cinema, it is also
important to recognize the desire that brings spectators to the cinema. A theory based simply on negations of the conventional pleasures of cinema – the negation of narrative, mimesis, identification – leads to a dead-end anhedonia, leaving little for the spectator to connect with. To be effective a film must offer its quantum of pleasure, something to discover or see or feel. Brechtian distanciation, after all, can only be effective if there is something – an emotion, a desire – to be distanced. The view that simply laments the delight that audiences take in spectacle and narrative betrays a puritanical attitude toward filmic pleasure. It is of little value for films to be “correct” if no one is interested in participating in them (see Stam, 1985; 1992).

The critique-of-ideology approach performed an enormous service by unmasking the ideology at work within cinematic forms themselves and denouncing the potential for exploitation in identification with streamlined plots, glamorous stars, and idealized characters. But as Metz points out, totally deconstructive films require a libidinal transfer whereby traditional satisfactions are replaced by the pleasures of intellectual mastery, by a “sadism of knowledge.” The pleasure in the toy is transmuted into the pleasure of breaking the toy, a pleasure, ultimately, no less infantile. Why should the spectator or theorist give up pleasure, rather than look for a new kind of pleasure? While assuming the pleasures of conventional narrative, film might also mobilize the spectator to interrogate those pleasures and make that interrogation itself pleasurable. Films can play with fictions rather than do away with them altogether; tell stories, but also question them; articulate the play of desire and the pleasure principle and the obstacles to their realization. In literary fiction, for example in Don Quixote, it was possible to love fiction and narrativity but at the same time interrogate that love. The enemy was never fiction per se but rather socially generated illusions; not stories but alienated dreams.

The Politics of Reflexivity

A key term in many of these debates was “reflexivity” and its satellite terms such as “self-referentiality,” “metafiction,” and “anti-illusionism.” Borrowed from philosophy and psychology, reflexivity referred originally to the mind’s capacity to take itself as object – for example, Descartes’s cogito ergo sum – but was extended metaphorically to the capacity for self-reflexion of a medium or language. The penchant for reflexivity must be seen as symptomatic not only of the general language-consciousness of contemporary thought but also of what one might call its methodological self-consciousness, its tendency to scrutinize its own instruments. For artistic modernism – those movements in the arts (both within Europe and outside of it) which emerged in the late nineteenth century, flourished in the first decades of the twentieth century, and became institutionalized as high modernism after World War II – reflexivity evokes a non-representational art characterized by abstraction, fragmentation, and the foregrounding of the materials and processes of art. In the broadest sense, filmic reflexivity refers to the process by which films foreground their own production (for example, Truffaut’s La Nuit Américaine), their authorship (Fellini’s 8½), their textual procedures (the avant-garde films of Hollis Frampton or Michael Snow), their intertextual influences (the parodic films of Mel Brooks), or their reception (Sherlock Jr., The Purple Rose of Cairo). By calling attention to filmic mediation, reflexive films subvert the assumption that art can be a transparent medium of communication, a window on the world, a mirror promenading down a highway.

Much has been made of what might be called the political valences of realism and reflexivity. The left wing of 1970s film theory, especially that influenced by Althusser as well as Brecht, came to regard reflexivity as a political obligation. Some version of this idea pervades the 1970s and 1980s work of such theorists as Peter Wollen, Chuck Kleinhans, Laura Mulvey, David Rodowick, Julia Lesage, Robert Stam, Colin MacCabe, Michael Walsh, Bernard Dort, Paul Willemen, and many others. Film theory in this period thus