

Prospects for a Historical Poetics of Cinema:

David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Neoformalism

BY GREG LINNELL

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS
IN AESTHETICS

SUPERVISOR: DR. CALVIN SEERVELD

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN
STUDIES
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA
SEPTEMBER 1993

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROSPECTS (INTRODUCTION)	1
CHAPTER 1: THE FORMALIST LEGACY	
<i>introduction</i>	5
<i>historical overview</i>	6
<i>key concepts and scientific-historical poetics</i>	12
<i>neoformalist appropriation</i>	22
<i>critique and summary</i>	30
CHAPTER 2: A NEOFORMALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY	
<i>introduction</i>	36
<i>Formalism, neoformalism, critics</i>	37
<i>Dreyer and Ozu</i>	41
<i>classical Hollywood cinema</i>	56
<i>contending histories</i>	68
CHAPTER 3: INTERPRETATION/ANALYSIS	
<i>introduction</i>	76
<i>making meaning</i>	78
<i>breaking the glass armor</i>	102
<i>summary</i>	121
CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL POETICS (CONCLUSION)	
<i>introduction</i>	124
<i>the “Bordwell regime”</i>	125
<i>irreconcilable differences</i>	134
BIBLIOGRAPHY	139

PROSPECTS

THIS THESIS ADDRESSES several aspects of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's film scholarship, particularly their advocacy of neoformalism and a historical poetics of cinema as evident in their history of the classical Hollywood cinema, Bordwell's monographs on film directors Carl-Theodor Dreyer and Yasujiro Ozu, Thompson's analysis of an individual film (Otto Preminger's *Laura*), and Bordwell's anatomy of academic film interpretation. Such a study can, at the outset, presume, and during its course demonstrate, a unity operative within the work of these authors because they both appropriate many of their key ideas from Russian Formalism and deploy those ideas in a similar fashion.¹ Between the two of them a substantial body of film scholarship has seen publication and its ongoing significance warrants investigation. Of all the possible inquiries to mount, however, I have chosen to focus on their appropriation of Russian Formalism, their film historiography, critique of current interpretive practice, and the predominant features of neoformalist film analysis. Consequently, I have not included a consideration of their theories of narration or cognitive psychology (except where the immediate context warranted) which also comprise important contributions to film studies because, at the moment, these areas lie outside of my competency to assess properly (drawing as they do upon research with which I have insufficient familiarity, that is, narrative theory and cognitive science).

As chapter one makes clear the literary criticism developed by the Russian Formalists provides the basis for Bordwell and Thompson's work but it is important to realize that it is a selective appropriation of the tenets of Russian Formalism that is operative within neoformalism. It is, therefore, inaccurate and preemptive to assign the problems of early Russian Formalism (or, for that matter, Anglo-American New Criticism) to *neoformalism*. This chapter, nevertheless, concludes by assembling the substantial body of critique directed against neoformalism and a historical poetics into four distinct areas; this critical agenda provides the structure for the features of neoformalism to be examined in the rest of the thesis.

¹ Bordwell and Thompson are also married.

Chapter two's study of neoformalist historiography was prompted by the reception of Bordwell and Thompson's study (together with Janet Staiger) of the classical Hollywood cinema. The study exerts an undeniable presence on the domain of American (and Canadian) film study and has been subject to both extreme praise and critique. Moreover, it presents a challenge to those post-1968 influenced film histories which would posit that a film is merely the site of contending cultural codes and that the history of film is really the tracking of the socio-political predispositions and the ideological interventions of, for example, a dominant American ideology consisting of predatory capitalism and strident individualism. In recent years any formalist-inspired historiography has been seen as a scandalous enterprise and I believe (and hope to demonstrate) that Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson offer a rigorously developed, defended, and alternative paradigm for constructing the history of cinema.

Similarly, chapter three's examination of Bordwell's analysis of the inferential and rhetorical conventions operative within contemporary academic film interpretation is set up to demonstrate how Bordwell's analysis constitutes a serious challenge for those critics who understand their interpretive practice to follow directly from their theoretical position. In response to the dominating view that criticism is concerned solely with yielding a film's meanings, the chapter also demonstrates how Thompson's neoformalist approach illuminates not just the meanings of *Laura* but also how point of view structures within the film operate at several different levels to comprise the film's dominant. There is, in other words, more to do with an individual film than make it produce yet another "reading."

Chapter four concludes the thesis by citing and analyzing what may be the most extensive critique of neoformalism's foundational and guiding epistemic presuppositions yet offered: Robert Ray's typology of two types of knowledge is examined for how it would position neoformalism and a historical poetics of cinema in relation to postmodern practices. I then attempt a brief transcendental critique of the key enabling presuppositions to be found in Ray and Bordwell's epistemologies.

Throughout the thesis I practice an immanent critique assuming that Bordwell and Thompson's scholarship and claims are to be consistent with their presuppositions. I freely alternate between passages of describing the features of Bordwell and Thompson's work and, on the other hand, pausing to consider the critiques which encourage reflection upon different features in the neoformalist enterprise. The sometimes extended descriptive passages are also necessitated by an undesirable yet pervasive feature of current film scholarship namely, the tendency to misrecognize what neoformalism is, for politically and institutionally useful ends. In other words, I remain convinced that it is important to discern between what constitutes a legitimate disagreement within the domain of film studies and what is merely a game of malicious one-upmanship. A corrective to this situation is provided by my explications of key features of Bordwell and Thompson's scholarship.

Finally, the neoformalist prospects for a different type of knowledge about the cinema are revealed not only in the arguments, concepts, and analyses of Bordwell and Thompson's writings on film history, theory, and criticism but also in the widespread and diverse critical response to those writings. Although many opponents would desire to dismiss neoformalism as entirely out of step with contemporary film studies, it is apparent that Bordwell and Thompson's work presents a knowledge of the cinema that calls for and demands a nuanced analysis. Why else would their work provoke such an extreme critical response if it were not for the fact that neoformalism truly represents a competing paradigm for film scholarship? My own response to neoformalism has been shaped by my curiosity regarding the determination about what is so compelling and captivating about the cinematic experience and by my involvement with the Redeemer College Film Review Committee. I was led to examine the formal elements that comprise a film and I found the neoformalist writings to be extremely helpful in explicating systematically the variety of components that are organized within a film. Such an analysis also functioned to anchor the interpretive process in a thorough familiarity with the film thereby serving as a corrective to those who would attribute any kind of meaning to a film. The prospects of a historical poetics of cinema, therefore,

as may be seen in the following thesis, comprise an exciting and compelling research program into a diversity of intriguing film phenomena. It is my hope that some of this excitement has been communicated in what follows.

THE FORMALIST LEGACY: *introduction*

THERE IS NO doubt of the importance that the writings of the Russian Formalists hold for Bordwell and Thompson's neoformalism, for the copious citation, deployment and explication of central Formalist tenets and principles is sustained throughout their neoformalist corpus. This chapter, therefore, will isolate and assess the ways in which neoformalism has made use of essential Formalist principles by examining several questions which may be levelled at the Formalist legacy operative within neoformalism. A brief survey of the neoformalist appropriation of Formalism, for example, cannot fail to notice that Bordwell and Thompson have stopped short of following the Formalist's direction in researching the language of film. Is it possible to separate the semiotics of the cinema from other Formalist concepts as Bordwell and Thompson have done? Why have they not moved in a corresponding direction? In addition, and as critics have noted, the relatively brief and tumultuous life of Russian Formalism did not lend itself to the uniform consolidation or stability of theoretical concepts—which, in turn, gives rise to obvious questions regarding which account of central Formalist concepts (e.g., defamiliarization, the device, motivation, the dominant) neoformalism selects and makes use of. The question of the neoformalist appropriation is qualified and given more complexity yet by the early Formalist insistence that artistic fact dictate ongoing revision of theory or concept. Consequently, the persistent valuation of evidence-driven theory has been labelled positivistic by some Formalist critics and this criticism has been extended to cover the neoformalist endeavour. Such critical inquiry seeks to determine which view of science and scholarship underwrites Bordwell and Thompson's ongoing construction of a historical poetics of the cinema.

Despite the apparent animosity that sometimes animates this criticism, these questions reveal the tremendous significance that Russian Formalism holds for neoformalism and this chapter seeks to demarcate the implications of that legacy. Before engaging in these substantial concerns, however, it is advisable to familiarize ourselves with a brief historical overview of Russian Formalism to be followed by an explication of the key Formalist concepts utilized by neoformalism. A

concurrent task will be to delimit the features and contours of the Formalist desire for a scientific poetics and to evaluate the nature of their allegiance to positivism. A survey of the neoformalist appropriation of Formalist concepts and poetics will preview what is to be pursued and examined in more depth in chapters three and four. The chapter closes with an indication of what the critics have considered problematic about the neoformalist reliance upon the Formalist legacy; is it correct to say that the deficiencies of the literary movement are inherited by Bordwell and Thompson's film theory, history, or criticism? Or are such problems abrogated by their new neoformalist context?

Finally, it is important to realize that this chapter represents an evaluation of the Formalist legacy as it is referred to in the writings of Bordwell and Thompson and not a complete critical survey which would exceed the scope of this study. The present interest in Formalism is not in the movement itself but in the particular use and function that many of its essential ideas play within neoformalism. Moreover, the purview of this analysis is further constrained by the questions which have been put to the Formalist legacy as found in neoformalism; of all the questions that could be asked, therefore, only those which many critical appraisals have voiced will preoccupy us in this chapter. Although the foregoing bears a resemblance to a "disclaimer clause" with its intention to preempt a critical response, it is instead meant to signal the fact that the rich and varied tapestry which is Russian Formalism deserves to be reviewed for its own merits and not simply because it is harnessed (in this instance) to film studies.

THE FORMALIST LEGACY: *historical overview*¹

As is made clear by the Formalists themselves it is important to provide a historical context sensitive to the polemical interactions of contending art groups and theories in revolutionary Russia because this environment had a determinative effect upon the introduction and development of new

¹ The transliteration of some Russian Formalist names is not consistent across the many different English-language sources used in this chapter. I have maintained that diversity within any quotes from these sources for the sake of accuracy, but have used the following transliterations in my text: Eikhenbaum for Èjxenbaum, Eykhenbaum, Èjkhenbaum or Eichenbaum; Tomashevsky for Tomashevskij; Shklovsky for Shklovskij; Tynjanov for Tynyanov or Tynianov.

ideas and concepts.² This section, therefore, will lay out a brief chronology of the course of Russian Formalism with an attendant emphasis on contextualizing important names, dates, and essays within the polemical and rhetorical environment extant at the time of the Formalists.

The immediate prehistory of Formalism is revelatory in that it serves to introduce many of the complex issues that would consume not only Formalism but other concurrent critical schools as well before the unfortunate imposition of official State dogma effectively ended all open debate.³ Russian Symbolism (c.1890-c.1920) sought to question the accepted uses of language and, to that end, drew up a theoretical agenda and artistic practice which opposed both the prevailing naturalist/realist conventions operative within Russian literature (i.e., those who valued the mimetic message, the content over and against formal considerations) and the positivist bias for a language praxis which valued the informative or referential function of language over and against its poetic or metaphorical usage. The primary Symbolist response found its focus in the attempt to develop a way to overcome the form-content dichotomy by transcending it by way of the direct correspondence between word and thought, sign and object: “Form becomes content, content becomes form.”⁴ Erlich notes two tendencies emerging from Symbolism one of which, the awareness of poetic technique, form, and craftsmanship, was carefully examined by one of the leading theorists of Symbolism, Andrej Belyj. Belyj’s work centred on the delineation of differing metrical patterns in a variety of Russian verse traditions and periods; such an endeavour Erlich believes to be indicative of a step towards a scientific poetics, for Belyj “...seemed to be aware that each

² As Boris Eikhenbaum notes: “In discussing the Formal method and its evolution, it is essential always to keep in mind that a great many of the principles advanced by the Formalists during those years of intense struggle with their opponents had value not only as scientific principles but also as slogans—slogans spiked with paradoxes in the interest of propaganda and opposition. To fail to take that fact into account and to treat the *Opoz* works of 1916-1921 as works of an academic character is to ignore history.” B.M. Ejxenbaum, “The Theory of the Formal Method,” Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978) 19. Eikhenbaum’s review essay was first published in 1926 and serves as a useful introduction to the development of many Formalist principles.

³ The following abbreviated history is culled from Part One of Victor Erlich’s Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine, second, revised edition (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1965), Christopher Pike’s Introduction to The Futurists, the Formalists, and the Marxist Critique, ed. Christopher Pike (London: Ink Links, Ltd., 1979), and two articles by Formalist Boris Eikhenbaum: “The Theory of the Formal Method,” as found in Matejka and Pomorska 3-37 and “Concerning the Question of the ‘Formalists’” as found in Pike 49-62.

⁴ Vjaceslav Ivanov in Erlich 35.

literary school had its own ‘poetics,’ that is, its own set of artistic devices.”⁵ Despite this promising avenue of research Symbolism found itself under hostile attack mainly due to its other developing characteristic noted by Erlich—a propensity for the mystical, abstract and otherworldly.

The main opposition to the Symbolist preoccupation with the esoteric and spiritual arose from the Russian Futurists (c. 1910-1930) who, nevertheless, shared a great deal of the Symbolist heritage, particularly its early concern with the unique properties of the poetic word. Avoiding any metaphysical imagery, the Futurists went to extreme lengths to secure the independence and priority of the poetic word’s outward form and sensory texture from its previous enthrallment to content and meaning.⁶ Poetic speech or verse was, in effect, positioned as a *sui generis* phenomenon and thus free from servicing other domains of culture and life. This move, anticipated in Bel’jy’s Symbolist research on poetic technique, effectively implied the need for the study of intrinsic factors to explain both literature and literary production, for the prevailing geneticism attributed innovation and development in the arts to the extrinsic factors of biography (i.e., the artist’s life is consciously or unconsciously mirrored in the art work), psychology (i.e., the art work is the artist’s self-expression), or society (i.e., in some way the art work reflects the predominant social reality). The Futurist *zaum*⁷ represented the overt attempt to free verse from such extrinsic factors and although not as theoretically able or systematic as Symbolism, Futurism—which was given to aphorisms and manifestoes—did propose an intriguing direction for the practice of verbal art and the concomitant study of poetic language itself.

⁵ Erlich 39.

⁶ The Futurists experimented with poetic form and texture by producing combinations of sound and word free from conventional lexical meaning: “The Futurist’s poetic games disclosed unexplored aesthetic sound texture arranged so as to fascinate by its very physiognomy, and these games served as alluring examples of a linguistic usage capable of *releasing the formal means of utterance from subordination to the semantic load*” (Ladislav Matejka in Pike 10, italics mine). The Futurist severance of form from meaning is developed in the early Formalist emphasis on the distinction between practical and poetic language.

⁷ “‘Zaum’ suffers from inconsistency in the description of it by both its futurist practitioners and its scholars, but basically it meant...the use of words as sound (either phonetically altered ‘real’ words or quite newly invented ‘words’) to convey to the reader, apart from any conventional ‘meaning’, a meaning or meanings (connotative, emotive, even mystical) that were purely sound based.” Pike 7.

Russian Formalism (1915-1930) endeavoured to meet the challenge posed by both Symbolism and Futurism⁸ and did not come to this task naïve of the latest scholarship for several sources lent themselves to their inquiry. The focus found in Symbolism and Futurism upon poetic technique, form and craftsmanship was complemented by several features of the new Saussurean paradigm in linguistics which the Formalists, in turn, revised and applied to the study of literature. As Peter Steiner has shown there is no simple equivalence between Saussure's ideas and those employed by the Formalists, and yet there is no doubt that the importation of *langue* and *parole*, synchrony and diachrony exercised an important influence upon, for example, Tynjanov and Jakobson.⁹ The broad impact of Saussure, however, was to suggest several ideas that were taken up and refined for the study of literature and, in mature Formalism, literary history. The component units or elements of literature, for example, were to be isolated and analyzed for how they functioned within the system of the individual text. In addition, literature itself was to be understood as a system that could be examined synchronically (the literary system at a given moment) and diachronically (which suggested to the Formalists a history or evolution of the literary system).¹⁰

The emergence of Formalism must also be seen against the backdrop of an emerging critique of Positivism. The Formalist objection to a Positivist geneticism wherein the originating conditions of a literary work were detailed and assumed an explanatory function for that work (e.g., a

⁸ Eikhenbaum in 1929: "In recent years literary specialists and critics have focused attention primarily on questions of literary 'technology' and on elucidating the specific features of literary evolution....It was the natural consequence of our having experienced a boom in literature that culminated in literary revolution (Symbolism and Futurism). Exactly that literary boom was what the enormous corpus of theoretical writings produced over the past fifteen years registered and ramified" Eikhenbaum, "Literary Environment" in Matejka and Pomorska 57.

⁹ see Peter Steiner, "Three Metaphors of Russian Formalism," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 2:1b (1980/81) 92ff. Tynjanov and Jakobson's 1928 essay "Problems in the Study of Literature and Language" (Matejka and Pomorska 79-81) cites Saussure's synchrony/diachrony and *langue/parole* couplets and goes on to hint at how they may be imported and revised for the study of literature. For more on the importance of Saussure for Formalism see Tony Bennett's *Formalism and Marxism*. (London and New York: Methuen, 1979) particularly chapter 3.

¹⁰ Pike 8. Although Shklovsky was critical of Potebnja's legacy (see Shklovsky's "Art as Technique"), the link between verse and linguistics was suggested by Potebjna who also posited no one-to-one or fixed correlation between word and idea. This fits well with Saussure's view of the arbitrary relationship between signified and signifier. Moreover, for Potebjna poetry was the ideal for language because it could represent the freedom of the word from the tyranny of finding its *raison d'être* solely in the communication of an idea. This conception of the independence of poetic language as found in Potebjna (1835-1891), Veselovskij (1838-1906), and Peretc (n.d.), antedates its usage by both the Symbolists and Futurists. See Erlich 23-26.

causal determinism) was part of a larger concern to preserve literature from any reductivist method which would threaten the autonomy of the aesthetic. This attempt to preserve a unique domain for the literary is clearly evident in the early Formalist writings which defended the idea that the proper object of literary scholarship is to be the literary fact; the early Formalists desired to be known as “specifiers” (of the literary fact) for this label was commensurate with their intended project. The attempt to bracket and set aside the consideration of social, psychological and ideological factors and instead engage in the analysis of literature itself marks out the essential difference of early Formalism *vis-à-vis* its post-Revolutionary development.

With the ascendancy of Marxist-oriented literary scholarship and particularly after the 1924 publication of Trotsky's Literature and Revolution that contained a critique of Formalism, the Formalists found themselves pressured into acknowledging and incorporating extra-literary and non-aesthetic issues into their work.¹¹ Increasingly their early commitment to specifying the unique properties of literary art was construed as counterrevolutionary because of their refusal to integrate ideological reality. In this context, Eikhenbaum's 1924 article “Concerning the Question of the ‘Formalists’” and his 1926 essay “Theory of the Formal Method” together functioned as an apologetic meant to stake out the legitimate scope of Formalist study by understanding it to be a scientific and non-ideological enterprise.¹² Negotiating this position was made all the more

¹¹ It must not be inferred that pre-Revolutionary Formalism was static, harmonious, or monolithic. As several histories of the movement reveal, its heterogeneity was insured by not only its two locations at Moscow and St. Petersburg but also the indigenous talents and interests of each group. This diversity of Formalist opinion, and, ironically, its influence (despite the increasing animosity it faced), were enriched and ensured in the post-Revolutionary period by an important institutional event. “...both the early groups were dissolved in the mid-twenties and most of their members were incorporated into two newly organized institutions—in the case of the Moscow Circle, the State Academy for the Study of the Arts...and in the case of [St. Petersburg-based] OPOJAZ, the State Institute for the History of the Arts. Here the original Formalists began to collaborate with other students of literature and entered into an exchange of ideas that was significant to both sides; many Formalist notions were accepted by non-Formalists, and on the other hand, the Formalists modified their views in response to the intellectual trends around them.” Steiner 60.

¹² Eikhenbaum wrote in 1924 that “...formalism and Marxism cannot be ‘opposed’ to each other: formalism is a system of an individual science, Marxism is a philosophical-historical doctrine. It is impossible for Marxism to be opposed...because these are incommensurable things....Formalism does not ‘oppose’ itself to Marxism, but simply protests against the simple transfer of socio-economic problems into the sphere of the study of art....Within the limits of literary science, formalism is a revolutionary movement, in that it liberates literary science from old, outworn traditions and compels a renewed examination of all basic concepts and schemes” Eikhenbaum, “Concerning...” in Pike 59-61. In 1926 Eikhenbaum reaffirmed the Formalist’s commitment to the

difficult because many literary groups fought vociferously for the privilege of erecting a new proletarian culture and many opportunistically allied themselves with the State-sponsored Marxist position. As it was impossible for the Formalists to construe their endeavours as Marxist, they sought to position themselves as indifferent to ideology and interested solely in the facts of a literary system. The reaction among Marxist-oriented critics was to accuse the Formalists of a positivism that would ultimately threaten the ideological foundations of the new State by its systematic denial of historical and societal factors. Although the Formalists did begin to consider extra-literary aspects of the literary system by the late 1920s, such a move did not appease the many critics who recognized their advantageous position and used it to drown out the Formalist voice and to construct a politically useful caricature of the movement. Capitulating to the pressure, Shklovsky disowned many of the Formalist tenets in January 1930; the dissolution of the Formalists and other non-Marxist groups became an irreversible fact two years later in 1932.¹³

This section has provided a brief examination of the historical, theoretical and political contexts which served to both advance and impede Russian Formalism. Although this has been an incomplete account of all that transpired during those turbulent years, it is possible to determine the most proximate and influential sources that had a hand in shaping the general contours of Formalism. The attention devoted to examining literary technique, production and form effectively diminished the role of thematic or content analyses and suggested the possibility of overcoming the inveterate problems associated with the form/content dichotomy. The intrinsic nature of Formalist

practice of non-ideological literary science by emphasizing the relative independence of fact from theory: "...we value theory only as a working hypothesis with the help of which facts are disclosed and take on meaning....We establish concrete principles and adhere to them to the extent they are proved tenable by the material. If the material requires their further elaboration or alteration, we go ahead and elaborate or alter them....What I consider most important in scholarship is not erecting schemes but being able to see facts. Theory is essential for this, because it is precisely in the light of theory that facts become visible, that is, really become facts. Theories may perish or change, but the facts discovered and established with their help abide." Eikhenbaum, "The Theory..." in Matejka and Pomorska 3-4, 24.

¹³"A decree issued by the Central Committee in 1932 pronounced the dissolution of all literary groups. In principle this was aimed at extremism and at the monopoly then enjoyed by the Rappist Averbach, but in fact it was inspired by Stalin's determination to bring all literature under party control. This is an important date, marking the end of an era of tolerance, of relative freedom and of that absence of direct Party interference in cultural affairs. ...The colourful profusion of schools and groups gave way to a single organization: the Soviet Writer's Union, responsible for seeing to it that the dogma of socialist realism was respected." G. Conio in Pike 45, footnote 2.

study coupled with the new linguistics allowed for the recognition of the systematic and structural character of both the literary text and literature itself. The Formalist position on Positivism and concurrent call for a scientific poetics comprised more than a mere rhetorical stance meant to ward off critique; the emphasis on the literary fact, however, although an admirable effort to redirect literary scholarship from its previous eclecticism and reductionism, remains a problematic component of the Formalist legacy for neoformalism. Although an inadequate epistemology and view of science appears to have underwritten the broad scholarly project of Formalism, Bordwell and Thompson's neoformalism makes it clear that the most beneficial components of the Formalist legacy are to be found in the basic concepts it deployed in encountering the literary text and it is to these that we now turn.

THE FORMALIST LEGACY: *key concepts and scientific-historical poetics*

In the move from an understanding of the general position and function of Russian Formalism within the literary criticism of the pre- and post-Revolutionary period to a more specific encounter with several key concepts and terms it becomes only too evident that, although Formalism demonstrates an overarching coherence and integrity *vis-à-vis* its purposes, there remains a high degree of heterogeneity within the movement. While Erlich offers the chronological distinction between an early, pure, and militant Formalism and a late, proto-Structuralist Formalism, Steiner's conceptual appraisal discerns at least four concurrently operative master metaphors (the mechanistic, organicistic, systematic, and linguistic) which comprise Formalism, and Jefferson's overview is organized around "the ubiquity of the differential principle" which she believes to be the *élan vital* which motivates and distinguishes Formalism.¹⁴ Each of these frameworks seeks to explain the diversity and unity to be found in Formalism and this section will implicitly use them to contextualize an explication of key Formalist concepts. In addition, a closer examination of the totality of the Formalist endeavour as manifested in its attempt at a scientific and historical poetics

¹⁴ see Ann Jefferson, "Russian Formalism," *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*, eds. Ann Jefferson and David Robey, (London: Batsford Academic & Educational Ltd., 1982) 16-37.

will function to introduce questions pertaining to the neoformalist practice of a historical poetics of the cinema.

Previously it was suggested that Symbolism and Futurism, the negative reaction to positivistic geneticism, and the growing Marxist presence in post-Revolutionary literary scholarship were compelling extrinsic forces in the further development of a Formalist approach to both the literary object and a literary science. As the three frameworks listed above (Erlich, Steiner, and Jefferson) indicate, there is reason to believe that factors immanent to Formalism were also conducive to its development and this is clearly evident in its continued review and reworking of basic concepts. Implicit in all three frameworks is the conviction that the concepts deployed by Formalism were of such a nature as to encourage revision and growth. Indeed, for these critics, part of the positive evaluation of Formalism is that its analytical concepts were fecund or generative and thus went a long way in securing an autonomous domain of investigation for a new discipline. It is to these concepts that we now turn.¹⁵

Victor Shklovsky's 1917 essay "Art as Technique" is usually singled out for critical attention due to its establishment of a perceptual and technical paradigm for understanding the process, purpose and function of art. Shklovsky maintains that art defamiliarizes the habitual or automated in our lives by forcing an intensified perceptual encounter with the art object or event. The elements or devices operative in an artwork are arrayed and constructed to impede, trouble, and slow down easy recognition and to draw attention to (and maintain it on) the artwork.¹⁶ A variety of devices are employed by the artwork to accomplish defamiliarization and the critic is to note

¹⁵ Our survey of Formalist terms is circumscribed by the selective appropriation of Formalism by neoformalism; only those Formalists writings which Bordwell and Thompson specifically cite will be examined. See, however, the introduction's explanation of the purview of this study (i.e., the exclusion of an indepth consideration of the neoformalist use of cognitive psychology and its theory of narration).

¹⁶ "Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war....And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*" Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays, eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) 12.

the ways in which these devices are harnessed to achieve this effect. Boris Eikhenbaum's "Concerning the Question of the Formalists" (1924) reaffirmed this insight and refined it by suggesting that the artwork was a constellation of devices and that all of these devices have a formal function and are integral to the specific form of the artwork.¹⁷ The analyses of technique and construction are, therefore, central to the Formalist project; a functional structuralism, in which the role of each device within the artwork would be specified, became an ongoing predisposition of Formalism.

"Thematics" (1925) saw Boris Tomashevsky introduce a means to distinguish between what motivated the inclusion of a particular device in the artwork.¹⁸ The role of a given device within the artwork is always determined or motivated by compositional, realistic, or aesthetic justification; a novel, for example, may demand the inclusion of a character or setting on nothing but compositional or realistic grounds. The character or setting is said to be motivated and its inclusion is over-determined and thus hard to discern as a device *per se* (its motivation is adequately justified and thus conceals its status as a device). A character or setting whose role is not explained or justified in either of these two ways will draw attention to itself as a singular, seemingly unmotivated device thus threatening the integrity of the artwork if it calls for a degree of realism¹⁹ or if the artwork's coherence demands a compositional unity. When a device is unaccompanied by the aforementioned motivations Tomashevsky designates this as aesthetic motivation, for the device is included precisely due to its intrinsic value and not because of demands external to it. If the

¹⁷ "Where the early view [Shklovsky 1917] saw a work of art as the sum total of its devices, the later view [Eikhenbaum 1924] took account of the fact that literary devices themselves were subject to the automatization of perception. This means that the habitual/made-strange opposition is now located within literature [and all of art] itself and is no longer co-extensive with the distinction between literature and non-literature [that is, the aesthetic and non-aesthetic, or, to use the early Formalist categories, the poetic and the practical]." Jefferson 21. This shift makes possible a much more dynamic view of the artwork for a device does not automatically defamiliarize and only does so depending upon its function within an artwork. It is possible to distinguish between devices which are either active or passive, defamiliarized or automatized, in the foreground or part of the background in the artwork and Jakobson's conception of the dominant capitalizes on this development. Moreover, since an artwork is now conceived as an interplay of active and passive devices (and not composed solely of active, defamiliarizing devices), the Formalists allowed for the inclusion and analysis of non-aesthetic formal elements thus opening up the system of the artwork and avoiding an art-for-art's-sake position. See Jefferson 23.

¹⁸ Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics" in Lemon and Reis 61-95.

¹⁹ Such is the case when, for example, in a poorly scripted mystery film a previously unknown character is revealed near the end of the narrative as the criminal. Such an occurrence, in this instance a *deus ex machina*, signals the presence of an unmotivated device.

aesthetically motivated device predominates, it is said to “lay bare” or foreground the artistic structure the device belongs to. In many situations, however, the device is subservient to the system that is the fully integrated artwork and does not demonstrate a formal or functional independence. Based on the difference between devices which are either motivated (and relatively imperceptible) or laid bare (and relatively perceptible), Tomashevsky distinguished two opposed and paradigmatic styles, respectively the classical realist and modernist text.²⁰ Tomashevsky thus made possible the determination or specification of a device’s function based on its motivation (e.g., if a device is compositionally motivated then its function within the artwork must be assessed with this in mind) and, moreover, linked a device’s ability to defamiliarize to the presence or absence of a motivation accompanying that device.

That the artwork was understood to be a system or constellation of devices rather than a disordered agglomeration suggests that the Formalists understood there to be an organizing principle operative within the artwork. Roman Jakobson’s 1935 review lecture on the Formalist use of the concept of the dominant in an artwork articulates several important and interrelated theses which specify how the dominant is to be understood.²¹ The dominant is the focusing and organizing component which transforms and rules over the other devices in an artwork. Early Formalism (Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique”) defined an artwork as the mere sum of its devices, the evolution of which was nothing more than the substitution of one device for another. Mature Formalism understood the artwork as a hierarchical set of devices ruled by the dominant, the evolution of which was signalled by a shift in the dominant. What is considered dominant is, in turn, conditioned by the artistic period or trend which provides the context or background for all artworks; relative to its changing aesthetic background, then, the dominant is what is considered

²⁰ “The first, characteristic of writers of the nineteenth century, is distinguished by its attempt to conceal the device; all of its motivation systems are designed to make the literary devices seem imperceptible, to make them seem as natural as possible....But this is only one style, and not a general aesthetic rule. It is opposed to another style, an unrealistic style, which does not bother about concealing the devices and which frequently tries to make them obvious... .” Tomashevsky 94. When cast in cinematic terms the distinction between these two styles and how they make use of the device bears a resemblance to what Bordwell and Thompson classify as the classical Hollywood cinema and its opposite, namely the modernist, art cinema of, for example, Dreyer and Ozu.

²¹ Jakobson, “The Dominant” in Matejka and Pomorska 82-87.

determinative of, and, therefore, valued as a mandatory or indispensable component of, an artwork. In addition, Jakobson suggests that the dominant operates at many different levels; the individual artwork, an artistic canon or school, and even an epoch are ruled by (often varying and sometimes oppositional) dominants.

The dominant is historically (and, therefore, socially) conditioned and this suggests the need to explicate the crucial link between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic. Two essay's—Tynjanov's "On Literary Evolution" (1927) and Eikhenbaum's "Literary Environment" (1929)²²—query this link and together define it. Tynjanov proposes that literature *in toto* is a system and that every element or device within the system is interrelated; although not every relation is of equal importance a change in the functional role of one device (e.g., a shifting dominant) brings about changes in those devices which are in relation to it. The change in function of a particular device in one literary work can have repercussions on the role of the same device in other literary works. Other non-aesthetic systems contiguous to the literary system provide a context or background and convey a certain necessity upon the structural and functional organization of a literary work (i.e., the Formalists did not grant credence to the idea of the unmediated creative self-expression or intention of an *auteur*).

Eikhenbaum's starting point in his "Literary Environment" is the awareness that the Russian literary scene had changed significantly with the occurrence of the October Revolution.²³ The realization of the significance that extrinsic factors hold for literary history (i.e., that they are in some way determinative for the literary sphere and its evolution) leads Eikhenbaum—like Tynjanov—to maintain that historical connections and interrelationships must be examined and theoretically concatenated if literary history is to ever develop as a science. There are several approaches to this problem which Eikhenbaum discounts almost immediately: a direct causal

²² Both essays are found in Matejka and Pomorska.

²³ "The writer's professional status has changed, the reader-writer relationship has changed, the customary conditions and forms of literary endeavor have changed; a decisive shift has occurred in the very sphere of the literary environment, bringing to light a whole series of facts concerning the dependence of literature and the dependence of its evolution on conditions forming outside literature." Eikhenbaum, "Literary..." in Matejka and Pomorska 58.

relationship between auteur self-expression and artwork,²⁴ between “spirit of the age” or ideology and artwork, and between economic base and superstructural artwork, are all models which would arrogate and thus reduce the artwork to something other than the aesthetic. They may not, therefore, serve as paradigmatic for art history.²⁵ All of the relations just listed by Eikhenbaum (in footnote 25) are predicated upon the mature Formalist conviction that only the charting and investigation of the complex mediation of aesthetic and non-aesthetic systems can provide an accounting of what is needed for art history.

Before turning to an examination of the scientific-historical poetics propounded by the Formalists, it is necessary to consider Jan Mukarovsky's concept of the aesthetic norm for it also plays a role in neoformalism. Mukarovsky's development of a structural aesthetics recapitulates many of the previously examined components of the mature Formalist position but in a much more sustained and systematic fashion. “The Aesthetic Norm” (1936),²⁶ which appears in what Peter Steiner describes as the middle phase of Mukarovsky's structuralist period,²⁷ concerns itself

²⁴ Osip Brik's 1923 manifesto “The So-Called Formal Method” provides a clear example: “*Opojaz* proposes that *there are no poets or literary figures, there is poetry and literature*. Everything that a poet writes is significant as part of his work in the common good—and quite insignificant as a manifestation of his ‘I’. If the poetic work is understood as a ‘human document’, as a diary entry, then it is interesting to the author, to his wife, his relatives, friends, and to maniacs such as those passionately seeking the answer to the question ‘did Puskin smoke?’—and to no one else.

The social role of the poet cannot be understood by an analysis of his individual qualities and habits. *It is essential to study on a mass scale the devices of poetic craft*, what distinguishes them from adjacent domains of human labor, and to study the laws of their historical development. Pushkin was not the creator of a school, but only its chief. Had Pushkin not existed *Evgeny Onegin* would all the same have been written. America would have been discovered even without Columbus.

The poet is master of the word, language-maker, who serves his class, his social group. What he writes about is suggested to him by the consumer. *Poets do not invent themes, they take them from their environment.*” The entire manifesto is to be found in Pike 47–48, footnote 13.

Erlich summarizes: “...the Formalist theoreticians were intent on side-stepping the vexing issue of the creative personality. Literary technology [principles of construction] seemed to them a much firmer ground than the psychology of creation. Hence the tendency to treat literature as a suprapersonal, if not impersonal, phenomenon, as a deliberate application of techniques to ‘materials’ rather than as self-expression, as a convention rather than as a confession.” Erlich 190. But see chapter two's discussion of Tomashevsky's conception of the biographical legend.

²⁵ “Literature, like any other specific order of things, is not generated from facts belonging to other orders and therefore cannot be reduced to such facts. The relations between the facts of the literary order and facts extrinsic to it cannot simply be causal relations but can only be the relations of correspondence, interaction, dependency, or conditionality.” Eikhenbaum, “Literary...” in Matejka and Pomorska 61.

²⁶ Jan Mukarovsky, “The Aesthetic Norm,” *Structure, Sign and Function: Selected Essays by Jan Mukarovsky*, trans. and eds. John Burbank and Peter Steiner, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978) 49–56.

²⁷ see Peter Steiner, “Jan Mukarovsky's Structural Aesthetics” in *Structure, Sign...*, especially xxii–xxv.

with an explication as to how to theorize the normative context of, or background to, the individual artwork. Realizing that some norms resist codification more than others and that the aesthetic norm belongs to this group, Mukarovsky must struggle to formulate how such a norm can claim or express universality and thereby retain its nomothetic character. This problem is compounded when Mukarovsky maintains that the aesthetic norm is activated only in relation to an individual, particular artwork. The question becomes whether the individualization of the aesthetic norm, in the encounter with an artwork, precludes the possibility of its even being a norm. Mukarovsky responds by positing that the uniqueness or individuality of an artwork is not absolute for it always shares at least some features or characteristics with those artworks surrounding it and, secondly, that no artwork perfectly fulfills or actualizes the aesthetic norm. In fact, many artworks are valued precisely because they a) are the site of contending aesthetic norms, b) so frequently violate the current dominating norm and c) do not pretend to a perfect correspondence to it.

Mukarovsky also engages in a type of modal analysis of norms which, when present in an artwork, are transformed by their new context. Material norms are those norms which accrue to the unique properties of the materials used in the production of the various art media: words, stone, paint, and film stock have innate characteristics which are partly determinative for the formation of the artwork at hand. Technical norms are those conventions, habits, regularities, and traditions which accompany (and are inevitably brought to bear on) the construction of any artwork. Practical norms are those ethical, political, social, legal, religious, etc., norms which are harnessed to the purposes of the artwork and become part of its material by way of theme. Finally, different systems of aesthetic norms may be quoted and thus reworked within the confines of a particular artwork. At this point, it is possible to see how Mukarovsky systematizes mature Formalism (the ongoing development of which had been halted in the early 1930s): the artwork is understood to be a dynamic system with a dominant organizing principle, of a specifically aesthetic character, which works to transform both other aesthetic and non-aesthetic norms that are used as material in the construction of the artwork. This conception of the artwork implies the complexity of any

attempt at a history of art, a complexity of which the mature Formalists seemed aware although unable to elaborate systematically.

The preceding outline of some of the key Formalist concepts indicates the inclinations and components which the Formalists brought to bear on their attempt at a scientific-historical poetics. Ostensibly, their poetics were to resist the prescription of what an artwork should or should not achieve and, instead, to be an ideologically indifferent description and analysis of the system of devices, accompanying motivations, and dominants drawn upon in the defamiliarization process. They essayed to free literary scholarship from the traditional imperatives to offer interpretations, to isolate meanings²⁸ and to engage in non-aesthetically based evaluations. In the struggle to preserve a domain specific to literary scholarship and centred on the literary fact, the Formalists shirked any so-called civic responsibility to construct a Marxist (or any other ideologically-complicit) poetics which would have been politically prudent. The hallmark of the Formalist poetics is clearly evident: the desire to pare down, to limit and specify the field of inquiry via the relative autonomy of literature (and, by extension all of art) from other distinct areas of culture and life.

The commendable features of the proposed poetics are, however, also the foci of critique. Erlich, in a critique of early Formalism, speaks of "...the tendency...to reduce art to its distinguishing feature"²⁹ (the literary device or literary fact) and the concurrent failure to recognize the importance of extra-literary material which inevitably enters the literary work. Although desiring to prevent the subsumption of the literary work by the analyses utilized for other cultural domains, the early Formalist reaction propounded a view of literature and dealt with the literary text in a way which threatened to be as impoverished as the traditional approaches it undertook to displace.³⁰ Moreover, the predilection for those artworks which unequivocally demonstrated the

²⁸ "...for the Formalists meaning and ideas are neither here nor there; like reality, they enter into literature as part of the available material which is then put to literary use by the functional devices of the work." Jefferson 27.

²⁹ Erlich 198.

³⁰ In discussing Shklovsky's (over)emphasis on ascertaining the compositional architecture of Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment and Dickens' Little Dorrit Erlich states "...he [Shklovsky] went so far as to maintain that the discursive passages in Crime and Punishment—for example, the dialogue between Raskol'nikov and Svidrigajlov

nature of the device by loosening it from any traditional motivation (and this predilection was all too apparent in the Formalist appraisal of Futurism and the literary avant-garde) reveals an unacknowledged approbative estimation of the unfamiliar, of that which radically departed or diverged from the conventional.³¹ The endeavour to suspend all value judgements and to identify/isolate the function of a given device as definitive for literary scholarship betrays what several critics analyze as an early and foundational character trait of Formalism which it never managed to consciously control: a naïve, cursory, eclectic and, therefore, unsuitable epistemological basis for their work.³² Their epistemic commitment is seen to comprise the Achilles heel of Formalism and thus to threaten their prospect for a coherent and integrative poetics.

We have seen how early in its development Formalism sought to situate itself as a scientific endeavour in opposition to the traditional, preeminent methods of literary analysis which the

about the immortality of the soul—were fundamentally delaying devices, interpolated into the narrative for the sake of suspense. Even if one sees some merit in Šklovskij's unorthodox notion of Crime and Punishment as a mystery story 'complicated by philosophical materials' one must insist that in the process of this 'complication' philosophical problems acquired in Dostoevskij's novel a status much more central than that of mere 'interpolations'. A similar, if somewhat subtler operation was performed on Little Dorrit. Here, too, Šklovskij tended to play down the ideological implications of the novel. He suggested that the scenes in the debtors' prison were needed chiefly in order to delay the solution of the riddles inherent in the plot." Erlich summarizes this problem as a "reluctance to admit that an idea could be 'assimilated' so successfully as to become one of the pivotal elements of esthetic structure." Erlich 246, 247. Noël Carroll offers a similar critique of the early Formalist construal of intellectual and moral material or theses as merely the pretext for the operation of a device; see Noël Carroll, "Formalism and Critical Evaluation" The Reasons of Art ed. Peter McCormick (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985) 334.

³¹ "As spokesmen for the literary avant-garde, the Formalists were bound to set much store by the violation of artistic canons and by novelty in general. As estheticians they saw the core of esthetic perception and the source of artistic values in the 'quality of divergence' (*Differenzqualität*). This concept seems to have meant to the Formalist theoreticians three different things: on the level of the representation of reality, *Differenzqualität* stood for the 'divergence' from the actual, i.e., for creative deformation. On the level of language it meant a departure from current linguistic usage. Finally, on the plane of literary dynamics, this catch-all term would imply a deviation from, or modification of, the prevailing artistic norm." Erlich 252. Ann Jefferson's overview of Russian Formalism makes *Differenzqualität* the fundamental organizing principle operative in the deployment of Formalist concepts: "The Formalist strategy for dealing with the problem of definition not only had the virtue of ensuring that literature could not be reduced to anything else, but proved also to be immensely productive in the elaboration of every aspect of Formalist theory. The Formalist definition of literature is a differential or oppositional one: what constitutes literature is simply its difference from other orders of facts. Indeed the object of literary science turns out not to be an object at all, but a set of differences, and the science will consist in 'the study of those specifics which distinguish it [i.e. literature] from any other material'... ." Jefferson 19.

³² "Where there is no clear awareness of the underlying principles, philosophy gets in just the same, but it does so through the back door—in an 'implicit', that is, undigested, form. By the same token, where a critical movement lacks clear-cut criteria of evaluation, the inevitable value judgments are more often than not projections of the critic's personal taste, or of the particular 'poetics' which he happens to favor." Erlich 281-282.

Formalists believed to degenerate all too quickly into reductive templates applied indiscriminately to literature. The advent of aggressively Marxist approaches signalled the arrival of a new front in the war of independence to secure a unique method and field of study for the arts and made necessary the Formalist insistence that ideology and literary poetics addressed different domains of reality, were incommensurable and thus need not threaten each other. The search for the simple and pure literary fact unadulterated by fixed theoretical or ideological commitments is clearly an extreme empiricist or positivist view of science and does not make for a promising epistemology.

At this point, and given the countering opinions of commentators, it is readily apparent that the Formalist reception of positivism was complex. While the Formalists disapproved of the geneticistic literary scholarship that they associated with positivism,³³ Peter Steiner has shown that they embraced a positivist epistemology—albeit, as noted above, to distance themselves from traditional scholarship and later on to avoid a direct confrontation with their Marxist adversaries.³⁴ The adoption of this positivist epistemology, however, definitively shaped a Formalist poetics that was characterized by an exclusionary focus on the aesthetic fact to the detriment of both an adequate art history and the theorization of the interrelationships between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic,³⁵ an unrecognized (and, therefore, unexamined) bias for modernist works that clearly

³³ see pages 9-10 above.

³⁴ “In this state of affairs it was vital to counter the subjective-aesthetic principles that had served the Symbolists as inspiration with propaganda for an objective-scientific attitude toward facts. That is the source of the new spirit of scientific positivism that characterizes the Formalists: the rejection of philosophical premises, psychological or aesthetic interpretations, and so forth. The break with philosophical aesthetics and ideological theories of art was dictated by the very state of affairs. It was time to turn to the facts and, eschewing general systems and problems, to start from the center—from where the facts of art confront us. Art had to be approached at close range, and science had to be made concrete.” Eikhenbaum, “The Theory...” 7. It is impossible not to notice how Eikhenbaum justifies the Formalist use of positivism: in effect, he says, the times demanded it as the only viable rhetorical posture for Formalism. Steiner, however, notes the tremendous cost to Formalism as a scholarly endeavor for in adopting the polemical trappings of positivism they fell victim to its substantive weaknesses. “The emphasis on facts ‘as they are,’ undistorted by any speculative theorizing, led the young literary scholars to seek their inspiration in positivism, an epistemological standpoint which programmatically banned all theoretical presuppositions from the realm of true science....The shortcoming of this admirable intention is obvious. There is no ‘pure,’ presuppositionless knowledge. Every cognitive process is governed by certain rules, and proceeds from a particular kind of systematization....In order to demarcate their material from other data and to deal with it consistently, therefore, the Formalists had to utilize pre-existing conceptual frameworks. However, by suspending all theorizing (including epistemology), they gave up any conscious control over those frameworks.” Steiner, “Three Metaphors...” 61.

³⁵ This remains a valid criticism of Formalism despite both its theorization of the dominant that allowed for the in-

revealed the operations of the device, a functionalist approach to every device and all the material comprising the artwork regardless of its thematic meaning or philosophical significance, and the suspension of worldview- or ideological-based value judgments that resulted in a critical relativism unable to adjudicate between the merit of different artworks.

This section has outlined several of the principal Formalist concepts and suggested how they operated together to form a poetics. Several of the problematic characteristics of the Formalist poetics have been noted and it remains to be seen how these comprise part of the Formalist legacy operative in the neoformalist historiography and poetics of cinema. The next section, therefore, will examine the neoformalist reception of the Formalist legacy and offer a preview of what is to be examined in greater detail in chapters three and four.

THE FORMALIST LEGACY: *neoformalist appropriation*³⁶

Although every journal or anthology article authored by Bordwell and Thompson demonstrates an affinity for and application of a particular set of Formalist principles, there are several writings which specify the debt which neoformalism owes Formalism and, moreover, suggest the historical poetics of cinema made possible by Formalism. In assessing the neoformalist usage of Formalism an important first step is to realize, as noted in footnote 15, that only those Formalist texts and

clusion of non-aesthetic material in the artwork (see footnote 17) and Jakobson's protestation in 1933: "Neither Tynyanov, nor Mukarovsky, nor Shklovsky, nor I have preached that art is sufficient unto itself; on the contrary, we show that art is part of the social edifice, a component correlating with the others, a variable component, since the sphere of art and its relationship with other sectors of the social structure ceaselessly changes dialectically. What we stress is not a separation of art, but the autonomy of the aesthetic function." Jakobson, quoted in Ben Brewster, "From Shklovsky to Brecht: A Reply," *Screen* 15, No. 2, Summer (1974): 86. Jakobson's hindsight ignores the fact that the Formalists only *began* to theorize the place of non-aesthetic material and the relationships between art and other spheres of life and culture—and this they did reluctantly and only under Marxist provocation. "The non-literary elements against which the literary is differentially defined are insufficiently theorized. The Formalists have no developed theory of language and no theory of culture and society....despite their innovative definition of literary history as a discontinuous series, they were unable to explain how literary history related to other historical series. Had they had a more sophisticated social and cultural theory, they would have been in a much better position to address themselves to this problem." Jefferson 35-36.

³⁶ Chapters three and four will make exclusive and detailed use of the main works in neoformalist poetics. The present section draws upon journal and anthologized articles to suggest the contours and extent of the neoformalist use of Formalism.

concepts cited in the neoformalist corpus have been surveyed. Moreover, it is not inaccurate to state that the Formalist concepts outlined above find similar usage in their neoformalist context. What is different between Formalism and neoformalism—that is, what Bordwell and Thompson disavow and exclude from their neoformalist project—is, however, by no means inconsiderable. Indeed, the exclusions are revelatory in that they serve to foreground the features of neoformalism which together mark a series of important departures from Formalism and, positively, signal the promise of a neoformalist poetics. It is to the examination of these differentia that we now turn.

The neoformalist appropriation of Formalism is distinguished by its rejection of the latter movement's commitments to positivism and, as available in a 1981 collection of Formalist writings on the subject, a semiotics of the cinema.³⁷ Although as early as a 1975 addendum to a 1971 article on *Citizen Kane* Bordwell makes it clear that his approach endeavours to jettison any positivistic claims to a pure, autonomous, theory-independent science,³⁸ he does not dismiss the view of science underwriting Formalism in a way akin to the animosity displayed by the Formalist's contemporaries.³⁹ Moreover, Bordwell's position does not entail the methodological eclecticism to which the Formalists rightly objected; as the Formalists limited and specified their field of inquiry, so too does neoformalism insist on avoiding the reduction of cinema to other cultural realms.⁴⁰ In their eagerness to distance themselves from positivism, however, Bordwell and

³⁷ Herbert Eagle, *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1981).

³⁸ "...every analysis requires categories, acknowledged or not. Such analytical categories aren't simply bins for sorting the data already observed; rather these categories *constitute* the very act of critical perception itself. We see only what we look for. The analytical categories, to my way of thinking now, should be widely varied, including not only theories of film but also categories which are historical and critical, cultural and ideological, aesthetic and philosophical." David Bordwell, "Citizen Kane, Addendum 1975" *Movies and Methods*, Vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) 289.

³⁹ "...the Formalists' insistence upon the need for a science of literature often begged the question of how that science was to be conceived. Typically these critics held a positivist conception of science, so that the critics' categories would resemble those of a botanist and the literary historian would 'discover' the basic laws of change. Since in my view criticism is not and cannot be a science in this sense, I must reject the Formalists' claim to scientificity. *But I find salutary the insistence upon rigorous construction of concepts and the empirical adequacy of evidence.* Similarly, I do not believe that there are likely to be 'laws' of historical change, but the Formalists' search for them turned up many useful categories for historical analysis." David Bordwell, "Lowering the Stakes: Prospects for a Historical Poetics of Cinema" *Iris* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1983) 8, italics mine.

⁴⁰ "...cinema also constitutes a unique field. The assumption here will be that it is possible to develop an approach to film that uses specifically cinematic traits to develop principles of analysis; the object of the film theorist, critic and historian is *cinematicness*, or that which is specific to cinema." Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's Ivan the*

Thompson do not forego evidentiary claims altogether for to do so would seriously cripple any attempt at a poetics of cinema and threaten to position neoformalism as yet another interpretive school.⁴¹

To appreciate better the view of science that subtends neoformalism it is expedient to analyze two encounters that it has had with adversarial positions. In a 1985 review of Barry Salt's Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis Bordwell and Thompson illustrate that Salt's positivism results in a purely descriptive analysis of film style that fails to establish an explanatory framework comprehensive enough to account for the historical character of the evolution of film style.⁴² Salt's translation of stylistic features into statistical data via methods which mark the average shot length, number and types of both camera movements and camera setups reveals an atomistic conception of film style.⁴³ Salt's apparent reluctance to anchor film style within an overall theory of film form leaves him open to Bordwell and Thompson's critique that his analysis is merely "technique-spotting—what we would call description, and that of a limited sort."⁴⁴ Although Salt takes pains to isolate the occurrence of discrete devices operative within a film, his positivism disables a historical analysis which would explain the relation between, for instance, lighting and editing in a given period.⁴⁵ Implied in their critique is Bordwell and Thompson's belief that

⁴¹ Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 24.

⁴² "...formalist analysis is open to correction or refutation on the same grounds as any *theoretical-empirical* inquiry: completeness, consistency, discrimination and elegance." Bordwell, "Lowering the Stakes..." 14, italics mine.

⁴³ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Toward a Scientific Film History?" Quarterly Review of Film Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3, Summer 1985.

⁴⁴ Another consequence of Salt's atomistic and positivist method is its inability to construct a larger context for historical change. "...the specific historical context of film and maker is narrowly defined so as to exclude any concept of 'materialist history' or 'cultural history,' for example, the changing structure of the film industry and its related institutions, the sociopolitical conditions of production and exhibition, the conventions of other cultural practices...." Richard Abel, "Review Essay: Split Decision" Quarterly Review of Film and Video Vol. 11 (1989) 48. Compare with Bordwell's statements in footnotes 52, 54, and 56 below.

⁴⁵ Bordwell and Thompson, "Toward..." 227.

⁴⁶ "He [Salt] offers no overarching argument about the history of film style; he makes no claims about its directions, patterns of transformation, or significant ruptures. The book in fact works against such a broad argument by its piecemeal breakdown of each chapter into miscellaneous topics. This obviously promotes the atomistic treatment of technique we have already noted. Salt's chronology of inventions, innovations, and changes typically provides not explanations but descriptions....In general, Salt has not faced the problem of constructing a period scheme for the historical phenomena he wishes to consider—i.e., style and technology." Bordwell and Thompson, "Toward..." 234-235.

positivism provides an insufficient basis for film history (because it cannot theorize relation, influence, mediation, or other genuinely historical linkages) yet they do recognize that Salt's attempt furnishes an important example of how a film history must hold itself responsive to empirical and historically-given data.

This last component, the necessity to confront the traces of the historical record in all their detail, is reaffirmed in a second critical encounter which also acts to underscore how neoformalism is to be distinguished from the ideological and theoretical project that can be associated with a journal like Screen. In replying to Barry King's critique of The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 Bordwell exposes an underlying problem that subverts King's analysis, namely his sundering of theory and evidence. Whereas Salt's atomistic positivism disabled his prospects for constructing an adequate theoretically-nuanced historical account, King believes it possible to evaluate neoformalism, and particularly a historical account of the Hollywood cinema, solely on theoretical grounds without considering the account's evidential claims.⁴⁶ Bordwell believes there to be more to the construction of a film history (and film studies *in toto*) than the mere "juggling of terms and concepts" and while this is clearly apparent in each neoformalist work, it stands out in his 1989 article, "Historical Poetics of Cinema." Contrary to an account which would construe every fact and all data as open to a nearly infinite series of alternative and malleable explanations depending upon the theoretical and ideological commitments and construals of the analyst or historian, Bordwell maintains that there are intersubjectively accepted data which constrain every analyst or historian to argue to the best explanation (i.e., that explanation which, in the words of footnote 41, demonstrates "completeness, consistency, discrimination

⁴⁶ King's "eviction of the empirical has a lot to do with his inability to get inside our arguments....In relegating 'evidentially based assessments' to others, King thinks he is doing something rather simple: just looking at 'the coherence of the arguments presented and their relationship to arguments not presented'....this assertion and King's subsequent discussion assume that the 'evidence' is all one kind of thing....This allows King to flatten all claims to the same level of abstraction: the juggling of terms and concepts. *But in historical or critical/analytical work, the evidence is ingredient to the texture of the arguments....There is not a single proposition without empirical import and not a single proposition without conceptual consequences. To assess this argument at all, you must weigh both inferential adequacy and empirical claims at every step.*" David Bordwell, "Adventures in the Highlands of Theory" Screen Vol. 29, No. 1, Winter (1988) 80-81. Italics mine.

and elegance").⁴⁷ For ideological critics who take meaning and interpretation to be their primary *raison d'être*, the production of meaning can be (and often is) endlessly deferred and, therefore, prolonged since it usually consists in nothing more than the "juggling of terms and concepts." A neoformalist poetics, bound as it is to intersubjectively accepted data and the need to argue to the best explanation, does not restrict film studies to either the rampant yield of yet more meanings or, conversely, the undisciplined and non-systematic positivist accumulation of isolated facts.⁴⁸

The neoformalist appropriation is further demarcated by its rejection of the Formalist work on the language of cinema. Although the origin of many Formalist insights was the distinction

⁴⁷ "...any poetics—indeed, any descriptive or explanatory project—is committed to some grounding in intersubjective data. Furthermore, one can consider a fact to be an accepted claim about what there is in the world, *including theoretical or unobservable entities*—something that positivism rules out. Moreover, there is no question of letting the facts speak for themselves. Neoformalism presumes that one cannot discover factual answers to questions about films' construction without carefully devising analytical concepts appropriate to these questions. But it also assumes that not all concepts are equally precise, coherent, or pertinent, and so we may evaluate competing conceptual schemes; it also assumes that not all concepts explain the data with equal clarity, richness, and economy; and, crucially, it assumes that we are not complete prisoners of our conceptual schemes, that we may so construct them that anomalous and exceptional phenomena are not invisible but actually leap to our notice. In sum, neoformalist poetics makes theoretically defined, open-ended, corrigible, and falsifiable claims...the answer [re: "how Hollywood films secure unity among successive scenes"] I supply is empirically disconfirmable. If it is disconfirmed, I need to rethink the data and indeed, the question itself. Shklovsky's counsel of skepticism should be our guide: 'If the facts destroy the theory—so much the better for the theory. It is created by us, not entrusted to us for safekeeping.' Neoformalism's hypotheses are grounded in a theoretical *activity* rather than a fixed theory. This theorizing moves across various levels of generality and deploys various concepts and categories. It does not presume global propositions to which the researcher pledges unwavering allegiance and which automatically block our noticing recalcitrant data." David Bordwell, "Historical Poetics of Cinema" The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS Press, 1989) 379-380.

⁴⁸ The notion of a film presenting spectators with intersubjectively acceptable or confirmable data also plays a role in Noël Carroll's refutation of Jean-Louis Baudry's proposed and seminal analogy between the film and the dream. A key component of Baudry's analogy is his belief that both dreamer and spectator are unable to test the reality of their experiences. Carroll counters this by suggesting that "...films are publicly accessible; they can be viewed by more than one person. Moreover, they can be repeated; we can see the same film again and again, and we can fall back on all sorts of evidence—production and distribution records, the testimony of other viewers and of the filmmakers, the existence of similar prints, and so on—to warrant the claim that the film we just saw...is the same film we saw in the past. This is a radical disanalogy with dreaming....film experiences are open to interpersonal verification. This appears to me to be important enough to outweigh analogies between film and quasi-solipsistic phenomena, since it establishes that film viewing has an objective dimension and is not purely subjective." Noël Carroll, Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 25. In a critique of the reception theory promoted by conjunctural-appropriations criticism Bordwell utilizes an argument analogous to Carroll's: "...the method has developed no sense of what aesthetic boundaries there are on any audience's capacity to 'read' the text. The tendency has been to assume that the text sets down no constraints and that the limits on appropriation are wholly those determined by the audience's social position. Yet this will not explain why at a denotative level, there are widespread agreements about the text across audiences and conjunctures." David Bordwell, Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) 176, italics mine.

between a practical and non-practical (aesthetic) use of language, such a dichotomy cannot be applied to cinema, for films, unlike words, are not used as part of ordinary, everyday, practical discourse.⁴⁹ In addition, “film is not a language in any strict sense of the word for the material elements of cinema have no set denotations as words do.”⁵⁰ Finally, Thompson denies the legitimacy of a strong analogy between cinema and language thereby contesting the foundation of cinema semiotics.⁵¹

Bordwell and Thompson clearly believe that it is possible to make use of Formalism without subscribing to its view of science and its extension of a linguistic analogy into the realm of the cinema and this belief surfaces in neoformalism’s use and development of a series of mature Formalist insights into historiography and criticism. As noted earlier the key Formalist concepts continue to play an important role in the neoformalist approach to film history and criticism. An early examination of the idea of montage in Soviet art and film finds Bordwell asserting that the development of an artistic technique and theory crosses the boundaries of contiguous systems of art and that factors intrinsic to film alone are not sufficient to situate montage historically.⁵² A determination of the role of camera movement (after the advent of sound) within cinema history unfolds when Bordwell places camera movement within the context of the proximate and contiguous systems of production economics and the demands of cinematic representation.⁵³ Similarly,

⁴⁹ “Here we already discover a major difference between literature and cinema that prevents a direct application of Formalist assumptions to the analysis of films. Clearly the distinction in this case is not between the everyday use of motion pictures and their artistic use; films, unlike words, are not used as part of ordinary discourse.” Thompson, Eisenstein's... 25.

⁵⁰ Thompson, Eisenstein's... 25.

⁵¹ “...much of the Formalists’ writing on cinema was concerned with the possible parallel between cinema and language. Tynjanov was concerned with the ‘semantic’ aspects of film, while Eikhenbaum discussed film as ‘inner speech’ and tried to find the ‘basic unit of film speech.’ Yet the theoretical justification for considering cinema as analogous to language remains unclear....The current study makes no assumptions that film is a kind of language. On the whole, then, the Formalists’ writings on cinema are of little use in this analysis.” Thompson, “Eisenstein's...” 31. Bordwell and Thompson’s work is labeled “generally non-semiotic” in Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis’s New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 11.

⁵² “...we need inquiries which place the history of film-making and film theory in the history of modern art as a whole; the problem is to trace both formal and stylistic similarities and precise historical relationships. In short, the history of film does not exist in pristine isolation from that of the other arts; if we are to write adequate film history, we need to study more than just film.” David Bordwell, “The Idea of Montage in Soviet Art and Film” Cinema Journal Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring (1972) 17.

Bordwell positions the conventions of the art cinema in relation to the conventions extant in the dominant classical Hollywood cinema and those of the modernist cinema.⁵⁴ Thompson's study of *Ivan the Terrible* uses the classical Hollywood cinema to make salient the unique narrative and stylistic features of Eisenstein's film.⁵⁵ A 1983 article co-authored by Bordwell and Thompson provides them with the occasion to reflect directly upon the problems presented by film history in the form of a critique of Noël Burch's historiography. A brief typology and critique of linear historiographical paradigms—evolutionary, teleological, serial, and expressive causality—is followed by an indepth analysis of Burch's attempt at a non-linear, materialist film history. Similar to the problems associated with Salt's positivism (see footnotes 43 and 45), Burch (and others) fail to systematically integrate and relate various cinematic techniques and devices in a manner both conducive and responsive to the needs of a non-linear, materialist film history.⁵⁶ In response to their critique of Burch, Bordwell and Thompson provide the mandate of a non-linear, materialist history of film in which the Formalist legacy is clearly operative.⁵⁷

⁵³ David Bordwell, "Camera movement: the coming of sound and the classical Hollywood style" (1979) reprinted in The Hollywood Film Industry: A Reader ed. Paul Kerr (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) 148-153.

⁵⁴ "We cannot construct the art cinema in isolation from other cinematic practices. The art cinema has neighbors on each side, adjacent modes which define it." David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" Film Criticism Vol. 4, No. 1 (1979) 61.

⁵⁵ Thompson, Eisenstein's... 53ff.

⁵⁶ "The Burch-Dana argument furthermore slips into an autonomous history of devices. Techniques are considered outside of any context in the films' formal systems and are never related to conditions of production or reception or to other spheres (other arts, social and economic history, etc.)....Both Comolli and Burch tend to treat techniques (closeup, eyeline match) in the abstract, outside their functions within specific systems (film, genre, studio, period)." David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Linearity, Materialism and the Study of Early American Cinema" Wide Angle Vol. 5, No. 3, Spring (1983) 12-13.

⁵⁷ "The inadequacies of Burch's work cannot decisively reveal the limitations of a materialist history, but his efforts suggest how difficult the enterprise is. The obvious recommendations—cite evidence, go to primary sources, utilize an adequate sampling of films—will not automatically generate a new historiography. One suggestion is that the idea of 'non-linearity' needs to be framed in more substantial terms. We can, for instance, replace various linear assumptions with the concept of a shift from one aesthetic system to another, the shift itself being explicable by changes in the uses of the systems. To take Burch's field of research, Kristin Thompson has suggested that the move from primitive to classical cinema was caused by fundamental changes in production, distribution and exhibition practices....Thus primitive and classical were actually two distinct approaches to filmmaking. Nineteenth-century art forms did indeed have a great deal to do with the shift; but it was not simply a vague contradiction between influences from bourgeois and working-class media [Burch's hypothesis]. A set of concrete production circumstances, not traceable by looking only at the films or speculating about spectators' reactions, can explain the change....A materialist history of American film could usefully ground itself in a theory which dynamically relates modes of production, distribution and consumption to the representational processes of cinema." Bordwell and Thompson, "Linearity..." 13. Bordwell and Thompson's historiography parallels the realist

It was mentioned previously that key Formalist concepts also inform neoformalist film criticism and this will be examined in the study of Bordwell's monographs on Dreyer and Ozu, his work (together with Thompson and Janet Staiger) on the classical Hollywood cinema, and Thompson's collection of neoformalist film analyses. These book-length studies are complemented by articles on Dreyer's plans for a film on Jesus, the interrelation of Eisenstein's aesthetic positions and theories of mind, Ozu's modernist use of space and narrative, a perceptual account of camera movement and cinematic space, Mizoguchi's importance for the history of film style, and an account of an almost purely decorative presence in 1930's Japanese film style.⁵⁸ For the present, however, one article is indicative of the tremendous yield and complexity which the Formalist legacy provides neoformalist criticism namely Bordwell's study of the jump cut. At the centre of his analysis is the working hypothesis that four factors are operative in the recognition of any stylistic figure; these four factors are derived from several Formalist concepts. First of all, the presence of a stylistic figure is often signalled both perceptually and cognitively in that it stands out and calls attention to itself as a stylistic device (defamiliarization). Secondly, the stylistic figure may be assigned a more or less prominent role within the film (the film is understood to be a system with devices contending for dominance). Next, the cinematic conventions extant at the time of the film provide a background against which a particular stylistic figure either stands out or fades into (norms). Finally, changes in the state of film criticism and theory can bring to light previously unrecognized stylistic figures that, within a new critical environment, can now be analyzed (norms again).⁵⁹ Bordwell then deploys these four factors in explicating the use of the jump

historiography defended in Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1985) particularly 13-21.

⁵⁸ See, respectively: David Bordwell, "Passion, Death and Testament: Carl Dreyer's Jesus Film" *Film Comment* Vol. 8, No. 2, Summer 1972; David Bordwell, "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift" *Screen* Vol. 15, No. 4, Winter 1974/75; Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu" *Screen* Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer 1976; David Bordwell, "Camera Movement and Cinematic Space" *Cine-Tracts* Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1977; David Bordwell, "Mizoguchi and the Evolution of Film Language" *Cinema and Language* eds. Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp (Frederick: University Publications of America, Inc., 1983); David Bordwell, "A Cinema of Flourishes: Japanese Decorative Classicism of the Prewar Era" *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History* eds. Arthur Nolletti, Jr. and David Desser (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

⁵⁹ David Bordwell, "Jump Cuts and Blind Spots" *Wide Angle* Vol. 6, No. 1 (1984) 6.

cut in films by Méliès, Pudovkin, and Godard thereby demonstrating that the virtuosity attributed to these *auteurs* (due to their masterful use of the jump cut) must be situated in relation to “changes in film form, institutional practices and critical discourse.”⁶⁰

This section has defined the neoformalist appropriation of Formalism both negatively—its rejection of positivism and the analogy between language and the cinema—and positively—its use of the late Formalist suggestions regarding art historiography and the systematic deployment of Formalist concepts and principles in textual and technical analyses. The Formalist legacy operative in neoformalism remains, however, problematic for many of Bordwell and Thompson’s critics and it will prove useful to keep their criticisms in mind during the scrutiny of the main works in neoformalist poetics which follows in chapters three and four.

THE FORMALIST LEGACY: *critique and summary*

There are four sites of critical interest for those evaluating the Formalist legacy that is operative within neoformalism: (1) the marginalization or decentering of meaning and content, (2) the conceptions of history and background, (3) the positivism and empiricism which appear to underwrite neoformalism, and (4) the questionable neoformalist appropriation of Formalism itself. It is evident that these four comprise what has also been considered problematic about Formalism *per se* (see pages 19-22 above) and that many critics have extended such criticisms to neoformalism.

(1) Regarding Bordwell’s monograph on Dreyer, Jonathan Rosenbaum cites Bordwell’s inability to deal with the existential aspects extant in the films while Nick Browne objects to an empiricism which brackets out the films’ meanings and Tony Pipolo rejects the severing of the thematic and the formal.⁶¹ Elsewhere, Barry King and Douglas Pye remark upon Bordwell’s

⁶⁰ Bordwell, “Jump...” 11.

⁶¹ “The passionately personal, intransigent, and relentless aspects of the film [*Gertrud*] seem to confound him [Bordwell] because he can’t rationalize them sufficiently into formal properties, so he tends largely to limit his view of the film to reductive criticisms.” Jonathan Rosenbaum, “The Passion of David Bordwell” *Film Comment* Vol. 17, No. 6, Nov-Dec (1981) 78; “Bordwell’s version of neoformalism is an empiricism that, as a principle of method, puts meaning in parenthesis.” Nick Browne, “The Formalist’s Dreyer” *October* 23, Winter (1982) 84; “...despite his claims to the contrary, Bordwell’s analyses *do* lead toward another reading of Dreyer’s films. It is a reading that attempts to erase all other readings and replace them with a posture that claims to be outside the

systematic exclusion of the thematic in favor of the purely aesthetic in his treatment of the classical Hollywood cinema,⁶² while King and Bill Nichols note the conflation or reduction of content and thematic material to form.⁶³

(2) While Barry Salt offers a blunt indictment concerning the anti-historical character of both Russian Formalism and neoformalism, others are more refined and complex in their critique of Bordwell and Thompson's understanding of history and backgrounds.⁶⁴ Both Nichols and Dana Polan challenge a conception of history wherein the background to a film is theorized as static, determinate, or immutable.⁶⁵ Both Polan and Nichols query the adequacy of the concept of the

work the better to perceive its 'inner' workings. The conclusions drawn from this posture—severing cinematic form from the poetic/thematic/narrative—constitute a reading of Dreyer's major films as modernist texts. It is that reading and not Bordwell's delineation of formal and perceptual elements that is in question." Tony Pipolo, "The Poetry of the Problematic" Quarterly Review of Film Studies Vol. 7, No. 2, Spring (1982) 160-161.

⁶²"...the decision to focus on aesthetic norms as the context for other norms means that those others—technical, material norms as well as political—only take on significance in the terms that aesthetic norms do....not only do matters of meaning and theme receive recognition only insofar as they function aesthetically as bearers of style, but film *per se* becomes identified with its formal articulation or style....If it is an error to see the 'cinematic apparatus' as a mere channel for the transmission of meaning, it is no less an error to see meaning as only arising out of the technical properties of the channel [as he alleges Bordwell does]." Barry King, "'The Classical Hollywood Cinema': a review by Barry King" Screen Vol. 27, No. 6, Nov-Dec (1986) 86-87; "...this exclusion of systems of representation [Bordwell's "practical or ethico-socio-political norms"] and therefore, to a considerable extent, of their relationship to formal decisions, has important consequences..."[Pye states later that] "technical devices and formal systems mean nothing outside their contexts—the specific dramatic and ideological fields which they present and comment on." Douglas Pye, "Bordwell and Hollywood" Movie 33, Winter (1989) 46, 51.

⁶³King maintains that neoformalism signals "...a collapse of the *plane of content*—with its substance of social values and forms of thematic organisation—into the *plane of expression*—materials of the medium and structures of technique...." King, "The Classical..." 87; for Nichols, Bordwell's "...approach tends to dramatize how formal systems take on a life of their own, drawing on historical referents to vitalize their own dynamic, but remaining impressively immune to any materialist history....[contra Bordwell, Nichols queries] Might we not also say...that formal conventions become appropriated and transformed by the force of political material?" Bill Nichols, "Form Wars: The Political Unconscious of Formalist Theory" The South Atlantic Quarterly Vol. 88, No. 2, Spring (1989) 500.

⁶⁴"He [Bordwell] proposes that his own 'Neoformalist film theory' can deal with film history, but in this he is mistaken, for Neoformalism, like the original Russian Formalist criticism of which it is a slight variant, is by its nature anti-historical, having no intrinsic conception of historical causality..." Barry Salt, "Historical Poetics" Sight & Sound Vol. 60, No. 1 Winter (1990/91) 69.

⁶⁵In his critique of Bordwell's Narration in the Fiction Film Nichols states: "But history for Bordwell is merely the temporal ground against which the full range of formal options associated with a mode of narration congregate into more restricted, specific paradigms....Throughout Bordwell's text, history exists as a relatively inert ground for the dynamics of cognitive, narrational process." Nichols, "Form..." 501; "In a Kantian aesthetic, history turns into mere temporality—a repeated, abstract cyclicity of familiarization, defamiliarization, refamiliarization, and so on. The artwork does reach out to a context, but that context is simply defined in terms of the artwork as its negative ground, the practicality it stands out from...context becomes as fixed as New Criticism's well-wrought urn..." Dana Polan, "Terminable and Interminable Analysis: Formalism and Film Theory" Quarterly Review of Film Studies Vol. 8, No. 4 Fall (1983) 72.

background on the basis that it does not seem to provide for a materialist history and is therefore reductive.⁶⁶ Finally, Tom Gunning doubts the neoformalist ability to ascertain the proper background in its analysis of a film because he understands neoformalism to be an essentially immanent analysis not suited or equipped for the determination of a background.⁶⁷

(3) Robert Ray and Nichols accuse neoformalism of insufficiently examining its epistemological and scientific basis thus revealing a typically positivist commitment to the marginality of theory.⁶⁸ Ray, in his sustained and extensive analysis of “the Bordwell regime,” maintains a strong analogy or similarity between the methods and aims of Bordwell and Auguste Comte. Bordwell is Comtean in his methodology⁶⁹ and his arguments for restricting the scope of film studies resemble Comte’s rationale for positivism.⁷⁰ Finally, and to be examined in a later chapter, is Ray’s positioning of Bordwell within the practice of Kuhnian “normal science”⁷¹ and Bordwell’s

⁶⁶“The conversion of history’s openness into the formalism of the systematic (i.e., history conceived as no more than the textualization of norms and the deformation of norms) brings with it a number of potentially idealist or essentialist critical concepts.” Polan, “Terminable...” 72; see Nichols in footnote 63.

⁶⁷In his review of Thompson’s Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Analysis Gunning states: “Thompson claims that traditional Japanese culture does not form the best background against which to understand Ozu’s films, but how one determines the proper background is not really explicated in neoformalist terms, perhaps because this task lies beyond it.” Tom Gunning, “Review of Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Analysis” Film Quarterly Vol. 43, No. 3 Spring (1990) 54.

⁶⁸“...given its [‘the Bordwell regime of knowledge’] subject (the Classical Hollywood Cinema), it is curiously blind to its own unquestioning participation in our culture’s hegemonic arrangements between truth and power. In CHC [The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960], BST [Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson] lay bare how a particular mode of communication, historically constituted, came to appear natural and inevitable. They have not chosen to examine similarly their own ‘scientific’ methodologies.” Robert Ray, “The Bordwell Regime and the Stakes of Knowledge” Strategies Vol. 1 (1988) 158; “In true formalist spirit, seeking answers to questions provides its own justification and the nature or use-value of the questions, or answers, the purposes and intentions that might surround them, can be comfortably bracketed in the service of science and the avoidance of subjectivity.” Nichols, “Form...” 501-502.

⁶⁹“...the book’s [The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960] reception confirms the abiding dominance of Comtean Standards. As a group, CHC’s reviewers have seemed less impressed by the book’s conclusion than by the apparatus used to generate it. With its computer samples, scores of obscure movie and periodical citations, four appendices and 65 double-columned pages of footnotes, CHC dramatically foregrounds its own claims to objectivity.” Ray, “The Bordwell...” 152.

⁷⁰“The most striking thing about Bordwell’s argument is how much it resembles Comte’s rationale for positivism. Structurally, in fact, the two are identical, with the inefficiency of disorder (blamed on epistemological competition) contrasted with the benefits of stability (promised by philosophical consensus). In calling for a suspension of film study-as-revolutionary science for the sake of a normal science consolidation around a single paradigm (which, as was the case with Comte, happens to be his own), Bordwell implicitly reaffirms Comte’s insistence that knowledge depends on suppression. Knowledge begins, in other words, only by putting an end to theory proliferation, a move...that stakes out a terrain, a regime of law and order where policing becomes possible.” Ray, “The Bordwell...” 156. Later Ray points out that “...the Comtean assumptions of Bordwell’s essay predisposes him to some kind of formalism, since, as I have argued, positivism itself is formalistic.” 169.

participation in the apparatus of rational science with its valorization of reliability and predictability (also, according to Ray, marks of positivism).⁷²

(4) Also germane to a critical evaluation of the neoformalist appropriation of Formalism and the aesthetic presuppositions which animate it is the specification of which version of Formalist concepts have been selected for use by neoformalism. While Gerald Pirog takes exception to Kristin Thompson's failure to incorporate the Formalist writings on cinema into her analysis of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* and, in addition, charges her with neglecting the change and diversity within Formalism, other critics are more specific in their critical remarks.⁷³ Gunning, in his review of Thompson's Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Analysis, suggests the misapplication of the key Formalist concept of the dominant.⁷⁴ In the same review Gunning also notes the neoformalist predilection for films which disclose "defamiliarization in its purest form, directing the viewer's attention to intricacies of perception and form rather than to realistic, genre, or narrative concerns" (53); this mirrors the Formalist inclination for Futurism and other avant-garde art movements (see page 20 above). Polan excavates the Kantian framework extant in Formalism and

⁷¹ "Indeed, his [Bordwell] description of his own *modus operandi* exactly matches Kuhn's picture of normal science: 'for me [Bordwell] at least, research begins with puzzles that I think worth solving'; and 'one should strive for *an argument to the best explanation.*'" Ray, "The Bordwell..." 148.

⁷² "This apparent eclecticism, however, is offset by a characteristic of normal science: a disciplinary specialization that marks itself in *repetition*. Whatever approach he takes, Bordwell pursues film study; moreover, to the extent that he succeeds in establishing a single, persistently used method, he becomes reliable, *predictable* (positivism's goal): a brand name to depend on." Ray, "The Bordwell..." 155.

⁷³ "For her [Thompson], because of their reliance on the model that language provided for film, 'the Formalists' writings on cinema are of little use in this analysis'. However, if the semiotic gropings of their writings were better understood and elaborated, her objection to their discussion of film in terms of language might seem less fundamental....Another problem with a 'neoformalism' as Thompson conceives it is that, in trying to stabilize the theory in a static, original theoretical point, it ignores change and diversity within the movement..." Gerald Pirog, "Review of Kristin Thompson's Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis" Slavic and East European Journal Vol. 29, No. 2 Summer (1985) 213.

⁷⁴ "...Thompson's use of the term 'the dominant' seems somewhat problematic....the dominants that Thompson finds constitute a rather bizarre series....While all these terms [the various dominants Thompson has assigned to a series of films] have a very clear role in Thompson's analyses, their heterogenous nature indicates a concept rather different from most Formalist uses of the term. Whereas Tynjanov or Shklovsky discuss broad factors specifiable outside individual works (such as rhythm in verse, or the mystery genre in *Little Dorrit*), Thompson's dominants would have little meaning outside of her specific analysis (e.g., discrepancy in *Rules of the Game* refers to its juxtaposition of classical elements of performance, lighting, and decoupage to distinctly nonclassical ones). Although Thompson echoes the Formalists' claim that the dominant is an important term for historical analysis, one of the weaknesses of her selection of dominants lies in their too specific nature. How terms like 'discrepancy' or 'separation' could play a historical role becomes hard to imagine." Gunning, "Review of Breaking..." 53.

suggests that problems arise for the neoformalist theorization of the film and the spectator because it accepts that framework.⁷⁵

These four sites of critical interest comprise a daunting body of more-or-less hostile evaluations which, with varying degrees of success, confront the principal Formalist-inspired concepts operative within neoformalism. Though they have not yet been examined to determine if their queries and criticisms hold true for neoformalism, they do serve to highlight areas which will continue to be an ongoing concern in the analyses of neoformalist texts in the following chapters. As Bordwell and Thompson's work is explicated against the background of what a few critics have written about their efforts in film criticism, theory and history, it will become ever more clear as to the true explanatory and analytical power of neoformalism.⁷⁶

This chapter provides a necessary means of comparison that will help to determine the true value of the film historiography and poetics proposed by and instantiated in the central neoformalist texts to be discussed in the next chapters. It has been shown that the theoretical trajectory established by Formalism is refined and, in several important aspects, continued in neoformalism. The Formalist legacy preconditions neoformalism to notice and appreciate certain features of the cinema and while some critics argue that Bordwell and Thompson's analytical grasp accounts for too little of what is truly significant about the cinema, it remains to be seen if such criticism holds up against an imposing body of historical and theoretical neoformalist scholarship and criticism. As Bordwell has made only too evident in his reply to King (see footnote 46), however, it is impossible to assess neoformalism properly without both some consideration of the claims to evidence that it assembles and the inextricable symbiosis between theory and evidence that

⁷⁵ "The Kantian framework of Formalism has as one of its most extreme consequences to understand the separated realms as fully constituted and clear-cut realms. Once again, the historical variability of the ways artworks and viewers might de-essentialize each other turns into an essential model.... The Kantian paradigm leads to a mythology of subjectivity's liberation: individual subjects, possessed of categorical imperatives, face objects that only ask for a certain utilization (a certain reading, for example) to function properly, and freedom comes from this proper working of the system...." Polan, "Terminable..." 73-74.

⁷⁶ There are, however, problems with letting the critics set the agenda; the growing body of critical response to the neoformalist endeavor has witnessed the development of strategic misrepresentations of neoformalism and these, in turn, have worked to obfuscate the value of Bordwell and Thompson's efforts. See the "contending histories" section in the next chapter.

neoformalist writings entail. The next chapters, therefore, in their survey of neoformalist historiography, criticism, and poetics, will alternate between description and analysis in the hope of better illuminating and discerning the symbiosis of neoformalist theory and practice.

A NEOFORMALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY: *introduction*

AS SEEN IN our examination of the Formalist legacy operative within neoformalism one of the most contentious sites of critical interest is the neoformalist claim that it maintains and promulgates a genuinely historical knowledge of cinema. A prime example of that criticism: a neoformalist historiography, according to the critics, represents an oxymoron because of its inherent commitment to a film's immanent properties and structures. Contra such criticism, Bordwell and Thompson argue that neoformalism assigns only a methodological priority to immanent factors and does not work to elide the historical relevance of the non-cinematic. Given this disagreement regarding the ability of neoformalism to provide a historical comprehension of the film object it becomes apparent that these contradictory claims can be adjudicated only in the light of a careful analysis of the historiography which underwrites neoformalism, specifically in its application to both directors (Bordwell's monographs on Dreyer and Ozu) and a seminal historical/analytical construct (the classical Hollywood cinema).

A brief review and summary of the pertinent historiographical questions and positions as explicated in chapter one comprises the first portion of this chapter's agenda and will help to limit and sharply focus the specific questions which need to be examined. There are important developments in the transition from a Formalist to neoformalist historiography and these need to be re-reviewed. In addition, the profusion of critical voices raised in opposition to the neoformalist historiography does not demonstrate a bewildering and unmanageable diversity; carefully summarized, Bordwell and Thompson's critics express complementary positions regarding their estimation of the neoformalist historiography. With these criticisms in the foreground we turn next to the main works in neoformalist poetics, namely David Bordwell's The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer, Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema, and his collective venture co-authored with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960. These studies provide a nuanced, variegated and sustained instantiation of neoformalist historiographical presuppositions and, therefore, present an advantageous means of assessing the

efficacy of the criticisms used against Bordwell *et al.* In examining these texts we will have the opportunity to investigate key neoformalist terms and constructs; backgrounds, norms, materials, the biographical legend, the mode of production, the tracking down of functional equivalents, contingent or adjacent aesthetic and non-aesthetic realms, and the devices, systems, and relations of systems at work in a film—all these together comprise the neoformalist historiography. The chapter concludes by placing the neoformalist historiography within a larger art historiographical context in order to make salient its unique contributions to this area.

A NEOFORMALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Formalism, neoformalism, critics*

The previous chapter introduced the fundamentals of Formalist historiography as developed in the work of Tynjanov, Eikhenbaum and Mukarovsky; all three theorists contribute to a nascent historiography which, although not developed to maturity in Formalism itself due to Stalin's 1932 declaration, nevertheless comes to fruition in neoformalist film history. Tynjanov's notion of literature as a system of interrelated devices and elements has as its consequence the recognition that formal and stylistic change is systemic and not atomistically contained to or by the individual work. No innovation or experiment remains the sole property of its first user but instead becomes the provenance for systemwide structural and functional mutation among a plethora of devices and systems. Eikhenbaum noted the uniquely material, social and political conditions of the October Revolution which served to alter the methods by which literature was produced in Russia. His first-hand awareness of the new context, however, did not lead him to posit a direct causal relationship between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic but instead saw him propose relations of correspondence, interaction, dependency, and conditionality between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic. His reluctance to attribute a direct, unmediated causal power to non-aesthetic factors—a preeminent trait of Formalist theory—is given theoretical voice by Mukarovsky's idea that the aesthetic norm transforms any factor which impinges upon or falls into the orbit of the sphere of influence that is the artwork. The integrity of the artwork is not compromised or effaced by the initially

extrinsic material, technical, or practical norms which are active together in the making of an artwork.

The neoformalist writings surveyed in the previous chapter made it clear that this incipient historiography is broadly utilized and developed by Bordwell and Thompson. Bordwell's recognition of the importance of concurrent and mediating Russian artistic and theatrical movements for the development of cinematic montage, and his placement of camera movement in relation to the contiguous field of production economics (to take just two examples listed in chapter one) demonstrate that both non-cinematic aesthetic and non-aesthetic factors are key to constructing a history of film devices and systems. Films draw upon a number of materials/sources and Bordwell, following Mukarovsky's idea that the artwork effects a change on or transforms any extrinsic materials that are used in its construction, maintains that part of the film historian's task is to track the importation of any such materials to note how the system of the film reworks them to its own specific purpose(s). Bordwell and Thompson's historiographic presuppositions are made explicit in their critical review of Burch's attempt at a non-linear, materialist historiography: cinematic techniques or devices cannot be understood historically if there is no attempt to situate them within the overall formal system of the film. Furthermore, and equally important in attempting to comprehend the immanent, formal features of the film, the historical apprehension of a film is incomplete when its means of production, distribution, exhibition and reception are overlooked or rendered secondary in favor of ideological interventions. As prolific as Bordwell and Thompson have been in authoring a substantial number of articles it is clear that the limitations of the journal format do not encourage prolonged, extensive or sustained argumentation, theorization, and empirical demonstration.¹ Consequently, it becomes necessary to delve into the scholarship more representative of what the neoformalist historiography has achieved.

Before engaging three main works of the neoformalist corpus, however, it is also important to

¹ An important component to this chapter is its review and description of some of the historical argumentation which neoformalism offers. It is not enough to go digging for theory apart from evidence (see chapter one, footnote 46 above). Furthermore, this chapter's organizing pattern, the alternation between descriptive passages and critical interludes, is meant to demonstrate the interdependence of theory and evidence.

have in the foreground a summary of the principle objections to film historiography as conceived of and practiced by neoformalism. Both Salt and Gunning query the very idea that an immanent, by definition, formalist-inspired critique could conceive of historical causality or determine historical backgrounds pertinent to the film at hand.² Nichols and Polan cast doubt upon the neoformalist historiography because it inadequately theorizes both the dynamic relation between film and historical ground against which the film is known, and because such a project insufficiently attends to material causes by assuming that intrinsic formal cinematic features outweigh, for the purposes of historical scholarship, so-called extrinsic, secondary determinations (e.g., the political).³ Moreover, Polan objects to what he perceives as the cyclical historical pattern mandated or, better yet, dictated, by the Formalist (and neoformalist) commitment to what is theorized as the central purpose of all art, defamiliarization. He argues that the process subtending any meaningful conception of defamiliarization commits a film history to the unceasing repetition of perceptual familiarization, defamiliarization, and refamiliarization and that such a process eludes the historical progression and development evident in, for example, the technical innovations extant in the history of film. The result is an idealist, unnecessarily abstract, and tending-towards-essentialist historiography in which form is unfettered of meaningful material and ideological determinants.⁴

It is clear to see that the preceding historiographical questions necessarily involve contending determinations of the ontological status of the film *per se* and the ways in which to study it. Robert Ray's critique of "the Bordwell regime" locates neoformalism within a classical tradition of analysis and this has implications for deciding what is the most fitting historiographical project for film. Ray's move to analyze Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's work on the classical Hollywood cinema not for its own sake but, instead, for what it reveals about "prevalent assumptions about knowledge and its dissemination" is prompted by his frank admission that on its own grounds a positivist science operating within a classical epistemic paradigm (i.e. Bordwell *et al.*) cannot be

² See Salt in chapter one, footnote 64 and Gunning in chapter one, footnote 67.

³ See Nichols in chapter one, footnote 63.

⁴ See Polan in chapter one, footnotes 65 and 66.

meaningfully evaluated. An immanent critique of Bordwell *et al.*'s work on the Hollywood cinema, such as that demonstrated by Barry King, demonstrates that "picking away at the book's minor points or omissions seems pointless" and fails to challenge the epistemic paradigm under which it operates.⁵ Ray here states that the neoformalist historiographical achievement amounts to the mere positivistic accumulation of facts predicated as it is on the governing notions of objectivity and comprehensive coverage.⁶

Ray's characterization of neoformalism as positivist implies yet another feature of the approach which many ideological critics voice: the way in which Bordwell *et al.* utilize their historical sources is naïve of ideology and its mediations within history. As we will see below, the neoformalist historiography takes contemporary historical accounts from trade journals, personal remembrances or anecdotes, studio documents, etc., at—so the critics believe—face value, failing to ferret out and interrogate the ideological projects which invariably subtend these accounts thus rendering their historical intelligibility (to say nothing of their reliability, veracity, accuracy, and validity) highly suspect. Where, ask the critics, is the preliminary hermeneutical work which serves to assess the latent, ubiquitous ideology in a particular historical account? How can neoformalism construct or compile a history of film without first engaging in interpretation? For many critics neoformalism reveals its positivist commitment at this point because it seemingly fails to engage in either the needed ideological assessment of the historical account or, indeed, of itself. In sum, then, these critics prompt an inquiry into the historiography which both motivates and aids in the construal of neoformalist scholarship.

We turn now to an examination of how the neoformalist historiography functions within Bordwell's critical monographs on film directors Carl-Theodor Dreyer and Yasujiro Ozu. As will become apparent, Bordwell's aims (and the terms deployed) in these two studies differ from those employed in his co-authored work on the classical Hollywood cinema because the object of historical interest varies: two are focused on individuals while the third centres on an institution.

⁵ Ray, "The Bordwell..." 149.

⁶ See Ray in chapter one, footnote 69.

A NEOFORMALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Dreyer and Ozu*

Although there are several critical constructs which Bordwell's analyses of Dreyer and Ozu share despite the intervening seven years in publication, each study is approached with an awareness of the particular historiographical problems or challenges presented by the director at hand. Bordwell is only too aware that these directors have accumulated a patina of critical commonplaces and he strives to defamiliarize our experiences of the films by first defining and then critically examining the attendant biographical legends and the ways in which they have worked to construe our understanding of the filmmaker and his films.⁷ The renovation of both our comprehension and appreciation continues with the determination of the most relevant and proximate backgrounds to the film style and mode of production practiced by the filmmaker as evident in the films, historical accounts and records (e.g., contemporary production reports, filmmaker's statements, etc.), and specific critical traditions. In both of his monographs on Dreyer and Ozu, Bordwell's recontextualizations serve as the prolegomena to an encounter with the films themselves. The individual, film-by-film analyses are to ground and demonstrate exactly how the previously described historical and critical backgrounds work upon and within each particular film's formal system.

The next phase of Bordwell's strategy involves a focus on the immanent formal devices and structures of the film as they are in relation to each other, to additional cinematic conventions, and to the norms of contiguous or adjacent art media. Operating with the Formalist assumption that artworks are dynamic systems, Bordwell describes and explains how temporal and spatial systems relate, how directors institute unique functional equivalents for conventional cinematic devices, and how the filmmaker's aesthetic and mode of production mediate and transform the direct

⁷ The desire to defamiliarize films which we experience only too often through the time-worn commonplaces of criticism (i.e., those canonized Hollywood classics or the films of the 1950s art cinema or French New Wave) also motivates Kristin Thompson's film analyses and is evident in an epigraph attributed to Shklovsky which prefaces *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*: "The fate of the works of old artists of the word is exactly the same as the fate of the word itself. They are completing the journey from poetry to prose. They cease to be seen and begin to be recognised. Classical works have for us become covered with the glassy armour of familiarity—we remember them too well, we have heard them from childhood, we have read them in books, thrown out quotations from them in the course of conversation, and now we have callouses on our souls—we no longer sense them."

impact of actual economic, social, and political realities. Accompanying Bordwell's explication of the inner structure of the film is a recognition that filmmaking is a planned activity and that although a biographical legend and a definite background set are partially determinative in the production of any film, it is important to acknowledge the self-aware, purposeful activity of the filmmaker. The director is not a passively positioned and unwitting transmitter of ideology but, instead, assumes a relative degree of active control (or, at the very least, awareness) over the filmmaking process. Bordwell's film history is equipped to plot the historical, social, economic, technological, and political backgrounds specific to the cinema as they mediate and transform the filmmaker's choices and, in turn, as they are mediated and transformed *by* the filmmaker's choices. While the preceding has introduced Bordwell's historiographic strategy in outline it remains to be seen how it actually operates. Several extended examples should suffice to show how it engenders a historical knowledge of the cinema.

The notion of the film director as the author of, and the person responsible for, all that we see and hear when viewing a film is a widely held belief. Not only do newspaper reviews and interviews confirm the primacy of the director's control in the production of a film, but much film history and criticism returns again and again to the film director as *auteur*.⁸ Screen credits at the start of each film end invariably with the director's name displayed entirely on its own and film directors themselves have encouraged the attention of the public—think of Alfred Hitchcock, for

⁸ Even if contemporary film theory and criticism holds the notion of the author in doubt (i.e., just what or who are we talking about?) or defines the issues negatively (i.e., the dissolution or effacement of the author) there remains an ongoing discussion. As John Caughey's introduction to the British Film Institute's reader on authorship states: "...it is in no way my intention to construct *auteurism* or 'auteur-structuralism' as a simple past, a background for academic study. One motivation for the Reader is the feeling that, in its reaction against a teenage romance with the *auteur*, much recent discussion of film (and teaching of film) has tended to deny its former attachment by leaving the author (or *auteur*, or director) without an adequate place in theory: if the author is not at the centre, he is nowhere; if the romance is over, I will reject him utterly. The documentation of the past of authorship theory...is functional for the present: to insert into film theory something of the fascination with the author." John Caughey, ed. Theories of Authorship: A Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 1981) 2. In the same preface Caughey notes that in contemporary theoretical accounts of the *auteur* "...there is a dangerous absence of history, a lack of attention to the way in which the author's place within a particular social history is written into the text." In the context of this chapter on neoformalist historiography and particularly given the current examination of Bordwell's conception of the biographical legend it is important to see how such a conception answers to Caughey's warning of the need to historically ground the *auteur*.

example, or the directors of the French New Wave. Moreover, these conventions, although film-specific, are buttressed by enduring and extensively accepted traditions in the other art media of attributing to authorship legal and economic consequences, the values attending public recognition, and explanatory or critical power. Given the considerable amount of often conflicting information and hypotheses circulated within public and academic domains regarding the status, control and responsibility of the film director, and yet the need to analyze the work of this important individual, Bordwell develops the concept of the biographical legend to help in the comprehension of the historical function of the film director or *auteur*.

The biographical legend is defined by the several tasks that it accomplishes within a history of the cinema. First of all, it involves the systematic arrangement of the film director's public explanations as to his or her task; that is, what was the director's point of view on the particular dynamics of his or her film practice? Interviews, autobiographies, and collections of theoretical writings all yield an indication of the intentions and proclivities of the director. Furthermore, these materials play a role in the director's mode of production in that they often mediate the impact of studio-enforced pre-production, production, and post-production practices. In addition to the films themselves, these materials are often the foundation for the public perception of the film director and, therefore, assume an important role in film reception. As such, the biographical legend becomes material for the construction of film history.⁹ It is important to realize, however,

⁹ "Boris Tomashevsky writes: 'the biography that is useful to the literary historian is not the author's curriculum vitae or the investigator's account of his life. What the literary historian really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself. Only such a legend is a *literary fact*.' ...we can situate a filmmaker's work in film history by studying the persona created by the artist in his public pronouncements, in his writings, and in his dealings with the film industry....However subjective, even self-centered, such a legend may appear, that legend has an objective function in a historical situation. The biographical legend may justify production decisions and even create a spontaneous theory of the artist's practice. More important, the biographical legend is a way in which authorship significantly shapes our perception of the work. Created by the filmmaker and other forces (the press, cinephiles), the biographical legend can determine how we 'should' read the films and the career. We do not come innocent to the films, and Dreyer's legend can shape how we regard them." David Bordwell, The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981) 9. "As a film director, Ozu exists within a network of practices and discourses—aesthetic, industrial, and journalistic. I shall have occasion to return to them throughout this book, but a factor that deserves separate treatment here is what Boris Tomashevsky calls the 'biographical legend'. Some artists have biographies, others don't. A Byron or a Bergman offers us a strong version of the individual's life that functions in two ways: to permit works to come into being, as fulfillments of the legend; and to orient perceivers to them, to favor certain construals and to block

that the biographical legend is not a simple compendium of facts to be directly inserted into the historical account or, on the other hand, to be demythologized; rather, Bordwell seeks to depict how the legend functions both historically and aesthetically so that it becomes possible to reveal the choices, real or imagined, that the filmmaker confronted in his or her film practice.¹⁰ In other words, in response to what historical exigencies did the legend develop and, moreover, how does the filmmaker situate his work in relation to the dominant aesthetic norms extant at the time?¹¹ The biographical legend, comprised as it is of received critical traditions which historically and aesthetically situate a director in a particular site, is used by Bordwell as a foil for his construction of backgrounds pertinent to a renewed understanding of both Dreyer and Ozu.¹²

others. The film industry can generate a biographical legend...or the artist himself can provide one through interviews, writings, and public pronouncements, as Dreyer did. In the latter event, the creation of a biographical legend should not be considered a cunningly contrived display; public discourse will necessarily appropriate a filmmaker's words and acts, turning them to particular ends. Ozu offers a good example." Bordwell, *Ozu...* 5-6. Tomashevsky's distinction between the investigator's account of the minutiae of an author's life and the biographical legend's conscious selection and promotion of those facts which the author chooses to reveal in the social construction of his persona is found in a more strident and polemical form in Osip Brik's 1923 manifesto (see chapter one, footnote 24).

¹⁰"For a poetics of cinema, filmmaking is a practice—operating within institutions, regulated by tacit assumptions about the nature of the work process and about the decisions that are allotted to people in different roles. What we think of as the 'Ozu' film is strongly affected by the mode of film practice in which he worked." Bordwell, *Ozu...* 18.

¹¹"Our task is not to puncture this legend, as if we could replace it with an easy truth, but rather to analyze the legend's historical and aesthetic functions. We need to pose three sorts of questions. First, we need to specify the situation to which the biographical legend responded. What concrete circumstances confronted the filmmaker when he entered the realm of film production?...Dreyer entered an objectively constituted situation in which economic, social, and aesthetic forces operated. Secondly, we can ask what difficulties the artist identifies in his or her historical situation. What are the stale materials, the outworn habits, the clichés which the artist seizes upon? We are not asking whether the artist's view of the situation is correct in some absolute sense, only whether that view coheres with the biographical legend. Thirdly, we can see that legend as a struggle with contemporary norms. How does the filmmaker see his or her work as altering the historical situation, transforming standardized materials? We should not expect a simple transmission of influences but a dynamic action *upon* contemporary practice by the artist's work." Bordwell, *The Films...* 10.

¹²"In the artisanal and conservative themes, Ozu's biographical legend—so divorced from his private life that we might rather speak of a 'tempermental' legend—functions to supply a particular 'set' or orientation to the films. In the argument of this book, this orientation plays various roles. For one thing, it will be questioned. This conservative craftsman makes bold, varied, innovative films. I shall argue that Ozu is an experimental filmmaker, quite likely the greatest. The legend can also be put into various historical contexts. We can suggest, for instance, that what seems to be a stylistic conservatism is actually, in the context of 1930s Japanese film, a somewhat 'progressive' rigor....Analyzing Ozu's poetics of cinema thus requires us to qualify and contextualize the biographical legend, discounting it when it runs afoul of other evidence while still preserving it as a precious clue to the diverse aesthetic and political roles the work could fulfill." Bordwell, *Ozu...* 6-7.

Both Dreyer and Ozu display biographical legends which construe the relations between production practices, aesthetic precepts, and actual historical situations as relatively unified and complementary, thus making their unconventional and sometimes more formally difficult films palatable. Dreyer, the “dour Dane” and “stubborn individualist refusing all compromise,” believed that cinematic art could not be sustained within the assembly-like factory of studio production practices and, therefore, rarely found a production situation amenable to his needs. This explains his sporadic output (only 4 feature-length films in the last 35 years of his life). Ozu’s films incarnate a uniquely Japanese aesthetic and continue traditional artistic practices, styles and themes in opposition to the foreign Western cinema. There is much more to each biographical legend, yet the preceding demonstrates what Bordwell questions and challenges in the historical assessment of each director. In Bordwell’s history, Dreyer’s aesthetic precepts work to obscure the relations between his mode of production and his actual historical situation (i.e., if you define cinematic art in terms of a rejection or disavowal of the modern industrial practices associated with filmmaking, then an *auteurist* explanation and its attendant reduction of all aspects of the mode of production to the personal vision of the director assume a much more powerful position than they actually hold).¹³ Again, in Bordwell’s history, Ozu’s relationship to “Japaneseness” is not one wherein the director simply expressed or transmitted the predilections of Zen Buddhist-inspired Japanese aesthetics.¹⁴ In fact, Bordwell demonstrates that Ozu and his contemporaries are to be located within a native cinematic tradition which had already appropriated and, moreover, assimilated in a

¹³ “Dreyer’s search for the artisan’s role in mass-production filmmaking swerved him toward an ahistoricality of style, an avowed concern for the universal and permanent. By situating cinema art outside industrial definitions, Dreyer’s aesthetic blocked consideration of the contemporary conditions of film work....As T.W. Adorno points out: ‘The division of labor is not to be revoked by the claims of universal genius.’....his [Dreyer’s] biographical legend did not permit a recognition of the way his production practice was related to concrete historical circumstances.” Bordwell, The Films... 191.

¹⁴ “The exasperated reader may protest that surely Japanese aesthetic traditions and Buddhist philosophy must have something to do with Ozu’s work. In certain ways, they do. But I can spell out those ways only by showing that the very concepts ‘Zen Buddhism’ and ‘Japanese aesthetics’ need to be understood within particular historical contexts....In sum, Zen is not the only source of Japanese aesthetics, nor does it exemplify a pure essence uncontaminated by historical reinterpretations. Indeed, to speak of ‘Japanese aesthetics’ itself is to suggest that the tradition is more homogeneous than it is. Japanese art has always subscribed to a variety of doctrines....There is no single or monolithic Japanese aesthetic tradition. It is a highly variable construct to which artists and polemicists of different periods appeal even as they redefine it for contemporary purposes.” Bordwell, Ozu... 27.

mediated fashion many of the narrative and stylistic conventions and material practices of the classical Hollywood cinema.¹⁵ At the same time Ozu differs from his contemporaries in that he innovated several practices (low camera position and the use of 360° space) which, due to their conspicuous break with Western practice, came to be identified as essentially Japanese by both (appreciative) Western critics and the (deriding) directors of the Japanese New Wave.¹⁶ Whereas

¹⁵ “Because of foreign influences, Japanese films had a more ‘Western’ dramaturgy and style than prior traditions would have allowed, but filmmakers also borrowed eclectically from native sources in order to display an ‘indigenously Japanese’ quality. Cinema disrupted native traditions by reinforcing the pull toward Western models of narrative and representation that was already being felt in Meiji literature and theatre. But filmmakers could embellish American-based plot structure and style with asides, elaborations, and fine points that harked back to ‘traditional’ arts. In this context, Ozu’s mixture of classical Hollywood principles and studied citations of Japanese elements makes sense. His films draw not on some amorphous entity called ‘Japanese tradition’ but upon mass culture of his moment....he recast not a pure ‘Japaneseness’ or traditional art but specific post-Meiji materials, themselves shaped by the encounter with the West. That recasting was centrally mediated by such cinematic factors as Hollywood norms, Japanese cinema’s ‘decorative classicism’, and the practices of a commercial film industry.” Bordwell, Ozu... 30. An aside: Bordwell is here setting up the dynamics necessary to analyze the peculiar characteristics of a colonial film practice which must contend with the convergence of foreign dominant film practices and native artistic traditions. At a later point in the book he states: “The ‘purely Japanese’ traditions are not always so pure; and the synthesis, no matter how dependent on foreign models, may be taken as somehow intrinsically Japanese....The task of the Meiji artist was to modernize and remain Japanese; but what is it to be Japanese? To retain some mysterious, uncontaminated essence, or to create a distinct synthesis out of many, often disparate sources?” (146). Does Bordwell’s attempt to delineate the unique synthesis of colonial (Japanese) and dominant (American) filmmaking practices hold any relevance or significance for understanding Canadian filmmaking? Culturally active Canadians have, in the interests of nationalism and the perseverance of a Canadian identity, struggled to define the Canadian film—particularly in opposition to the dominant American product. Are there pure Canadian themes or are we operating with definitions of what it is to be Canadian which have themselves been subject to historical reinterpretations? Moreover, given the originary “two solitudes” and a contemporary burgeoning multiculturalism can we even conceive of a singular Canadian aesthetic as many have been inclined to do? Many of these discussions, as recorded in the pages of the now-defunct Cinema Canada, have sought to discern “some mysterious, uncontaminated essence” to use Bordwell’s description, yet no one has been able to agree just what that essence entails (in large part due to the same factors which work against defining “Japaneseness”). Would it be more productive to examine the synthesis of dominant American film practice and the local—yet vital—elaborations that constitute Canadian film practice as they are realized in mediations specific to the Canadian situation?

José Arroyo contends that Bordwell’s theory of narration and commitment to cognitive psychology efface a unique Canadian mode of spectatorship which only a psychoanalytically-derived understanding of fantasy or masquerade can properly inform. However, locating Canadian identity within a mode of spectatorship, especially a consciousness analyzed in the abstract and universalizing prescriptions of psychoanalysis, would seem to constitute yet another search for a singular identifying trait held in common by all Canadians. Moreover, there is more to Canadian film than the psychological disposition of an individual spectator. If contemporary Canadian film occupies a colonial position similar to that of Ozu’s Japan, then a more fruitful way to discern the marks of a national film practice would be to analyze those unique local institutions (and their inherent aesthetic precepts, production practices, etc.) which mediate the impact of the dominant American practice, namely the National Film Board of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Telefilm Canada, the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, the Directors Guild of Canada, the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, etc. Arroyo’s article, “Bordwell Considered: Cognitivism, Colonialism and Canadian Cinematic Culture,” can be found in Cineaction 28 (Spring 1992) 74-88.

¹⁶ “After the war, his [Ozu’s] collaboration with Noda was applauded by middle-aged critics for its respect for Japa-

the biographical legend shuts out history by providing a critical shorthand which construes aesthetic precepts, production practices and the immediate historical context as a unitary phenomenon, Bordwell's historical poetics lead us back to situating the filmmaker's work in relation to (sometimes) conflicting factors, which, in turn, yield important historical insights concerning the interactions of those factors.

The biographical legend provides a means to review the persona crafted by the director *et al.* and the persona's importance as a critical and historical construction. The legend also, and ironically (given that it often substitutes for history), establishes the need to develop a genuine history of the director or films under analysis since it fails to furnish this sort of knowledge; although the biographical legend marks certain contexts as salient to a film history, and therefore itself operates historically and aesthetically, it ultimately works to occlude more than reveal anything of true significance. The previous chapter introduced the nascent historiography of the Formalists as evident in the concepts of the background and the norm as developed by Tynjanov and Mukarovsky. Tynjanov's contribution was to propose that a background proximate or contiguous to the artwork effects change at both a broad structural level and upon the functional organization of interrelated devices or elements. Mukarovsky demonstrated that aesthetic norms operate on and in an individual artwork via the material, technical, and practical norms extant in the traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic backgrounds drawn upon in the art-making process. Bordwell effectively uses these terms to provide an alternative history to that offered by the dominant biographical legends which invariably attend both Dreyer and Ozu.

nese tradition. But these films of the 1950s paved the way for a reaction. Directors like Oshima and Imamura called for a rude cinema which protested against not only their elders' formal elegance but the definition of 'Japaneseness' inherent in it. Ozu came to be identified with an arid rigor and a serenity that was oblivious to the Japan of the Cold War, resurgent capitalism, and the Security Treaty. For the West, however, discovering Japan's new international power in the 1970s coincided with discovering Ozu, and exactly those values which the Japanese New Wave loathed became the basis of the Ozu cult abroad. He became the 'essentially Japanese' director once more. We shall see throughout this book how his career—his life, his legend, and his films—reveals that the very question of being Japanese is far from simple, and is itself a site of cultural contestation." Bordwell, *Ozu*... 15-16.

A foundational and enabling presupposition necessary to the study of an individual director is that in some ways his film practice and style can be distinguished from those of other directors surrounding him; the unique features of his films warrant and can bear sustained critical attention because they differ (in some way) from the cinematic conventions currently practiced. The background serves this primarily differential function by providing the means by which comparisons can be initiated.¹⁷ Of the conceivably infinite number of backgrounds which could be used to generate a historical analysis of a film or group of films not every one (indeed, not many) will deliver a deepening of our understanding about the history of the film, and, therefore, Bordwell must establish criteria by which to judge the most pertinent backgrounds, the backgrounds which will best reveal those unique divergences from the conventional. Bordwell assumes that the cinematic norms and film practices concurrent to those of the subject of the historical study evince, because of their differences, a high degree of explanatory power and thus comprise a key background.¹⁸ In his studies on Dreyer and Ozu, for example, Bordwell allocates a considerable amount of room to explicating the formal norms and mode of production associated with the classical Hollywood cinema.¹⁹ Although this “quality of divergence” has been seen as inherently predisposed to noting

¹⁷“Crucial to this book is the assumption that Dreyer’s work presents certain unique and salient features. But how to identify them? How, even, do we mark salience?....what is needed is a background set against which we can define Dreyer’s difference.” Bordwell, The Films... 4. This recalls Victor Erlich and Ann Jeferson’s characterization of the Formalist object of study as being *Differenzqualität* or the “quality of divergence”; see chapter one, footnote 31.

¹⁸“The poetics of cinema which I am proposing differs from an ‘intrinsic’ critical theory in assuming that only against historically significant backgrounds do particular works achieve salience, for audiences or analysts. In one sense this is simply a matter of ‘putting Ozu’s work into context’; but this formulation usually fails to specify what will count as theoretically significant features of context. For a filmmaker, the pertinent backgrounds are at least two: the mode of film production and consumption within which s/he works; and the formal norms which come to hand. For Ozu, one more background is made salient by previous critical discussion: those cultural norms identified with Zen Buddhism and traditional Japanese aesthetics.” Bordwell, Ozu... 17.

¹⁹“This book examines Dreyer’s work as a set of deviations from some historically defined norm within the same medium....Although several choices are possible here, I shall pick a background set which I shall call ‘the classical Hollywood cinema.’ Why this construct? Historically, it is at once proximate and pertinent, central to a knowledge of the development of cinematic forms. If there is an ‘ordinary cinematic usage’ for the fifty years of Dreyer’s career, it is the narrative and stylistic principles of the American cinema. This book attempts to show the value of situating a filmmaker in relation to a model of typical traits of narrative feature films between 1920 and 1960....The model of a classical narrative system proposed in chapter three and that of a classical spatial style in chapter four are meant to have the same explanatory status as the concepts of classicism or baroque in the history of painting or music: they are useful for establishing the norms and conventions of dominant stylistic practices of a period.” Bordwell, The Films... 4-5. “The Hollywood cinema in particular exercised a strong influence over the Japanese industry. During World War I, Universal had pioneered American export to Japan, and

the modernist or art cinemas of, for example, Dreyer and Ozu (see Erlich and Jefferson on Formalism and the avant-garde in chapter one, footnote 31 and Gunning on neoformalist criticism in chapter one, page 33), Bordwell maintains that no film, not even the most typical, assumes all of the features of a film practice—no film, despite the many characteristics it may share with conventional practice, fades completely into the background.²⁰

Pertinent backgrounds also act to mediate the effects of broad cultural dispositions on the filmmaker and his films. As we have seen, Ozu's biographical legend maintains that he and his films somehow mirror or signify "Japaneseness," and that this constellation of interrelated cultural features is key to historically and aesthetically situating not only Ozu's *oeuvre* but also any specific formal features at the diegetic, intra-filmic level. A direct linkage, for example, is sought between Ozu's use of a low camera position and the height of a Japanese person kneeling on a *tatami* mat. Bordwell claims, however, that any such linkages between film form and broad cultural dispositions are mediated by the proximate backgrounds of mode of film production and cinematic norms extant within the historical situation (in Ozu's experience, the Shochiku studio) of the director.²¹ The mediation induced by backgrounds also militates against viewing either

for several years Universal 'Jewel' and 'Bluebird' titles far outnumbered other firms' products. After the 1923 Kanto earthquake damaged many theatres and Tokyo studios, American films established themselves solidly in the market. Hollywood films became second only to Japanese films in popularity. Shochiku [the studio which employed Ozu for his entire career] went so far as to take Paramount as partner in owning a major Tokyo theatre. Studios also relied upon U.S. technology—Bell & Howell, Mitchell, Akeley, and Eyemo cameras; American arc and incandescent lighting fixtures; and, until 1938 or so, Eastman raw stock, both negative and positive. Studio executives visited Los Angeles to buy equipment and observe production methods, while back at home scenarists were urged to study Hollywood scripts, and cinematographers counted and timed shots as they watched American films. Hollywood pictures were cited, copied, remade, and even inserted into Japanese ones." Bordwell, Ozu... 19.

²⁰ "My account of the 'classical cinema' will be a model, not a collection of inductive generalizations. Every actual film submits the model to certain pressures; no film succeeds in *becoming* the model. But this does not make the paradigm sheer fantasy either. The conception of a 'Hollywood film' has a historical existence, registered not only in films but also in the testimony of screenwriters and other studio personnel. (Hence my references to manuals and recipe books which state certain assumptions quite bluntly.)" Bordwell, The Films... 5.

²¹ "...we can treat Ozu's films as lying at the core of a set of concentric circles. We cannot simply link the outermost circle—that is, the most broad and general features of Japanese society or history—to these films. The concentric circles in between represent the more pertinent and concrete forces impinging on the films—such forces as Ozu's working situation, the film industry, and the proximate historical circumstances of his milieu. Throughout this book I will be insisting that contextualizing Ozu's work requires the critic to trace how broad social forces are warped, refracted, or transformed by the dynamics specific to these mediating factors. For example, to disclose the relation of Ozu's films to devices of Japanese poetry, one must recognize how poetic devices were appropriated by the Japanese film industry as a whole." Bordwell, Ozu... 17. Later Bordwell states that: "There is no

Dreyer's or Ozu's films as pure, personal self-expression. Both directors had to contend with forces which partially mandated the parameters of their film practice: for example, Dreyer found himself constrained by several different production arrangements²² and Ozu was assigned specific genres to film by Shochiku studio head Shiro Kido.²³ Some backgrounds and their attendant norms, like those provided by the classical Hollywood cinema, assume a high degree of historical importance because of their almost universal existence and adoption across a variety of cultures and cinemas. In every situation, however, the vicissitudes of local film practice will mediate and intervene in the force and power exercised by a strong cultural disposition, social ideology, or "spirit of the age."²⁴

doubt that at a very basic level, certain artistic practices and broad cultural assumptions about space and time affected Ozu's work. Yet exactly because the level is so basic, it must also have affected every Japanese filmmaker, every artist, indeed every individual in the culture. But no other filmmaker's style resembles Ozu's. A precise historical explanation cannot simply assert a continuity between centuries of Japanese poetry and the work of a film director born in 1903....Furthermore, an appeal to 'tradition' often conceals a loose, untheorized, and imperialistic approach to 'Japaneseness'. The danger is the sort of ahistoricity that Tynianov warned against and which is very common in studies of Japanese culture....We are back to the problem posed in Chapter 2, where I argued that a causal explanation (rather than a dispositional one) requires us to spell out Ozu's concrete historical circumstances, and to consider the ways in which they may transform many long-range cultural influences. We must start from the assumption that historically specific mediations impinge upon the individual filmmaker." (146)

²²"Dreyer's career constitutes a varied series of solutions with respect to these [production] possibilities. Never wealthy himself, he could drum up private financing for only one film (*Vampyr*). He refused the position of avant-garde artist or political filmmaker. In his early career, Dreyer took the first option and simply worked under contract with an industry. When that solution was no longer tenable, he sought other production possibilities. Although he tested the possibility of working within an 'artistic' segment of a major firm, by the end of the silent era he had settled on a fifth solution to the problem of the artist in relation to industrial filmmaking....Dreyer's career in the 1920s added a fifth alternative to the list which I proposed earlier. Directors did not need to pledge themselves permanently to a single firm...; but neither did they have to be independently financed. A director might operate on a film-by-film basis, working on a single project for a single company on whatever terms might be acceptable. The filmmaker could then move to another firm, perhaps even in another country. Although this solution is common now, it was rare in the early days of monopoly film production. This alternative made Dreyer an international traveler. Between 1920 and 1926, he made seven films in five countries, and no two films for the same firm...." Bordwell, The Films... 11, 16.

²³"With its long hours, intense production schedule, and close and informal ties among peers, Shochiku Kamata/Ofuna had powerful effects on Ozu's career. He would work calmly within the industry, accepting the star system and approved genres. He would cultivate the humanistic Kido touch. He would use the studio's casual atmosphere to borrow ideas and quickly launch topical projects. He would become a Shochiku house director." Bordwell, Ozu... 21.

²⁴A history of Canadian film would be wise to examine, in detail, the local and national institutional, economic, and aesthetic mediations which are operative in Canada to understand how they help to secure Canadian film practice. To write such a history with the presupposition that the classical Hollywood cinema exerts a direct and unmediated control fails to illuminate the unique features of Canadian filmmaking, positions that filmmaking as reactionary, oppositional and marginal and, moreover, yields yet another dispiriting (and usually highly abstract) litany focusing on the loss of a Canadian essence (as anyone who has surveyed Cinema Canada over the years

An integral yet vexing component of every historiography is the need to provide a theory of periodization to illustrate the different stages or phases which comprise the diachronic axis of the historical subject. Bordwell sunders Dreyer's career in two—"Craftsman and Artist" (1919-1927), and "On the Margins of Film Production" (1928-1968)—founded as it is upon the interaction between Dreyer's oft-expressed desire to remain in complete control of all facets of film production and the emerging standardization and differentiation of film production which was rapidly accelerated after the introduction of sound to the cinema. In Dreyer's periodization the Romantic-derived aesthetic of personal expressive creativity and the ongoing industrial and economic developments correlated with the evolving practices of monopoly capitalism can be seen as together giving an actual shape to his career.²⁵ Bordwell's initial periodization of Ozu's public career is governed by the public reaction and critical reception to his films: "Apprenticeship" (1923-27), "Emergence" (1927-30), "Fame" (1931-40), "Prestige" (1941-45), "Postwar gropings" (1946-48), "Re-emergence" (1949-51), and "The Old Master" (1952-63). Immediately, however, Bordwell recognizes the problems inherent in such a scheme which, despite its usefulness as a

can attest to). Canadian cultural critics have become used to this latter mode of analysis, however, and Bordwell's historical poetics may not appear at first glance to produce the political, social and ideological rhetoric common to such discussions, but it offers a detailed and nuanced account of Ozu's film practice by way of relating it to many backgrounds, particularly the conventions of both Hollywood and concurrent Japanese filmmaking.

²⁵This conflict is illustrated in the following series of quotes: "What Dreyer read in the careers of Griffith, Sjöström, and Christensen was a craft heritage opposed to the routinized labor of 'manufacturing film-products.' Such a vision of artistic autonomy was already nostalgic in 1920. Nevertheless, Dreyer declared his faith in the film artisan, the creator who made one film from top to bottom, seeing it through every phase of the production process. The conception of the director as artisan shaped production habits which would remain constant throughout Dreyer's career....Dreyer either avoided working for monopoly firms or worked for such firms only when he could get considerable directorial control over the project....At the end of the 1920s, Dreyer's independence was well synchronized with opportunities in the industry....By 1932, after ten films, he was confronted with the difficulty of maintaining his freedom in a changing European film industry. The 'holy organization' against which Dreyer had railed in 1931 now dominated filmmaking in virtually every country. After the coming of sound, monopoly control of filmmaking sharply increased. Sound patents and technological priorities forced small firms out of business and increased consolidations. In the silent cinema, a poly-lingual filmmaker could move from country to country, but sound encouraged the hardening of national boundaries....With a reputation for being a financial risk and a tenacious commitment to directorial control, Dreyer became not only independent but also unemployable. After *Vampyr* [1932], he did not complete a film for ten years. For the rest of his career, from 1932 to 1968, Dreyer was marginal to world film production. He was able to make films only in unusual economic circumstances." Bordwell, The Films... 17-19. This periodization reveals the historical and aesthetic significance of Dreyer's self-construed biographical legend; by subscribing to a certain view of the practice of film art early in his career (approx. 1920), Dreyer precluded a later positive collaboration with the emerging historical reality of the industrial paradigm associated with the sound cinema.

basic point of reference, fails to reveal anything significant about the films themselves (other than the shifting loyalties of both the public and the critics). For one thing, there are stable and continuing production and technical practices which make aesthetic periodization difficult. Furthermore, the standard periodization (pre-1948/post-1948), although legitimately distinguishing several features within Ozu's films, has assumed a qualitative character in Ozu scholarship; either one period or the other is accorded much more analytical attention and, therefore, weight, and the resulting inequity comes to be expressed in evaluative terms which, in turn, reinforce both historical and critical commonplaces (e.g., Noël Burch favours prewar Ozu, while Paul Schrader and Donald Richie favour postwar Ozu).

Bordwell clears the ground by recognizing that aesthetic periodization is made particularly difficult because many formal features present in the films of Ozu's *œuvre* do not develop in concert.²⁶ Ozu's periodization cannot be based meaningfully upon a linear construal of the different genres within he worked; the *gendai-geki* (contemporary life), the *nansemu* (nonsense comedies), the *shoshimin-geki* (the lower-middle-class life), the *burujoa-eiga* (the bourgeoisie), the historical film, the melodrama, the 'home drama', and the 'salaryman' genre do not fall into a successive historical pattern.²⁷ Isolating the phases of stylistic change will reveal problems similar to those already witnessed.²⁸

Instead of the (naïve) periodization which can be the endpoint to which a film history aspires, Bordwell offers the terms examined previously; the biographical legend, the background, the norm, the mediation—which have been demonstrated above to be dynamic and not static or abstract concepts—are to be utilized when examining changes observed across the entirety of a film

²⁶ "My main concern is to show that although the standard periodization captures important changes in the films, we ought to recognize that in many ways Ozu's development is more complex than the scheme suggests. In any body of films, different factors may develop at different rates; we ought not to expect that all changes in various aspects of the films will tally with each other. Subject and theme, for instance, do not fall so neatly into the prewar/postwar categories." Bordwell, Ozu... 12-13.

²⁷ "Evidently we cannot neatly project the contours of Ozu's career onto his use of genres." Bordwell, Ozu... 14.

²⁸ "Trying to define stylistic phases confronts us squarely with the overall problem of divergent criteria for period units. Everything depends on what we want to measure. We ought not to expect that changes in, say, camera position will coincide with a new approach to staging or editing." Bordwell, Ozu... 15.

director's career.²⁹ Bordwell, therefore, reaffirms his commitment to emphasizing that a methodological priority must be assigned to an examination of the film itself because, as Mukarovsky noted, the individual film transforms the backgrounds and norms which come to be embedded, implanted, and cited within it.³⁰ Bordwell, then, can be seen as carving a third way between a linear, evolutionary progression and, on the other hand, a semiotic-derived alternative where the film is theorized as the mere site for the confluence of differing sign systems. Again: a history cannot be the simple accumulation of factors or influences as they appear in chronological order (for this is a list, not a history) nor the indiscriminatory aggregate of countless backgrounds which assume such an importance that the film itself becomes effaced having no historical nor ontic definition. For Bordwell, the historical integrity—and not the historical autonomy so often posited as an equivalent to Formalism—of the film obtains; and in those histories where it does not, the analytical emphasis perforce finds its focus in ostensibly determinative non-cinematic phenomena which, in turn, results in a cultural or ideological history unable to offer a nuanced account of the “films” in film history.³¹

There is one more major component to Bordwell’s histories of Dreyer and Ozu namely, the attempt to assess their legacies, their effects on other filmmakers. This aspect of a historical study is predicated on the concepts previously explicated and is also indicative of Bordwell’s historiography. In a brief analysis of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Vivre sa vie* Bordwell renders salient how the Dreyerian fragmentation of cinematic space via the concentration upon the face and the glance

²⁹ “Part Two of this book [the analyses of Ozu’s films] will consider stylistic changes across Ozu’s career without seeking to create a rigid master scheme. Since Ozu seemed to regard each film as an occasion to recombine elements which he or someone else had already introduced, we ought to expect neither linear evolution nor simple periodization.” Bordwell, *Ozu...* 15.

³⁰ “A *historical* poetics cannot rest content with the analysis of syuzhet [“the substance and sequence of narrative events explicitly presented in the film” (51)] and style in Ozu’s work, even if we have sought always to retain a sense of the pertinent backgrounds provided by contemporary practices. We want more. We want to explain, in a historically plausible way, how these strategies came to be as they are. *Our intrinsic analysis thus becomes an indispensable methodological step, since it reveals an overall system of narration that must be explained in its concrete and dynamic totality, not through vague evocations...or excessively local analogies.* Our systematic analysis, if coupled with a study of historical factors both proximate and pertinent to Ozu, can yield a richer sense of the narration’s sources.” Bordwell, *Ozu...* 143, italics mine.

³¹ As can be seen there are contending historiographies available to the cinema and this is briefly examined in a section to come.

becomes a *locus classicus* for Godard's film, "offering a point of departure for Godard's own stylistic work."³² That is, influence is never an event or process centred on the importation of just one device or element, but is, rather, the transferral and transformation of a set or system of conventions and problems which are then adapted and reworked by their new context.³³ Ozu, working within the confines of the Shochiku studio system, had a more immediate impact on the assistants and apprentices who worked under him and a farther reaching legacy upon both Japanese and Western filmmakers.³⁴

This section on the historiography operative within Bordwell's studies of Dreyer and Ozu has introduced and developed several important concepts necessary to the historical assessment of these directors, or, for that matter, any film director. The biographical legend, because (and in spite) of its obscurantist misconstrual of key historical factors, serves a vital historical and aesthetic function in disclosing the operative clichés of the public and critical reception of a director's

³² Bordwell, The Films... 199.

³³ "...just as we had to avoid excessively simple notions of influence on Dreyer, so must we avoid the same error in considering his effects on other filmmakers. It is not a matter of finding Dreyerian devices in other filmmakers' works, for that simply pries elements loose from their functions in different films. What is at stake is not the borrowing of isolated devices but the functions themselves, the problems and processes that Dreyer's films open up. Influences, writes Tynianov, concern the shifting roles assigned to a given element. Influence is seldom straight or direct; it moves crabwise, like (Shklovsky insists) the knight's move in chess. An artist rarely provides a model to be copied by another artist; an artist opens up a field of problems, launches a theoretical excursion into some possibilities. The problems opened up are not necessarily settled—neither by the first artist (Dreyer did not, as we have discussed at length, solve the problems his work raised) nor by the successors. The successors transform the problem, position the issues within a different context, even reject the initial premises. *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Vampyr* pose problems of spatial and temporal continuity; *Day of Wrath*, *Ordet*, and *Gertrud*, problems of rhythm, theatricality, sparseness, and emptiness; and all of the films, problems of the relation of narrative logic to the spatio-temporal structures of cinema. What is at stake is not direct influence...but rather ways in which modern filmmakers have transformed those issues." Bordwell, The Films... 199.

³⁴ "Ozu and the norms of his early period cannot, of course, be starkly separated, since he also shaped them. Many Shochiku directors of the 1930s, such as Yasushi Sasaki, Kenkichi Hara, and Minoru Shibuya, started as his pupils, and his influence is easy to spot in their films....The many Ozu touches in Shochiku home dramas of the late 1930s make it likely that he contributed to the studio 'look' by innovating a highly noticeable stylistic system which other directors drew upon as eclectically as they had drawn upon Hollywood." Bordwell, Ozu... 25. For directors of the Japanese New Wave and still later Western filmmakers, Ozu provided something to react against or fondly recall: "In the late 1950s, a new generation of filmmakers identified him with an outdated concept of Japanese film. The problem they defined for themselves was not that of establishing a distinctive national cinema but that of self-expression through social engagement. Hence there appeared the Japanese 'New Wave', with its rough and technically flamboyant films that seemed to have more ties to contemporary conditions. Ozu thus paved the way for Oshima, Imamura, and Yamada in that he represented what they reacted against. To a still younger generation abroad, however, Ozu came to represent a stable compromise between narrative accessibility and formal control—a significant tension for such directors as Wenders, Wang, and Jarmusch." (175-176)

work. It negatively defines the historian's task by suggesting the (counterfactual and, therefore, erroneous) relationships among pertinent backgrounds and a filmmaker's work. Moreover, pertinent backgrounds both mediate the impact of broader socio-cultural values and are, in turn, mediated by the formal system that is the film. Any periodization must take account of the preceding concepts and be supple enough to incorporate them and, at the same time, work hard to avoid imposing a schema which threatens to become more evaluative than historical. Bordwell is not proposing that periodization be conceived of as value-free; rather, once the aesthetic proclivities that are instantiated within every historical scheme are admitted, the historian is enabled to attend to the more central task of propounding the backgrounds which are pertinent to the film. Histories will hold an implicit evaluation of their subject which partially structures their periodization, but the films themselves and their proximate backgrounds mediate and militate against a complete subjectivization of the historical project.

In a brief return to the criticisms addressed to the neoformalist historiography it becomes apparent that both Salt and Gunning, in maintaining that neoformalism as an immanent analysis of film is unable to construct a history of film directors or cinema, misconstrue the way in which neoformalism makes use of such constructs as the biographical legend and the background. In effect, they dispose of neoformalism as yet another immanent critique because it is a formalism and all formalisms are construed to be ahistorical concerned as they are with a film's historically autonomous formal features. The rhetorical advantages of misrecognition allow for a superficial analysis and Salt, particularly, seems to favour this strategy.³⁵ Clearly, however, a deeper objection underlies some critiques of the neoformalist historiography and this comes to light in both Nichols and Polan's disagreement with the idea that a film's intrinsic structure and style be given

³⁵ Although it may appear to be an *ad hominem* to suggest that Salt holds any other purpose than to offer a review of Bordwell and Thompson's efforts, it must be mentioned that all three have been involved in an acrimonious exchange regarding their respective work on the classical Hollywood cinema. This did not remain a quiet academic disagreement regarding methodology but escalated, at Salt's provocation, to attacks on personal and scholarly integrity before the editor of *Film Quarterly*, himself a previous target of Salt's ire, shut down the exchange. See the "Controversy & Correspondence" column in *Film Quarterly*, 39.2 (Winter 85-86), 40.2 (Winter 86-87), and 40.4 (Summer 1987).

methodological priority over extrinsic, material causes and determinations. Ultimately, Nichols and Polan would appear to subscribe to a film historiography different from Bordwell's (perhaps a semiotic alternative), one which grants primary explanatory weight to socio-cultural formations or codes traversing the site of the film and not the film's formal features, but this does not clarify how they fail to miss the neoformalist concern with detailing the mode of production or the production economics of a particular film practice. Perhaps the real issue is that whereas Nichols and Polan begin with and put in the analytical foreground their ideological constructions, Bordwell *et al.* work through both the immediate backgrounds to a film practice and the films themselves before drawing any ideological conclusions. What we have here, again, are contending historiographies which both lay claim to film history and, in particular, what is arguably the most significant construct in any film history, and to which we now turn, the classical Hollywood cinema.³⁶

A NEOFORMALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY: *classical Hollywood cinema*

The global hegemony exercised by the economic, technological and, especially, stylistic conventions founded and organized within the classical Hollywood cinema (CHC) make this historical and aesthetic construct extremely relevant to any film history, whether that of a national cinema or of an individual director.³⁷ This position of dominance makes the CHC a focal point for

³⁶ We will examine Polan's other concern, that the neoformalist historiography, working as it is with the Formalist idea that perceptual defamiliarization is the foundational characteristic of art, is condemned to construct a cyclical film history devoid of any actual relation to history in a section ("contending histories") to come. At that time the implications of Robert Ray's critique will also be addressed.

³⁷ "The longevity of the classical cinema accounts partly for its influence. We often forget that Hollywood cinema has affected nearly every sphere of Western cultural life, from building design to conceptions of physical beauty. Certainly the classical style has influenced other narrative media—modern literature, advertising, comic strips, and photography. Even if we confine our survey to the sphere of filmmaking, we cannot ignore the extent to which the classical film has become a model for the entire world. By the end of the 1920s, the classical style dominated the world's screens.....It is evident that the 'ordinary film' of France, Germany, and even Japan and Russia constructed causality, time, and space in ways characteristic of the normal Hollywood film. The accessibility of Hollywood cinema to audiences of different cultures made it a transnational standard. This trend has, of course, continued to the present. There is, however, a second effect of Hollywood's international prominence: the need within various countries to distinguish domestic films from the American product. The growth of 'national film styles' after 1919 can best be seen as an attempt to compete economically with the classical style." David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 378, 379. This last point, the growth of the national cinemas being primarily motivated by economic factors, is difficult to assess. From a colonial point of view a national cinema assumes a political and social significance which far outweighs any merely economic motiva-

film historiography—that is, given the indisputable ubiquity of the American cinema how does a film historiography begin to theorize a nuanced approach to assess adequately what threatens to become a monolithic commonplace in cinema studies? We have already seen how Bordwell draws upon the CHC as a background to forefront the divergences of Dreyer and Ozu, but how do he and the others set about appraising the CHC itself? The concept of the group style presupposes a high degree of uniformity and standardization in the phenomena which it describes or else it functions as an unsupported analytical shorthand and the historical construct of the CHC risks dissolution.

Although this study does not make use of the concept of the biographical legend it does incorporate many of the other terms examined above (e.g., the background,³⁸ the film practice,³⁹

tions. Thus the importance of defending our uniquely Canadian communications institutions (see those listed in footnote 14) so that they may nurture and enhance a distinctive film practice. From the imperialist, American perspective such institutions are a feeble excuse for a Canadian film industry which cannot support itself financially and can only exist on government handouts because its product is substandard. How to adjudicate these contrary positions?

³⁸ One of the most fascinating backgrounds that Bordwell illuminates is the appropriation of late-19th century operatic and symphonic music—particularly Wagner—in the service of bolstering narrative continuity. “The sources of Hollywood film music show its narrational bent very clearly. In eighteenth-century melodrama, background music was played to underscore dramatic points, sometimes even in alternation with lines of dialogue. American melodrama of the 1800s used sporadic vamping, but spectacle plays and pantomimes relied upon continuous musical accompaniment. The important influence upon Hollywood film scoring, however, was that of late nineteenth-century operatic and symphonic music, and Wagner was the crest of that influence. Wagner was a perfect model, since he exploited the narrational possibilities of music. Harmony, rhythm, and ‘continuous melody’ could correspond to the play’s dramatic action, and leitmotifs could convey a character’s thoughts, point up parallels between situations, even anticipate action or create irony. Adorno’s monograph on Wagner even argues that the dream of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* anticipated the thoroughly rationalized artifact of the culture industry, as exemplified in the Hollywood film. In the early teens, film trade journals solemnly supplied theater pianists with oversimplified accounts of Wagner’s practice....With the post-1935 resurgence in film scoring, Wagner remained the model. Most of the major studio composers were trained in Europe and influenced by the sumptuous orchestration and long melodic lines characteristic of Viennese opera. Max Steiner [*Casablanca*]...explicitly acknowledged Wagner’s influence....Characters, places, situations—all were relentlessly assigned motifs, either original or borrowed. When motifs were not employed, certain passages functioned as a recitative to cue specific attitudes to the scene....Sam Goldwyn [of MGM] gave the most terse advice: ‘Write music like Wagner, only louder.’” Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 33, 34.

³⁹ This key concept, important as it is for the classical group style, here receives a more extensive definition than that offered above in footnote 10. “A mode of film practice is not reducible to an *oeuvre*...a genre...or an economic category....It is, most simply, a context....the Hollywood mode of film practice constitutes an integral system, including persons and groups but also rules, films, machinery, documents, institutions, work processes, and theoretical concepts. It is this totality that we shall study....Detailed accounts of Hollywood financing, labor, distribution, exhibition, and technology have not usually sought to link economic factors to stylistic ones. In this book, we show how the concept of a mode of film practice can historicize textual analysis and connect the history of film style to the history of the motion picture industry....A mode of film practice, then, consists of a set of widely held stylistic norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production. Those norms consti-

mode of film production, etc.); our critical interest, therefore, will be in exploring those terms which run throughout and play an important role in this analysis of the CHC. In addition to the enabling presupposition of the group style, Bordwell together with Staiger and Thompson make use of the idea of functional equivalency to track the displacement of early cinematic techniques by what are now known to be their classical equivalents. The replacement of one technique by another was not instigated by only technological availability or economic necessity but, instead, these factors were governed and mediated by the demands of the emerging stylistic paradigm. This standardization was further enhanced and empowered by a succession of six management systems to cope with both the increased demand for film product and a need to differentiate one studio's product from another's. In addition to explicating these six management systems, Janet Staiger's contribution to the study is primarily concerned with detailing the material conditions of the CHC film practice (i.e., labor force, means of production, and the financing of production), the relations among these conditions, and an explanation of the changes in the relations among these conditions. Finally, it is impossible to exclude the various backgrounds, both material and stylistic, which contributed to the CHC. A few examples of how the preceding concepts function to provide a history of the CHC will suffice and give confirmation of the historiography implicit in this enterprise.

Critical to the historical maintenance of the Hollywood group style⁴⁰ is the demonstration that shifts, changes, or developments within the style do not constitute a radical break with tradition

tute a determinate set of assumptions about how a movie should behave, about what stories it properly tells and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique, and about the activities of the spectator. These formal and stylistic norms will be created, shaped, and supported within a mode of film production—a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labor, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of filmmaking. Through time, both the norms and the mode of production will change, as will the technology they employ, but certain fundamental aspects will remain constant. Thus to see Hollywood filmmaking from 1917-60 as a unified mode of film practice is to argue for a coherent system whereby aesthetic norms and the mode of film production reinforced one another. This argument is the basis of this book." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... xiii, xiv.

⁴⁰"At this point, a *prima facie* case for a 'classical Hollywood style' depends upon critically examining a body of films. Suppose that between 1917 and 1960 a distinct and homogeneous style has dominated American studio filmmaking—a style whose principles remain quite constant across decades, genres, studios, and personnel. My goal here is to identify, at several levels of generality, to what extent Hollywood filmmaking adheres to integral and limited stylistic conventions....To stress this collective and conserving aspect of Hollywood filmmaking also

but instead signify the replacement of one device or practice by another while the continuity of function or role is sustained. The introduction of new technologies and practices (e.g., three-point lighting, continuity editing, dissolves, etc.) is, of course, observable in Hollywood's history yet these innovative devices were constrained by the temporal, spatial, and narrative systems into which they were integrated. Moreover, any novel device's impact was further tempered by the relations of subordination, mutual interaction, or dominance among the aforementioned three systems. For Bordwell *et al.*, then, the historical specificity of the CHC arises from the interplay of devices, systems, and relations of systems and the continuity of functions preserved by the latter two levels.⁴¹ This idea of functional equivalency is crucial for it allows the film historian to recognize the appearance of a novel device, the ways in which such a device introduces change and is, in turn, mediated by stylistic conventions and industry-wide technical practices. The desire to make historically explicit the CHC's group style, however, predisposes Bordwell and company to emphasize not the diverse cinematic devices extant in the history of Hollywood but to focus on the functions that such devices sustained; not an atomistic listing or inventory of yet one more

affords a useful counterweight to the individualist emphases of auteur criticism....The point is simply that Hollywood films constitute a fairly coherent aesthetic tradition which sustains individual creation. For the purposes of this book, the label 'classicism' serves well because it swiftly conveys distinct aesthetic qualities (elegance, unity, rule-governed craftsmanship) and historical functions (Hollywood's role as the world's mainstream film style). Before there are auteurs, there are constraints; before there are deviations, there are norms." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 3,4.

⁴¹"To construct the classical Hollywood style as a coherent system, we also need to account for the style's historical dimension...I must indicate that my overall description of the classical style applies to a set of films across an extensive period. What historical assumptions underlie such a broadly based analysis? The three levels of generality indicate some of those assumptions. My enterprise assumes a historical continuity at the two most abstract levels of style (systems and relations among systems); it assumes that the most distinct changes take place at the level of stylistic devices. For example, through its history Hollywood cinema seeks to represent events in a temporally continuous fashion; moreover, narrative logic has generally worked to motivate this temporal continuity. What changes through history are the various devices for representing temporal continuity such as intertitles, cuts, irises, dissolves, whip-pans, and wipes." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 9. Bordwell's insistence on breaking up film history into devices, systems, and relations among those systems resembles Robert Allen and Douglas Gomory's conceptualization of the four stages of writing a Realist film history: "The redescription of the event under examination exposes the range of possible causal mechanisms responsible for it. The second stage of historical explanation involves analysis of these individual mechanisms....Third, the historian must take into account the fact that these generative mechanisms or causal factors do not operate in isolation from one another, but are interrelated....Finally, Realism recognizes that the force or causal power of generative mechanisms is uneven in any particular historical event. It is the historian's task not only to identify the range of causal factors responsible for any given event, but also to assess their relative force or importance." Allen and Gomory, Film History... 19-20.

technical innovation but an analysis of the stable roles assigned by temporal, spatial and narrative systems and their relations to each other. One example of functional equivalency follows: the changing functions of summary, expository and dialogue inter-titles in the transition from early cinema to the CHC.

Previous to 1909⁴² filmmakers would often place a summary of the action about to occur at the beginning of a sequence and when the action had unfolded as promised the next summary inter-title would appear; spectators were thus guided through the film and the preceding summary inter-titles ensured narrative legibility.⁴³ An expository inter-title, which simply set up the context or situation, was followed by the action. Dialogue inter-titles began to appear consistently around 1910 and the summary title fell into disuse as filmmakers combined lip movements, quotation marks on the dialogue inter-title itself and the placing of the inter-title at that moment in the scene when it was spoken. At this time, however, an alternative practice was to place the dialogue inter-title in the position occupied previously by the summary title; from 1911 to 1913 directors, cinematographers, critics, and screenplay manuals discussed where and when the dialogue inter-title was to be used. In 1914, however, the placement of the dialogue inter-title became firmly tied to that moment in the scene when a character spoke a line. The four reasons for the consolidation of this variation of the placement of the dialogue inter-title all reveal that although the summary and dialogue inter-titles fulfilled the same function or role within the narrative, the dialogue inter-title promoted the governing status of narrative and temporal flow.⁴⁴ Functional equivalency is

⁴² Bordwell operates with the following periodization: pre-1909, "primitive" or early cinema; 1909-1916, transition to classical cinema; 1917-1960, classical Hollywood cinema.

⁴³ "Summary titles of this sort are an extremely overt and redundant form of narration. They often present the spectator with an explicit hypothesis for upcoming action, rather than guiding him or her to form hypotheses on the basis of the actions themselves." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 183.

⁴⁴ "The prevalence of one alternative may have had several causes. First, as some of the aforementioned scenario advisers imply, the anticipatory dialogue title [the title preceding the action] would impair the suspense of a scene. Secondly, a cut from a speaking character to the written dialogue would make it easier to discern who was speaking and when the line occurred; this furthers the psychological individualization of characters. Thirdly, such a cut would make the character's lip movement motivate the title, which would in turn create a less self-conscious narration. Fourthly, by placing the title at the moment when it was spoken, the film could preserve the temporal flow of the actions uninterrupted. Placement before the shot would present a story event (the line of dialogue) out of order (before its actual delivery within the shot), and this unmotivated rearrangement of chronology would prove unacceptable under the classical system....The dialogue title is an interesting example of the classi-

not, therefore, the haphazard or arbitrary replacement of one device by another, but is governed by (and, therefore, reveals) the temporal, narrative, and spatial systems operative in the classical system.

Formal conventions and stylistic systems are not independent of the concurrent developments in means of production, management and labor structures, and film financing and ownership; these last three components together represent the conditions for the existence of the Hollywood mode of film practice.⁴⁵ The periodization offered by Janet Staiger elucidates six recognizably different management systems which sought to accommodate and promote that mode of film practice—both its economic (“increased production rate, increased technological complexities”) and ideological/signifying practices (“demands for certain stylistic qualities in the films”): prior to 1907, the ‘cameraman’ system; 1907 to 1909, the ‘director’ system; 1909 to 1914, the ‘director-unit’ system; 1914 to early 1930s, the ‘central producer’ system; early 1930s to early 1940s, the ‘producer-unit’ system; and from the early 1940s through the mid-1950s, the ‘package-unit’ system.⁴⁶ As is the situation with the process of functional equivalency being governed by the demands of the classical group style, so too does Staiger posit that these material aspects of

cal cinema’s having two possible devices which could become standard and weeding out the one which fits less well into its overall system of relations among causality, time, and space.” Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 185. The arrival of sound saw the exchange of many devices with those more suited to the production practices of the sound cinema, yet Bordwell maintains that these were functionally equivalent with their silent precursors and worked to keep the classical system stabilized. After comparing the Ernst Lubitsch silent *The Marriage Circle* (1924) with Lubitsch’s 1932 sound remake of essentially the same story, *One Hour With You*, Bordwell concludes that the parallel sequences in both films are “...emblematic of the relation of Hollywood’s silent style to its sound style: differences of stylistic devices (voice, shot, length, cutting rhythm, camera mobility) but fundamental similarity of the systems (coherence of causality, space, and time). The transition from silence to sound was a matter of finding functional equivalents: new techniques appeared, but they served constant formal purposes. One technique might wholly replace a prior one; with the introduction of sound, dialogue inter-titles left the classical paradigm.” (304)

⁴⁵“The purpose of this part is to ground the film practices of Hollywood in the particular historical situation of their making. I assume that because production practices allowed the films to look and sound the way they did, we need to understand the production practices, how and why those practices were what they were....We need to understand that the production of meaning is not separate from its economic mode of production nor from the instruments and techniques which individuals use to form materials so that meaning results. Furthermore, the production of meaning occurs in history; it is not without real changes in time. This suggests that *we need to establish the conditions of the existence of film practice, the relations among the conditions, and an explanation for their changes.*” Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 87, italics mine.

⁴⁶See The Classical... 93. The titles of these succeeding management systems reveal that in each case the mode of film practice changed thus providing yet another systematic structure or constellation which worked to secure and transmit the CHC group style.

Hollywood film practice are to be understood as effects of the CHC style. This circularity denotes that both ideological/signifying practices and economic practices are intertwined but that stylistic demands took the leading, governing role in this historical complex.⁴⁷ Although Staiger does not allow an unmediated economic determinism to rule her historiography, she is adamant that material processes alone account for change.⁴⁸

The authors of The Classical Hollywood Cinema do not subscribe to a technological determinism either; advances in film technology did not comprise a historical imperative that saw the direct application of new innovations to classical film practice. The delayed adoption of panchromatic film stock as an industry standard, for example, gives the lie to any historical account which posits that as soon as the technical know-how was in place the Hollywood film practice changed.⁴⁹ Important to the history of cinema technology is the realization that the industry and

⁴⁷ “...equally significant in the construction of production practices were ideological/signifying practices. The organization of this part [of the book] may imply that the economic practices are the more potent explanation for the mode of production. While in the last instance economic practices may have been determinant, this part will stress that ideological/signifying practices continually influenced the necessity to divide labor and to divide it in its particular configuration. Here we have to understand the intertwining of determinants. A very particular group style became the film practice for Hollywood, and this did not exist *in toto* in 1896; in fact, it was a result of a process of movements among alternative practices, culminating around 1917 in the style that finally characterized Hollywood’s films. What is most revealing is that *the mode of production constructed was by no means the cheapest filmmaking procedure*. Take, for instance, editing. By the 1920s, the post-shooting phase of production not only involved a film editor but also an assistant editor (to keep track of thousands of pieces of film), a writer (to construct additional bits of narrative information and dialogue for inter-titles), and an elaborate system of paperwork (including a continuity script, notes taken during shooting by a script secretary, notes from a cameraman’s assistant, and written directions from producers and directors.) In the balance between economical production and a presumed effect on the film, the latter won out. Thus, while economic practices helped produce a divided labor system of filmmaking, in many cases, ideological/signifying practices influenced how the firms divided that labor.” Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 88-89.

⁴⁸ “Finally, what was occurring was not a result of a *Zeitgeist* or immaterial forces. The sites of the distribution of these practices were material: labor, professional, and trade associations, advertising materials, handbooks, film reviews. These institutions and their discourses were mechanisms to formalize and disperse descriptive and prescriptive analyses of the most efficient production practices, the newest technologies, and the best look and sound for the films. It is with these terms, then, that we can construct a history of the conditions of the existence of the US film production practices.” Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 89.

⁴⁹ “...historians have assumed ortho [orthochromatic film stock] was an inferior stock; several suggest that as soon as panchromatic stock became available, filmmakers switched over to it. Yet panchromatic stock was available in this country from 1913 on, failing to become the basic negative in use across the industry until about 1927. Why did cinematographers cling to ortho so long?....The real breakthrough in the dissemination of panchromatic did not come until 1925, when Eastman lowered its price to a level commensurate with ortho and began actively to promote the stock. Apparently the manufacturers and studio officials were in no hurry to put pancho into wide use prior to that year....By 1925, Eastman had eliminated the two physical inferiorities of pancho. It was now more stable...pancho would not deteriorate in the heat. And the speed was now acceptable. By lowering the price, Eastman removed the last restraint. During 1926 Hollywood moved rapidly to use pancho.” Bordwell *et*

associated organizations had to describe and promote the demands of the CHC style for those external research laboratories upon which the Hollywood film industry was so dependent. Before detailing the way in which Hollywood worked to accomplish this task—a historical account which strives to provide a concrete or actual understanding of technological change in its relation to the classical style and mode of film production—it is necessary to provide a theoretical context to illuminate the operative historiographical assumptions.

Given that technological change in the cinema was itself based upon the continual needs for production or cost efficiency, product differentiation, and an adherence to established standards of quality,⁵⁰ how do we relate or implicate these mainly economic determinants to changes observable in the formal features of the films themselves? Bordwell and Staiger survey four aspects of historical change—direction, function, timing, and causation—to help them in this task. Direction marks changes from one point to another, from one style to another and, therefore, is predisposed to generate an explanation for change on the basis of the endpoint or place of arrival which the historical subject has attained and now occupies; implicit in such directional terminology is the relatively untroubled linear progress and evolution of the historical subject towards, and valorization of, a *telos*. Bordwell and Staiger find problems with such a view of the relation between technological progress and stylistic development not least because such a view obscures the often indirect ways in which technological development actually occurs.⁵¹ To embrace a

al., The Classical... 281, 284.

⁵⁰ Production or cost efficiency was an industrial value which Hollywood had adopted early on and can be seen in the move to the first fully equipped production facilities which centralized and rationalized the filmmaking process. Product differentiation was not a problem unique to Hollywood business: "Any firm will expend capital upon research and development if the firm believes that the technology will allow the firm to retain or expand its share of a market or move it to new markets. Douglas Gomory argues, for example, that Warner Bros.'s innovation of sound was the successful result of such a strategy." If a studio wished to outsell its competition, technological innovation would be one means of making its film product stand out from those around it. Finally, technological innovation serviced the promotion of the classical style: "In some instances, the film industry innovated technology because the industry's discourse marked certain innovations as desirable. This sounds circular and it was....American cinema's technological research has been aimed at meeting a commitment to the standards canonized by the classical stylistic paradigm. Synchronized sound, color, widescreen, stereoscopy, and stereophony were justified as progress toward better storytelling, greater realism, and enhanced spectacle." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 244.

⁵¹ "Such teleological accounts of style in history pose problems. Although a complete understanding of the Hollywood style cannot neglect the idea of progress, that idea cannot adequately explain the direction of stylistic

completely non-linear, fragmentary or contradictory, and ideologically-contentious history of cinema technology, however, fails to acknowledge the standardization of film practice that accounts for the CHC group style.⁵² Leonard Meyer's concept of "trended change" provides an alternative to either linear evolution or disjunctive revolution as foundational paradigms for film history and it allows for the recognition that change occurs within a context which is itself subject to the variegated impact of new technology.⁵³ Meyer's idea that change occurs within "a limiting set of pre-conditions" or "a bounded set of possibilities" is also useful for understanding that the replacement of one device by another (functional equivalency) is firmly tied to the functions permitted and delineated by those preconditions or possibilites.⁵⁴ Finally, the governing preconditions or possibilities of the Hollywood style also allow for an analysis of how new technological innovations and stylistic devices not only take on a function but also appropriate or

change. Any such conception of progress ignores the ways in which technological change has often reduced stylistic options. The classical style has not changed in a cumulative or additive fashion, nor has technology always left room for a return to discarded practices. We have already seen, for instance, that synchronized sound forced certain workers to relinquish areas of control. It is not simply nostalgic to assert that the range of possibilities often became narrower: something was definitely lost when Hollywood abandoned the hand-cranked camera, rack-and-tank developing by inspection, and three-strip Technicolor." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 247.

⁵²"[Jean-Louis] Comolli's point is certainly sound: the direction of change in the classical Hollywood style has been not linear but dispersed, not a progress toward a goal but a series of disparate shifts. Yet even if the change is not lawlike, it is not capricious either. Hollywood's insistence upon standardization limited the shape which change could take. To describe this non-linear but not random pattern, we need a non-linear teleological model of change." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 247.

⁵³"In *trended* change: 'Change takes place within a limiting set of preconditions, but the potential inherent in the established relationships may be realized in a number of different ways and the order of the realization may be variable (i.e., not specified by lawlike and invariant preconditions). Change is successive and gradual, but not necessarily sequential; and its rate and extent are variable, depending more upon external circumstances than upon internal preconditions.' This conception is useful because it grants that stylistic change need not operate according to notions of revolution or rupture on the one hand or evolutionary unfolding on the other. We do not have to consider the coming of sound as a drastic break in the classical mode....Once we admit that there is no lawlike pattern of development in Hollywood style, we can look for particular historical circumstances which govern the different ways that the classical paradigm has been realized and modified. This does not mean, however, that change is capricious. The category of trended change lets us see stylistic change as operating within a bounded set of possibilities, even if the causes or the timing of change derive from external spheres such as management decisions or technological innovations." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 247-248.

⁵⁴"If, for example, a scene's space may be established by means of a long shot, a camera movement, an editing pattern, an introductory title, or voice-over narration, then we need to examine not only the change in devices but also their common function—the establishment of classical narrative space. From this standpoint, the history of Hollywood film style after 1917 is in large part a series of shifts in formal devices within the range of functions defined by the classical paradigm." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 248.

reinforce other functions extant within the CHC paradigm and, indeed, work to extend the paradigm;⁵⁵ change and standardization operate in tandem in Meyer's trended change.

Timing and causation, the last two concepts that assist Bordwell and Staiger in accounting for stylistic change, signal a departure from the intrinsic movements tracked by Meyer's trended change and help theorize the place and role of external determinants in film history. The timing of stylistic change leads to the recognition that a direct, unmediated technological imperative cannot explain the lag or delay between technical innovation and industry-wide use.⁵⁶ The technological causation of stylistic change poses a more complex historiographical problem the common solution of which has often been to single out the action of a creative individual as the most salient causal force. After ferreting out the problems inherent to this type of agency⁵⁷ and

⁵⁵ "...a camera movement—say a track back from a detail to a long shot—can establish the scene's locale while serving other canonized functions: creating a stronger cue for three-dimensional space, centering viewer attention, suspensefully delaying information, creating a parallel to another tracking shot. Or consider the innovation of sound. In 1927, when sound was inserted into the already-constituted system of classical filmmaking, it was used in ways that supported the paradigm (e.g., voice for expressivity, sound effects for realism of locale). But sound also extended the paradigm: now vocal qualities could represent character psychology, now temporal continuity could be assured by diegetic speech or music. *Even though the classical premises define a limited hierarchy of functions, new stylistic devices can realize those possibilities in domains that were previously not absorbed functionally.* We are back at the issues discussed in Chapter 7, the ways in which controlled deviations from classical norms can reinforce the authority of those norms." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 248, italics mine.

⁵⁶ "Again and again we find a lag between the technological preconditions of color or sound or widescreen and the actual utilization of them. [Jean-Louis] Comolli claims that no autonomous logic of film style can explain this lag and that the best explanation is to be found in the socio-economic sphere. Technology does not get used until capitalism has a need for it at a certain juncture. The history of Hollywood technology certainly bears this out; more often than not, economic factors of the three sorts already mentioned [production or cost efficiency, product differentiation, adherence to standards of quality] determine when certain devices became standardized. Hollywood studios became interested in incandescent lighting when tungsten units and panchromatic film stock made filming cheaper and more efficient in significant respects. Firms decided to switch over to sound motion pictures when Warners and Fox had proven financial benefits and an acceptable standard of quality. World War II constraints on set expenditures encouraged location shooting and the development of more portable equipment. Although widescreen cinema and stereophonic sound were technically feasible before World War II, they were not exploited until the studios faced a declining theater attendance in the postwar period [partly due to the competition offered by television which could not, obviously, offer a widescreen or stereo sound]." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 248-249.

⁵⁷ "Causation of stylistic change poses even more severe difficulties for an immanent account. The most common, and commonsensical, move has been to attribute stylistic and technical change to individual innovation. Two causal agents typically emerge: the inventor and the artist.... Yet, as we have seen, technological change in the film industry has a broad impact, and research and invention are institutional to a very substantial degree. A vision of individuals talking to individuals does not explain the systematic effects of technology upon style. The artist/inventor pairing also does not explain why sometimes the technician innovates when no need is articulated by the artist.... The artist/inventor couplet, based on the filmmaker's posing a problem for the technician to solve, further ignores one crucial fact.... The most elegant solution to a technical problem from an engineering stand-

critiquing Jean-Louis Comolli's ideological explanation as reductive, abstract, and ahistorical,⁵⁸ Bordwell and Staiger reaffirm *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*'s focus on the variety of industrial associations as governing Hollywood's appropriation of technology and, therefore, mediating between immanent stylistic change and extrinsic technical research and development.⁵⁹ The American Society of Cinematographers, the Society of Motion Picture Engineers, and the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences all exercised a role in this mediating process.

An important example: the Academy's Technical Branch, in concert with the American Society of Cinematographers, suggested that the inevitable industry-wide adoption of incandescent/tungsten lighting would be effected more easily and with greater uniformity and standardization if a series of tests were organized using panchromatic film stock and the new lighting technology under studio conditions. The 1928 'Mazda' (the General Electric trademark) tests eventually coordinated the efforts of studios (the tests were held on a Warner Bros lot), manufacturers (General Electric for the lamps; Du Pont, Eastman, and Agfa for film stock and processing; Max Factor for makeup), and 40 studio cinematographers. Not coincidentally, the

point may be rejected for reasons of 'showmanship' or production routines. At any historical moment, the mode of production and the classical paradigm permit only some solutions. And about what is permitted, the individual artist or inventor has very little to say." Bordwell *et al.*, *The Classical...* 249.

⁵⁸In Comolli's historiography, according to Bordwell and Staiger's critique, "Cinema's construction of depth is reduced to 'Renaissance perspective' (itself a slogan for several perspective systems), deep focus is usually treated as only a matter of lens length, and most important, 'technology' and 'ideology' are flattened into abstract and ahistorical generalities. For Comolli, 'technology' includes not only the machines themselves but also many social processes that produce them: theories, scientific research, manufacture, and the labor of film production. These senses are never clearly distinguished. Similarly, Comolli makes the concept of 'ideology' do too much work; he assumes that 'bourgeois ideology' rests in place for three centuries, from Caravaggio to *Citizen Kane*." Bordwell *et al.*, *The Classical...* 250.

⁵⁹"In examining the ways that stylistic change in the period 1917-60 is tied to technological change, we will need to recognize the significant differences among the four aspects [direction, trended change or function, timing, and causation] already noted. Business strategies can usually explain the causation and timing of stylistic change, while the directions and functions of the change must usually be constructed from the way that technology permitted novel devices to fill roles which the classical paradigm had already staked out. But where can we locate the historical agents of this process? In most cases, the agents are a set of specific institutions: manufacturing and supply firms and professional associations. *These institutions transferred the industry's economic strategies and aesthetic precepts to the spheres of technological innovation and film form. In doing so, they fulfilled and elaborated the classical paradigm, spurring and guiding technological change.* In short, specific firms and associations functioned as mediations—not in the sense that they temporally came between film production and film style, but in the sense that they shaped a particular relationship between the two. *By mediating between film style and economic imperatives, these institutions defined the range of practical possibilities open to Hollywood film-making.*" Bordwell *et al.*, *The Classical...* 250-251, italics mine.

Society of Motion Picture Engineers, previously with few members on the West Coast and comprised of mostly research scientists, scheduled their April convention for immediately after the Mazda tests so that Hollywood technicians might become members. The results of the tests were announced immediately after the Society's conference ended and everyone concerned (engineers, manufacturers, technicians) now had a better understanding of the particular technological problems to be overcome and the stylistic demands to be met to service Hollywood's film practice.⁶⁰

This section has reviewed several of the most important historical constructs and enabling presuppositions of neoformalist historiography *vis-à-vis* the classical Hollywood cinema. As noted earlier, an institutional analysis, because of its historical subject, assesses its diverse formative influences in a way quite different from that extant in a monograph on a director. The CHC as a system or set of limiting preconditions governed by an emerging stylistic paradigm and harnessing to itself specific economic, organizational, and technological determinants, together with the ongoing importation of particular backgrounds and devices, resulted in the maintenance and promotion of a unified mode of film practice. In large part this was possible because that stylistic paradigm was the development of a complex of functions which worked across and throughout individual devices, their incorporation into narrative, temporal, and spatial systems, and the various relations between these systems. Although not detailing every significant aspect of Hollywood film practice from 1917 to 1960 (e.g., censorship, the Legion of Decency, and the self-imposed Motion Picture Production Code), this study provides the stylistic and economic structure to which these other features must be related.⁶¹

⁶⁰ "Before the Mazda tests, technological innovation was fairly haphazard and uncoordinated, relying on individual firms such as Cooper-Hewitt, Eastman, and Bell & Howell, or on institutional imperatives such as the creative role constructed for the cinematographer. After the tests, Hollywood had a network for the organized articulation of technical questions and the systematic search for answers. On 20 April 1928, at the very close of the Mazda tests, the Academy announced its intention to create a technical bureau which would use 'all research laboratories for the immediate benefit that we ourselves can gain.' The bureau would contract with firms to solve particular problems, standardize materials with the cooperation of the Federal Department of Standards, and eventually create its own research laboratory. On 8 August 1928, the Academy Technical Bureau was established. The bureau's head was J.A. Ball—a principal engineer at Technicolor, an active member of the SMPE [Society of Motion Picture Engineers], a founding member of the Academy, and the man who had proposed synchronizing the Mazda tests with the SMPE convention." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 296-297.

⁶¹ See Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Produc-

Such a comprehensive historical project has met, however, with both critical acclaim and hostile disapproval. The historiography instantiated by Bordwell's monographs on Dreyer and Ozu and his work, together with Staiger and Thompson, on the CHC has initiated a far-ranging critical discussion. It would be premature, therefore, to conclude this chapter without a brief consideration of what is perceived to be at stake in these contending histories.

A NEOFORMALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY: *contending histories*⁶²

One substantial component of Dana Polan's critique of neoformalism is the neoformalist acceptance of the Formalist emphasis on the perceptual foundation of the artwork and the concomitant valorization of defamiliarization. Such an acceptance, Polan believes, predisposes neoformalism to two highly problematic theses: 1) the explanatory weight given to perceptual and formal features, being the most noticeable and important aspects of an artwork, leads to a history which privileges style over other material determinants. History then assumes a cyclical pattern of marking devices as they are familiarized, defamiliarized, and refamiliarized; there is no integration between this stylistic history and the more material aspects of film. 2) an exclusive focus on form and style leads towards an analysis of the essential features of film. Such an analysis, the desire to make salient the specific properties of the cinema, refuses to recognize that as a historical phenomenon film is over- or multi-determined and cannot be reduced or abstracted to comprise just a favored few features; this "typically formalist" strategy, moreover, again results in a marginalization of non-formal, material factors.⁶³ Regardless of the veracity of Polan's critique it does serve to, as

tion Code from the 1920s to the 1960s (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1990).

⁶² The following section is indebted to a wide-ranging discussion with Calvin Seerveld during the course of an examination on area 3 of my guided readings in aesthetics, namely art historiography.

⁶³ Robert Ray's foray into roughly the same time period covered in The Classical Hollywood Cinema begins by asserting two governing assumptions for his study: "First, the cinema as a whole, and, even more emphatically, any individual movie, is massively overdetermined. No film results from a single cause, even if its maker thinks it does; as a discourse, the cinema, especially the commercial cinema, is simply too exposed, too public, to permit such circumspection. Second (and this point follows from the first), in terms of originating causes, the cinema as an institution, and any single film, is thoroughly decentered....The film historian, in other words, has an array of factors to consider, each of them 'right' as an object of study, each becoming 'wrong' only if the historian's attention fixes on one as the sole explanation of cinema. It follows from these two assumptions that an ideal film

we saw with neoformalist historiography, demonstrate the implicit connections between art historiography and what we take an artwork to be (of course, even framing the question in this fashion could be said to reveal an essentialist bias). Film historiography participates in a larger debate which centres on these two interrelated areas—art historiography and ontology—and it will prove useful to contextualize both neoformalism and its critics within this often intense and rancorous conversation.⁶⁴

Polan's remarks, for example, are akin to Norman Bryson's critique of E. H. Gombrich's Perceptualism which is accused of promoting the idea that art is essentially a "feast for the eye."⁶⁵ Bryson objects by positing that a semiotically-enriched account of art as a system of socially constructed signs and attending codes of recognition is able to construe the relations of real-world power that obtain between all social constructs. The Perceptualist "ocular spectacle" banishes art from any social significance because it refuses to see the artwork as participating fully in cultural

history would be supple and diversified, marked by a willingness both to keep moving and to acknowledge that film history is by definition 'interminable.' While seemingly reasonable enough, these criteria have in practice proved so strenuous that the history of film theory has consisted almost entirely of a continuous search for a single masterplot. McLuhan's and Bazin's technological determinism, the auteurs' concentration on filmmakers (whether producers, directors, actors, or scriptwriters), *the neoformalists' insistence on the aesthetic conventions specific to the movies*, Kracauer's socio-historical explanation of the German cinema, the sociological studies of the film audience—each has concentrated on one of the cinema's determinants at the expense of the rest." Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) 6-7, italics mine. Ray's own historiographical allegiance is to the "synthesis of formalism and materialism fathered by Brecht and taken up by Noël Burch...." which he believes comprehensive enough to avoid reductionism.

⁶⁴ Conversely, Donald Preziosi's *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Cov Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) uses film as a guiding metaphor to comprehending the traditional art historical apparatus and practice: "And yet the entire disciplinary apparatus as it exists in the twentieth century would be unthinkable without a correlative technology—that of the cinema. In a number of important respects, modern art history has been a supremely cinematic practice, concerned with the orchestration of historical narratives and the display of genealogy by filmic means. In short, the modern discipline has been grounded in metaphors of cinematic practice to the extent that in nearly all of its facets, art history could be said to continually refer to and to implicate the discursive logic of realist cinema. The art history slide is always orchestrated as a still in a historical movie....art history could not have arisen in its twentieth-century form apart from its groundings in filmic technology. At the same time, it is the development of cinema specifically that works both to recuperate the Western Realist tradition in art and to establish the foundations for the discursive framework of art history. *Lust for Life* [the 1956 Hollywood biography of Vincent van Gogh] can be seen in this regard not simply as a moving-picture illustration of a Vasarian program but, in fact, as part of the disciplinary apparatus of the network of strategies considered here under the disciplinary rubric of art history....it could be argued that in the twentieth century all of the traditional pictorial arts have been subsumed into the discursive frame of the cinematic apparatus." See 72-73, 192-footnote 30 and 207-footnote 69, respectively.

⁶⁵ Norman Bryson, "Introduction," *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) xiii-xxix.

codes of meaning. In sum, according to Bryson, to privilege the perceptual or formal necessarily precludes the semantic or ideological or cultural significance of art because these latter aspects are the avenues through which powerful signs circulate.⁶⁶ A semiotic art historiography, therefore, adopts a posture towards art which is radically different from that taken by those art histories which have some operative notion of the integrity of the art object; are we to postulate a site of traversing cultural codes or an identifiable art object? Is there only cultural studies or is the discourse of aesthetics still valid and meaningful? This seminal inquiry into determining the frame to be imposed upon—(cultural studies)—or discerned around—(aesthetics)—art has set up contending histories in the discipline of film studies.⁶⁷ One group desires to implicate film fully in

⁶⁶ Bryson's critique of Gombrich's Perceptualism can be seen to parallel the critical commonplaces which are often directed against neoformalism. The following counter-critique of Bryson, then, also illuminates points of weakness operative in the analyses of neoformalism. 1) Gombrich is aware that there is more to art than noting how it is a "feast for the eye": "I hope you need not be reassured that I do not think that that is all there is to painting. Botticelli's Venus or a self-portrait by Rembrandt, clearly have other dimensions of meaning and embody different values...." 2) Gombrich seems very aware of the real-world power that artistic conventions can exercise and his analysis of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is a case in point. From what we know of the prehistory of this particular artwork, Picasso struggled hard to overcome a cloying sentimentality to develop his Cubist method. Gombrich is fully cognizant of the power that traditional artistic conventions exercised on Picasso and works this into his analysis. 3) Although Gombrich contextualizes his understanding of Picasso and the public reaction to his work within the larger institution of art, he does privilege the artwork by insisting at the end of his analysis that even though the artwork is overdetermined it resists effacement in the presence of so many elements. Bryson offers no counter to the loss of integrity of the artwork which, on his conception, seems to be inundated by the confluence of sign systems. Gombrich's analysis of of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is to be found in "Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art," Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art (London: Phaidon, 1978) 30-44.

⁶⁷ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's review of semiotics and art history has a helpful annotation of Derrida's analysis of the frame and its importance to the discipline of art history; I believe it to be worthwhile to quote at length. "The first move, the drawing of a nonpermeable perimeter around the work of art, is the subject of Derrida's lengthy excursus on 'framing'.... It may be essential to the structuralist project, as well as to many others (including 'formalism' in art history) to maintain the fiction that the work of art is characterized by its apartness, that it inhabits an area of autonomy and separation from 'extrinsic' concerns. But for Derrida semiosis is a process that can never be placed within a logic of enclosure.... Where Saussure theorizes the sign as a fixed and static entity, with each signifier stitched to its stable signified, Derrida argues for the dynamism of signs: that a sign is not (as in Saussure) the conjunction between a signifier and its single, univocal signified, but the movement from one signifier to another, the *motion* between them. As motion, visual signification is therefore incompatible with the ideas of boundary, threshold, frame....Investigating the conceptual structure of the frame in aesthetic discourse, Derrida finds that it is both fundamental to that discourse, and at a profound level absent from it. Fundamental, because without the idea of frame, there can be no object of aesthetics.... Yet even though it is the idea of the frame that calls the discourse of aesthetics into being—for without it, that discourse could not open itself, could not define what is is that it discusses—that discourse, according to Derrida, cannot adequately theorize the frame or describe its opening move. What it can, of course, discuss is the 'outside' of the work of art, which comes into being as outside once the concept of frame is in place; and equally well it can discuss the 'inside,' what is proper to the work of art. But the frame itself is consigned to a kind of conceptual limbo, for the reason (Derrida argues) that the frame is the one thing in the discourse of aesthetics that escapes the categories of 'inside' and 'outside.'

popular culture and use it for unmasking the operations of ideology (e.g., classical film as symptomatic repression and avant-garde film as radical intervention), while another group reworks a more traditional aesthetic and historiographical agenda and brings it to bear upon a relatively young artform, the cinema. Against this broader context the present section isolates a few issues concerning the practice of a neoformalist historiography.

Contra the view of perceptualism/formalism which Polan and Bryson critique, Bordwell maintains that neoformalism (following Russian Formalism) effaces the form-content dichotomy and that the resulting film history assigns only a methodological priority to examining those aspects unique to the film at hand. What sets one film off from another is the way in which it draws upon a variety of common materials and norms (the narrative conventions of the mystery film, for example, or a studio mode of film practice) and reworks—thereby defamiliarizing—their. The way in which to conceive the actual relationship between a film and history is given expression in several ways: as a set of concentric circles through which cinematic determinants are filtered or mediated finally, but dynamically, to cohere under the governance of the individual film's dominant (see footnote 21 above where Bordwell posits that “Japaneseness” is mediated by both Ozu's

In fact, the frame is both at once, a hybrid, a categorical aberration—which might be manageable if the discourse within which the ‘frame’ operates, and which it also establishes, could permit a mediating zone between its two extremes....But the discourse of aesthetics, exemplified for Derrida by Kant, cannot allow such a zone of aberration to be admitted, since that would be to call into question its own primary move, the division of the field into ‘inside’ and ‘outside.’ Instead, the frame is conceptually disavowed and repressed, becoming an ornamental supplement, an unnecessary and optional accompaniment to the work of art. Nevertheless, this relegation of the frame to the place of a mere incidental in aesthetic discourse cannot conceal, in Derrida's analysis, that the latter's central area of interest, the ‘inside’ of the work of art, depends for its very being on the conceptual operation of the frame; that is, on an operation that threatens the clean separation of ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ to its foundations, since the concept of the frame is the undoing of the relation of ‘inside’ to ‘outside’ on which all else is predicated. Derrida's argument aims to expose the persistent logic of enclosure that allows there to be found in painting the stasis of transcendental contemplation (Kant), stabilized reference (Meyer Schapiro), or ontotheological presence (Heidegger). Against such a logic, and by pressing hard on the contradictions and incoherences of its fundamental moves, [Derrida's] *The Truth in Painting* shows visual semiosis to be a matter of disframing: an unending dissemination that, nevertheless, as repeatedly pointed out, always occupies specific social and historical sites.” Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* 73.2 (June 1991) 192-193. Peter Brunette and David Wills have imported Derrida's analysis of the frame into a study of the film frame, noting that it too requires a peculiar relation of presence to absence (i.e., the persistence of vision in the temporary absence of the film image from one frame to the next); moreover, Derrida's analysis of how the frame does not work to separate the inner from the outer, the intrinsic from the extrinsic but, instead, ensures that the cinema is never coherent or integral has obvious implications for the construction of a film history. See chapter four, “The Frame of the Frame,” in Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) particularly pages 99-118.

Western-derived mode of production and the more immediate background of Shochiku's generic conventions).⁶⁸ Likewise, the CHC group style works to harness and orchestrate economic, administrative, and technological factors in service to a historically specifiable film form (again, form is not to be considered as excluding the semantic). Given the neoformalist willingness to engage those material aspects of Dreyer and Ozu's film practice and the economic and administrative conditions which served to promote the CHC group style, it is hard to understand how it would be able to generate a cyclical history concerned only with marking the shifts from familiarization to defamiliarization to refamiliarization.⁶⁹ Neoformalism, then, avoids both essentializing film and negating its material determinants; it thus construes film as more than just an "ocular spectacle" or "feast for the eye" and, in fact, calls for cognitive and affective involvement.⁷⁰

⁶⁸"My insistence throughout this book on mediations should suggest that the institution and the medium of cinema transform, to various degrees, the material on which they draw; that the specific context of film production and reception establishes its own mediated relationship between the film and its maker or audience; and that the history of culture, especially popular culture, impinges at every point on the film." Bordwell, *Ozu...* 162.

⁶⁹Thompson's discussion of defamiliarizaton might be construed to offer a cyclical history of film but only at first glance. The following passage carefully notes that artistic defamiliarization works upon a number of materials (the everyday world, ideology, other artworks) and that artists work upon their artworks to retain a sense of newness (i.e., there are real-world determinants—for example, the artist's need to continue experimenting in order to grow as an artist and to intrigue the viewing and purchasing public—which impinge upon what Polan would construe to be a self-contained and abstract cycle). "Art defamiliarizes our habitual perceptions of the everyday work, of ideology..., of other artworks, and so on by taking material from these sources and transforming them. The transformation takes place through their placement in a new context and their participation in unaccustomed formal patterns. But if a series of artworks uses the same means over and over, the defamiliarizing capability of those means diminishes; the strangeness ebbs away over time. By that point, the defamiliarized has become familiar, and the artistic approach is largely automatized. The frequent changes that artists introduce into their new works over time reflect attempts to avoid automatization, and to seek new means to defamiliarize those works' formal element. Defamiliarization, then, is the general neoformalist term for the basic purpose of art in our lives. The purpose itself remains consistent over history, but the constant need to avoid automatization also explains why artworks change in relation to their historical contexts and why defamiliarization can be achieved in an infinite number of ways." Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) 11. It may be that Polan takes issue with neoformalist historiography because it maintains a consistent or universal purpose for art across or over history, and anything which appears to be thus constituted is free from the realities of historical disjunction or change. Bordwell and Thompson do not, however, discuss the term or process in the abstract but continually ground it within the contexts presented by specific films; it is meaningless to speak of the purpose or function of art apart from its historical instantiation or concrete appearance.

⁷⁰"For one last time, I should insist that what is at stake is no narcissistic aestheticism. The skills that Ozu would have us cultivate are exactly those which we need in order to lead finely-textured and responsible social lives. This modest virtuoso...demands that we exercise cognitive flexibility, perceptual discrimination, and visual and auditory acuity. He asks that we see the humor in rigor and the logic behind play. He coaxes us toward a cinema in which both grand structures and minute particulars become equally the object of reflection. What viewers want — 'want' in the sense of *lack*—is a cinema that, in its materials and forms, suggests fresh and subtle ways of understanding the social forces that constitute 'ordinary life'—constitute it even as a construct to be deployed by

We are also in a more advantageous position to evaluate the issues arising from Robert Ray's characterization of neoformalism as essentially positivist or classical in its view of science and, therefore, unable to construct a genuine, significantly ideological history.⁷¹ The deployment of the concepts of the mode of film practice, the biographical legend, functional equivalency, and the four-fold understanding of technology's relationship to the film (direction, function, timing, and causation)—to single out just a few—work against neoformalism construing film history as just a naïve compilation of facts.⁷² Moreover, Bordwell together with Staiger and Thompson do not seem to accept at face-value, as non-biased data, the first-hand reports and anecdotes with which they work.⁷³ Given these historical constructs and methods, it is difficult to discern the marks of a positivist-influenced historical practice.

Polan and Bryson's fear that every type of formalism predisposes art to be mere "ocular spectacle" and Derrida's belief, as communicated by Bal and Bryson, that an impermeable frame underwrites all formalisms (although neoformalism proposes no such impervious barrier discussing, as we have seen in Dreyer, Ozu, and the CHC, a variety of determinants that impact on films) seem to be strategic misrepresentations of, at least, *neoformalist historiography*. By marginalizing

conflicting interests. This cinema should also lead spectators to reflect on the limits and possibilities of film itself. It is toward this cinema that Ozu points us. He offers both a poetry of everyday life and a vision of the poetics of cinema. All he asks is our attention." Bordwell, *Ozu...* 179. Certainly more than just "ocular spectacle"!

⁷¹ Ray's history makes a point of demonstrating the inseparable nature of the formal and the ideological. In discussing the ability of a film's either thematic or stylistic components to break from their planned subservience to the conventional, Ray loads a stylistic device with ideological import (which is indicative of his approach in general). "Have dissident variations (thematic or stylistic) *any* chance of disrupting or subverting a movie's intended ideological effect? This question seems to me the most interesting thing we can ask about the American Cinema. Unfortunately, we still have to ask it on a case-by-case basis. I have not been able to develop a general theory that would account in the abstract for a dissident thematic variation's ability to outfight the context that seeks to subdue it. With formal variations, I have more of a clue: a stylistic device remains disruptive by avoiding motivation." Ray, *A Certain...* 18.

⁷² "...the concept of the mode of film practice is not one that can be retrieved by 'simply looking' at films, documents, and machines. For rhetorical purposes, our argument is cast chronologically, but the idea of a 'classical Hollywood cinema' is ultimately a theoretical construct, and as such it must be judged by criteria of logical rigor and instrumental value. This book thus stands out not only as a history of the Hollywood cinema but also as an attempt to articulate a theoretical approach to film history." Bordwell *et al.*, *The Classical...* xv.

⁷³ "Cinematographers and directors constantly invoked famous paintings as sources. Cecil B. De Mille claimed to have borrowed from Doré, Van Dyck, Corot and one 'Reubens.' Shamroy imitated Van Gogh. Discussions of lighting invariably invoke Rembrandt. *To a point, such assertions are simply hyperbole.* Allan Dwan remarked: 'Once in a while we would undertake the imitation or reproduction of something artistic—a famous painting, let's say.'" Bordwell *et al.*, *The Classical...* 50, *italics mine*.

all formalisms, these authors clear the field for their own historical/critical practices (as we shall see in the next chapter when examining Bordwell's Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema) and socio-political interventions (e.g., the domination of important academic journals like Screen or Cinema Journal).⁷⁴ Bordwell, however, should not be put only in a defensive posture for he has issued a challenge to those who believe that ideological studies can meaningfully detail the socio-historical uses of cinema without first coming to terms with an individual film's formal construction.⁷⁵

⁷⁴This misrecognition, sanctioned by the institutional sponsor of an interpretive practice, engenders a selective history which is often useful in a number of ways to the critics who operate within the institution. "If you believe the diversity of approaches to be salutary, you will tend to see the history of criticism as the devising of various, equally useful tools for jimmying open texts. Or you may take a partisan stance, declaring pluralism an act of intellectual evasion and asserting the superiority of one approach....*Whether you take the pluralist or partisan position, you will likely forget important things which do not fit into the reigning historical scheme—the way in which Russian Formalist criticism sought to integrate criticism with literary history, or the arguments flung at the New Critics by the Chicago Neo-Aristotelians, or the important contributions of Continental stylistics before the Second World War. Like military history, literary history is mostly written by winners.* As Douglas puts it, any institution makes its members 'forget experiences incompatible with its righteous image.' At several points in this book, we shall trace a comparable process at work in film interpretation, whereby the institution constructs a usable past for its members out of a tidy, selective chronicle of 'approaches.'" Bordwell, Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 24, italics mine. The misrecognition and subsequent elision of "important things" is aggravated by the role which rhetoric plays within interpretation: "Defining critical rhetoric as the persuasive use of discourse has the advantage of recognizing the comparatively small role that rigorous logic and systematic knowledge play in film interpretation. For one thing, *film study has not evolved through the clash of tidily presented opposing views. The history of film criticism is largely that of predecessors ignored or forgotten, ships passing in the night, people talking at cross-purposes, wholesale dismissals of prior writers' work, and periodic cycles of taste.* Obliviousness is of course common in other fields of inquiry, but more than most of his peers in philosophy or psychology or art history, the academic film interpreter avoids dialectical confrontation with alternative positions. At a scholarly conference in film studies, a paper delivered wholly to scrutinizing another critic's interpretation will be taken as a sterile exercise. Instead, *the interpreter practices a strategy of exclusion (no mention of other interpretations)* or supersession, declaring an earlier interpretation fine as far as it goes (which is never far enough)." (39, italics mine) The practices of selective history and interpretive rhetoric, then, work to exacerbate the problem of misrecognition. For a concrete example of the ongoing inaccurate characterization of Bordwell's scholarship see his letter to the editors of Screen regarding Barry King's report on the May 1990 Society for Cinema Studies Conference; King perpetuates the notion that neoformalism is antithetical to theory, ideology, and the symptomatic readings of films. "Note that the issue which King raises is not whether my conceptions of ideology and symptomatic reading are balanced, useful, sufficiently comprehensive, or whatever. The question is simply whether I believe that the concepts are viable and ought to have a place in film studies. I obviously do. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, King's remarks amount to an irresponsible sideswipe. Why is Screen publishing such stuff?" Bordwell, "Letter to the Editors of Screen" Screen Vol. 32, No. 4 Winter (1991) 456-457.

⁷⁵"Any adequate account of the social uses and effects of cinema cannot rest content with a description of theme and subject matter. The formal and stylistic norms of cinema, themselves social and historical, constitute an indispensable frame of reference for the study of a film's social functions; and the particular use that the given film makes of those norms is crucial to assessing its social role." Bordwell, Ozu... 162. Themes, subject-matter and ideology are often not unique to an individual film; what may be unique is the way in which a particular film takes this pre-existent material and reworks and restructures it into the entire form of the film. Interpretations

This section has provided just a brief glance or hint at what is at stake in these contending histories and the position that neoformalism occupies in relation to them; to do more would delay us from the examination of Thompson's neoformalist film criticism, Bordwell's anatomy of interpretive practice and his corresponding promotion of a poetics of the cinema. Some of the historiographical positions staked out have important critical and interpretive consequences and will, therefore, surface in interesting ways in the next chapter. At that time it may be possible to arrive at some degree of resolution concerning the relative merit of these contending histories. This chapter, moreover, has introduced the variety of historical constructs necessary to deliver a nuanced knowledge of both the filmwork of individual directors and what has assumed a key position in film history, the classical Hollywood cinema. The alternation of theory and evidential argument has enabled us to witness the historical explanatory power of neoformalism and it remains to be seen if Bordwell and Thompson can meet the challenges presented by that other all-consuming passion of contemporary film studies (historiography being the other extremely active contemporary endeavor) namely, critical interpretation.

will vary as to the ideological trajectory of a film, but Bordwell's main point here is that such critical speculation cannot proceed without first determining the ways and means by which that ideology is utilized and thereby transformed by the formal system of the film at hand. To do otherwise is to allow interpretation to become free-floating, without any regard for the features of the film which are said to embody the ideology. That it is possible (and desirable) to arrive at agreement concerning a film's denotative level (see chapter one, footnote 48) is an important component of any film criticism as the next chapter's examination of Bordwell's anatomy of academic film interpretation will make clear. Similar problems plague those historiographies which maintain an exclusive focus on universal ideological or worldview constructions as a means of construing an art history; more often than not the individual differences of the artists in the period or era under analysis are effaced because ideological or worldview determinants are deemed to be primary. See footnote 58 above.

INTERPRETATION/ANALYSIS: *introduction*

AT THE CONCLUSION of chapter one's examination of the Formalist legacy operative within neoformalism an agenda was suggested in the outlining of four sites of critical commentary which have grown up and around the neoformalist endeavor. The questions regarding the displacement of meaning, the inadequate and static theorization of the historical background, the commitments to a positivist/empiricist understanding of science, and the selective appropriation of Formalism, have all, thus far, served to structure our examination of neoformalism. There are problems, however, in allowing the critics to set the agenda and these became apparent at the close of the preceding chapter's examination of the film historiography employed by neoformalism. It became evident that the apparently ubiquitous critical and historical commonplace that maintains all formalist/stylistic historical practice in opposition to all ideological/semantic historical practice predisposes many of the critics to be reinforced in their misrecognition of what is, after all, *neoformalism*. As Thompson has suggested in the introduction to her study of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, moreover, Russian Formalism (and, consequently, neoformalism) construes the artwork and its historical context quite differently from the formalism exemplified in Anglo-American New Criticism.¹ Nevertheless, the problematic reception of neoformalism is useful and fulfills a function much like Bordwell's concept of the biographical legend; that is, such a reception informs us of what are perceived to be the crucial areas in contemporary film historiography and leads us to examine Bordwell *et al.* for clues to a neoformalist response. Moreover, despite the misrecognition of neoformalist historiography and the attendant failure to evaluate adequately its significance, there remain substantial theoretical differences between, as the last chapter suggested, what may be called contending histories. The four sites of critical interest, therefore, remain intact for

¹ Thompson, *Eisenstein's...* 9-22. Given our brief survey of both Formalist and neoformalist historiography it is possible to see that these two movements work to destabilize the formal/ideological historiographical commonplace. The historical development and presence of Formalism and neoformalism, since they do not fit within the parameters of this oppositional historiography, show that this powerful commonplace has become naturalized and, therefore, remains largely unexamined.

the present discussion of Bordwell's anatomy of the conventions of academic film interpretation and Thompson's neoformalist film criticism.²

Bordwell's analysis of interpretive practice reveals the psychological, social, institutional and rhetorical conventions which subtend a wide array of diverse interpretive theories and doctrines. There are four types of meaning that can be ascribed to the film and the critic draws upon inferential processes and institutional directives (including a set of rhetorical strategies) common to all academic film interpretation in order to construct a meaning. Bordwell's argumentation rests upon a certain construal of the relationship between theory and interpretive practice and upon his commitment to a cognitivist approach. Implicit throughout (and sometimes explicitly stated) in Bordwell's endeavor is his assertion that there is more to film criticism than making yet more meanings or generating "readings"; indeed, he envisages a different goal for film criticism which is realized in neoformalist film analysis. Thompson's film analyses, by using the tenets of the neoformalist approach to construct a knowledge of the film as a system, demonstrate Bordwell's claim that an interpretation-driven criticism (which ferrets out only a series of meanings) results in an impoverished understanding of the film at hand. The neoformalist determination of the semantic within individual films follows from its appropriation of several Formalist concepts which predispose it to

² The misrepresentation of the neoformalist endeavor has, however, tempered Bordwell's enthusiasm for critical debate: "...suffice it to say that the accumulating criticism of my work has obliged me to make a choice. Do I spend a great deal of time responding immediately to critiques (a process which...inevitably requires the correcting of misunderstandings and inaccuracies)? Or do I reflect on the criticism, take what I find useful in it, and press ahead with new work? More and more I have chosen the latter. The very existence of the essay you are reading indicates that I have not shut myself off from debates, but I do not think it is unreasonable to limit my participation in them. This decision has also been affected by the fact that when I have sought to respond to criticisms, I have almost invariably found journal editors highly unwilling to provide opportunities. Most editors are reluctant to take up space with rebuttals, and virtually none are willing to grant a rejoinder equal space and timely publication. A prominent British journal published a critique of my work; when I requested a brief space to respond, the editor asked whether, since another critique was planned for a forthcoming issue, wouldn't I prefer to reply to that instead? When I asked to respond to the forthcoming critique in the same issue as the critique itself, the editor never answered my letter. This issue of *Film Criticism* is literally the only occasion in which I have been granted the scholarly courtesy (utterly standard in other fields) of replying to peers' commentary within the same pages. Faced with the demands of time and the reluctance of journals to engage in debate, I have been obliged to assume that readers understand a publishing convention: when a journal prints a critique of a scholar's project and does not invite the scholar to reply, the reader is to take that critique as unanswered, but not necessarily unanswerable." Bordwell, "Film Interpretation Revisited" *Film Criticism* Vol. 17, No. 2-3 Winter/Spring (1993) 118-119.

position meaning or subject-matter as just one of the materials transformed in the construction of an artwork; film analysis, therefore, does not endeavor to isolate a preexistent “content” but instead notes the dynamic interaction of a system of elements and the dominant which organizes them. Neoformalist film analysis, moreover, provides a demonstration of a different construal of the relationship between theory and interpretive practice, between approach and analytical method. This chapter concludes, then, by examining the main features of neoformalist film analysis in comparison to the predominant conventions of interpretation-centered criticism and with an example of neoformalist analysis namely, Thompson’s disclosure of several levels of point of view in Otto Preminger’s *Laura* (1944). Bordwell’s anatomy of interpretive practice and Thompson’s neoformalist film analyses comprise a challenge to the prevalent practices extant in film scholarship (as can be seen in the reactions to Bordwell’s Making Meaning and Thompson’s Breaking the Glass Armor) and together promise a knowledge of a different order. This chapter hopes to ascertain if they make good on that promise.

INTERPRETATION/ANALYSIS: *making meaning*

Bordwell’s account of interpretive practice issues from convictions and distinctions several of which are germane to our immediate task. Primary among these is his recasting of the parameters of interpretation, his distinguishing of comprehension and interpretation, and his understanding of meaning within a constructivist framework. Early on in Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema (MM) Bordwell challenges the prevalent notion that interpretation alone accounts for what is accepted to be knowledge. This commonplace would propose that there is no way in which to distinguish and assess a given phenomenon or a state of affairs or reality apart from the interpretations that we make of it. There is, in effect, no means to adjudicate between contending interpretations or meanings ascribed to a film since we do not have access to a knowledge of the film apart from the constraints of our individual and idiosyncratic subjectivities. Bordwell, however, posits that knowledge is not to be completely subsumed by this solipsistic

understanding of interpretation and that such a view does not recognize that knowledge, both psychologically and socially, is inferential in character.³ We are not trapped in a hermeneutical circle because induction is intersubjective in character. That is, meaning is not the discovery of the isolated individual but rather the construction of inferences which are both innate to all human cognition and learned because they are extant, for example, within the institutions which direct academic film criticism.⁴

For Bordwell the introduction of inference allows for a way in which to understand the common conceptual distinction between comprehension and interpretation.⁵ Current interpretive practice holds to a conception of meaning which locates critical interest in the discovery, unearthing, or revelation of hidden, occult meanings within the film. Almost no critical attention is given to what is involved in the comprehension of a given film, however, because these meanings are

³ "Some writers take 'interpretation' to be synonymous with all production of meaning. The chief notion behind this broad usage is that any act of understanding is mediated; even the simplest act of perceptual recognition is 'interpretive' in that it is more than a simple recording of sensory data. If no knowledge is direct, all knowledge derives from 'interpretation.' I agree with the premise but see no reason to advance the conclusion. Psychologically and socially, knowledge involves *inferences*." Bordwell, Making... 1-2. In a response to an issue of Film Criticism devoted solely to the analysis of Making Meaning Bordwell reaffirms his commitment to discriminate (and, therefore, recuperate) what is meant by interpretation by demystifying a concept which serves too many analytical purposes: "Some people say that every perceptual act is shot through with 'interpretation' because there is no innocent eye, that every observation is 'theory-ladden,' that every statement presupposes a construal of the world and of language. All these assumptions seem to me very likely true, but 'interpretation' used in this sense comes down to denoting a set of assumptions, presuppositions, categories, beliefs, and the like. *MM* argues that such conceptual structures are indeed ingredient to critical interpretation in the narrower sense. That is, in order to make a statement about a film's abstract meanings, one must have categories and concepts, and at least some preliminary sorting of data. Call all this background structure 'interpretation' if you like, but then recognize that I am using interpretation in a different (and no less commonly accepted) sense. It is fallacious to claim that because everything involves 'interpretation' in the broadest sense, it is impossible to distinguish an activity we can call interpretation in the narrower sense." Bordwell, "Film..." 94. Bordwell believes that this "background structure" or "set of assumptions, presuppositions, categories, beliefs" to be better conceptualized under an analysis of perception, comprehension, and the cognitivist components that he introduces at a later point rather than lumping it all under the label of interpretation as contemporary usage is wont to do.

⁴ "I do not intend to use 'constructivism' in the epistemological sense that is commonly opposed to 'realism.' I simply mean to signal the importance of constructive inference, or inference-like procedures, in our mental activities. From the perspective I am taking here, one could be what Ronald Giere calls a 'constructive realist.'" Bordwell, "A Case for Cognitivism," Iris: A Journal of Theory on Image and Sound 9 Spring (1989) 34, footnote 8.

⁵ "The comprehension/interpretation distinction allows us to see that construing interpretation only in the broad sense will not do justice to discriminable claims that people make. If interpretation comes down to all sorts of judgments of significance, or inferences of any kind, then of course comprehension is 'interpretation' too. But we can preserve a useful and habitual distinction between, say, following the story and ascribing an abstract, implicit or symptomatic, meaning to that story, by using the concept of interpretation in a narrower sense." Bordwell, "Film..." 96.

considered to be obvious and direct and, therefore, not suitable for interpretation or film criticism. Bordwell objects to this valorization of interpretation over comprehension because such a scheme sets up the film as a mere container for hidden meanings and, moreover, implies a spectator who finds these meanings intact and ready to be extracted from the film. The idea of inference allows Bordwell to maintain that meaning-making is a constructive process in which the many materials furnished by the film are built into an interpretation by an actively involved spectator.⁶ Interpretive activity is not the ferreting out of a preexistent, encapsulated meaning which resides independent of the spectator but rather an ongoing awareness and active arrangement of the many properties of the film at hand.⁷ Making or constructing meaning via inferential procedures, however, does not allow for the type of unlimited profusion of meanings witnessed in the criticism of those who hold that interpretation is coterminous with the production of all knowledge.

Although critics may feel free to construe the film's meanings in any way possible, the film's features, the ubiquitous psychological and social inferential conventions, and the various institutions which define academic film criticism work together to constrain the endless dissemination or deferral of meaning.⁸

⁶ "Yet to assume that sense [i.e., meaning] is 'in' the text is to reify what can only be the result of a process. Comprehending and interpreting a literary text, a painting, a play, or a film constitutes an activity in which the perceiver plays a central role. The text is inert until a reader or listener or spectator does something to and with it. Moreover, in any act of perception, the facts are 'undetermined' by the data: what E.H. Gombrich calls the 'beholder's share' consists in selecting and structuring the perceptual field. Understanding is mediated by transformative acts, both 'bottom-up'—mandatory, automatic psychological processes—and 'top-down' conceptual, strategic ones. The sensory data of the film at hand furnish the materials out of which inferential processes of perception and cognition build meanings. Meanings are not found but made." Bordwell, Making... 2-3. "MM argues that films do not harbor meanings 'inside' or 'behind' them; how could they? Interpretation is an interaction of critic and film. What the critic brings to this engagement is human perceptual equipment, cultural experience and values, tacit norms of comprehension, and a repertory of knowledge structures and critical procedures for building an interpretation out of cues which she or he discriminates in the film. We don't just see meanings, literal or interpretive; the critic *constructs* meaning through a complex process of assumption, testing, projection, inferential trial and error, and comparable activities. Both comprehension and interpretation are inferential activities. Meaning is made, not found." Bordwell, "Film..." 103.

⁷ "The perceiver is not a passive receiver of data but an active mobilizer of structures and processes (either 'hard-wired' or learned) which enable her to search for information relevant to the task and data at hand. In watching a film, the perceiver identifies certain cues which prompt her to execute many inferential activities—ranging from the mandatory and very fast activity of perceiving apparent motion, through the more 'cognitively penetrable' process of constructing, say, links between scenes, to the still more open process of ascribing abstract meanings to the film." Bordwell, Making... 3.

⁸ "Taking meaning-making to be a constructive process does not entail sheer relativism or an infinite diversity of interpretation. I take the informing metaphor very seriously. Construction is not ex nihilo creation; there must be

It is also necessary to specify the four types of meanings which may be constructed by the critic and ascribed to a film.⁹ Most obviously, the film encourages the spectator to build a context or frame within which to interrelate the various components of the film; the film sets up terms of reference which allow for the spectator's comprehension of what has, is, and will occur. Bordwell designates this construction to be **referential meaning**.¹⁰ At certain points in the film the spectator may construe the film to be foregrounding its message or meaning; the elements of the film work together to state explicitly or present a meaning and Bordwell designates this to be the construction of **explicit meaning**.¹¹ At times the viewer will be prompted to seek an explanation for a component of the film which appears to be inconsonant with the established referential and explicit meanings which have been ascribed to the film. All is not what it appears to be since the film seems to be unable to recuperate the anomaly in terms compatible with the referential and explicit

prior materials which undergo transformation. Those materials include not only the perceptual output furnished by mandatory and universal bottom-up processes but also the higher-level textual data upon which various interpreters base their inferences. A composition, a camera movement, or a line of dialogue may be ignored by one critic and highlighted by another, but each datum remains an intersubjectively discriminable aspect of the film. While critics build up meanings by applying institutional protocols and normalized psychological strategies, we shall see that they typically agree upon what textual cues are 'there,' even if they interpret the cues in differing ways." Bordwell, Making... 3. In a footnote to the section Bordwell states that "this version of constructivism assumes that it is possible to arrive at inferences which are at least approximately true; it is thus compatible with a critical realist epistemology." (277, footnote 9). The constraints to interpretation—mandatory, universal perceptual and cognitive processes and intersubjectively discriminable textual data—result in inferences which will be approximately true to the film and which share something with the meanings constructed by theoretically-diverse critics (i.e., inferences approximately true to other interpretations). Also see chapter one, footnotes 47 and 48.

⁹ A brief survey of these four types of meaning is also to be found in Thompson, Breaking... 12-13, and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993) 49-52.

¹⁰ "The perceiver may construct a concrete 'world,' be it avowedly fictional or putatively real. In making sense of a narrative film, the spectator builds up some version of the *diegesis*, or spatio-temporal world, and creates an ongoing story (*fabula*) occurring within it....In constructing the film's world, the spectator draws not only on knowledge of filmic and extrafilmic conventions, but also on conceptions of causality, space, and time and on concrete items of information (for example, what the Empire State Building looks like). This very extensive process eventuates in what I shall call *referential meaning*, with the referents taken as either imaginary or real. We can speak of both Oz and Kansas as aspects of referential meaning in *The Wizard of Oz*: Oz is an intratextual referent, Kansas an extratextual one." Bordwell, Making... 8.

¹¹ "The perceiver may move up a level of abstraction and assign a conceptual meaning or 'point' to the *fabula* and *diegesis* she constructs. She may seek out cues of various sorts for this, assuming that the film 'intentionally' indicates how it is to be taken. The film is assumed to 'speak directly.' A verbal indication such as the line 'There's no place like home' at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, or a stereotyped visual image such as the scales of Justice, could be said to furnish such cues. When the viewer or critic takes the film to be, in one way or another, 'stating' abstract meanings, he is constructing what I shall call *explicit meaning*. Referential and explicit meaning make up what are usually considered 'literal' meanings." Bordwell, Making... 8.

meanings attributed to the film; in this situation the spectator has constructed and assigned an **implicit** meaning to account for and incorporate the film's *non sequitur*.¹² Finally, the spectator may construct a **symptomatic** interpretation of the film which is then taken in its entirety as unconsciously repressing certain meanings; the film is like a patient in psychoanalysis who unwittingly divulges meanings which are symptoms of what are taken to be (by the critic) individual, social, or cultural neuroses and, in some situations, psychoses.¹³ These four types of meaning also enable Bordwell to further distinguish comprehension and interpretation, for the first involves the construction of referential and explicit meanings (denotation) while the second marks the construction of implicit and symptomatic meanings (connotation). Implicit and symptomatic meanings, then, form the focus of Bordwell's study because academic film interpretation is not concerned primarily with a film's denotative level. This four-fold scheme, moreover, allows us to recognize that different elements in a film may be made to bear different types of meaning by different critics.

Part of understanding the making of meaning as posited by Bordwell's constructivist approach involves the delineation of how institutions contribute to the interpretive task. To that end Bordwell embeds the history of film interpretation within the historical context provided by the

¹²"The perceiver may also construct covert, symbolic, or *implicit* meanings. For example, you might assume that *Psycho*'s referential meaning consists of its fabula and diegesis (the trip of Marion Crane from Phoenix to Fairvale, and what happens there), and you might take its explicit meaning to be the idea that madness can overcome sanity. You might then go on to argue that *Psycho*'s implicit meaning is that sanity and madness cannot be easily distinguished. Units of implicit meaning are commonly called 'themes,' though they may also be identified as 'problems,' 'issues,' or 'questions.' The spectator may seek to construct implicit meanings when she cannot find a way to reconcile an anomalous element with a referential or explicit aspect of the work; or the 'symbolic impulse' may be brought in to warrant the hypothesis that any element, anomalous or not, may serve as the basis of implicit meanings. Furthermore, the critic may take implicit meanings to be consistent, at some level, with the referential and explicit meanings assigned to the work. Or, as in the process of irony, implicit meanings may be posited as contradicting other sorts. For example, if you posit that the psychiatrist's final speech in *Psycho* explicitly draws a line between sanity and madness, you might see the film's implicit denial of such a demarcation as creating an ironic effect." Bordwell, Making... 8-9.

¹³"In constructing meanings of types 1-3 [referential, explicit, implicit], the viewer assumes that the film 'knows' more or less what it is doing. But the perceiver may also construct *repressed* or *symptomatic* meanings that the work divulges 'involuntarily.' Moreover, such meanings are assumed to be at odds with referential, explicit, or implicit ones. If explicit meaning is like a transparent garment, and implicit meaning is like a semiopaque veil, symptomatic meaning is like a disguise. Taken as individual expression, symptomatic meaning may be treated as the consequence of the artist's obsessions (for example, *Psycho* as a worked-over version of a fantasy of Hitchcock's). Taken as part of a social dynamic, it may be traced to economic, political, or ideological processes (for example, *Psycho* as concealing the male fear of woman's sexuality)." Bordwell, Making... 9.

American academy.¹⁴ He demonstrates how prevailing movements in literary criticism (e.g., New Criticism) worked to establish everything from pedagogical procedures for film in the classroom to dominant conceptions of what to do with the film itself in the act of interpretation.¹⁵ Although caught up in the larger formative traditions of academic interpretive practice, Bordwell does allocate two chapters of MM to tracing the development of implicit or explicatory interpretation and symptomatic interpretation. A complete overview of these histories is beyond the purview of this section but the neoformalist approach to these two types of meaning is central to our task. Working with the understanding of implicit meaning developed above,¹⁶ Bordwell notes two powerful characteristics of explicatory criticism. In the first instance, the film is understood to transmit implicit meanings which the critic explices by assuming them to be indicative of authorial intent or expression (e.g., *auteur theory*).¹⁷ A second characteristic of explicatory criticism establishes an opposing view of the film as harboring implicit meanings; these meanings are explicated as self-contained and independent of the director's intent.¹⁸ Symptomatic criticism also has a long history—Bordwell's recovery of 1940s symptomatic criticism serves a propaedeutic function in that it

¹⁴ “...the growth of film studies attests to the powerful role of literature departments in transmitting interpretive values and skills....literary studies had embraced the ideology of multiple ‘approaches’—intrinsic, myth-centered, psychoanalytic, cultural-contextual, and so on. Film could be studied from all the critical perspectives that could be mobilized around a poem....The concrete historical factors led film studies to follow the interpretive path, constructing implicit or symptomatic meanings along lines already laid down in other humanistic disciplines. Such historical forces cast doubt on any hypothesis that interpretation is merely an assortment of diverse practices. Throughout its history, interpretation has been a social activity, a process of thinking, writing, and speaking within institutions governed by norms.” Bordwell, *Making...* 17-18.

¹⁵ “For the academic working in the shadow of New Criticism, as for the film analyst, the object of study is a text or group of texts possessing veiled meanings. In these meanings lies the significance of the work or works. The interpretation aims to be novel and to exhibit the critic’s mastery of the skills of attentive, usually ‘close’ examination. To interpret a work is to produce a ‘reading’ that justifies the work’s interest for us now as well as vindicates the critic’s overall claims about it.” Bordwell, *Making...* 23.

¹⁶ “The 1960s boom in explicatory interpretation was not accompanied by many debates that critics today would consider ‘theoretical.’ Still, the trend was undergirded by particular assumptions about form and meaning. A film was presumed to be a composite of implicit meanings given material embodiment in formal patterns and technical devices. That is, ‘beneath’ the referential meaning of the film and any explicit point or message, there lay significant themes, issues, or problems.” Bordwell, *Making...* 64.

¹⁷ “The transmission model thus leads to an *artist-centered* conception of meaning. According to this view, the film is a vehicle for meanings ‘put there’ by the filmmaker—either as an act of deliberate *communication* or as an act of only partially self-aware *expression*.” Bordwell, *Making...* 65.

¹⁸ “...like New Criticism, this [explicatory] approach harbors a more *object-centered* theory of meaning as well. Here, according to widely accepted assumptions in post-Kantian aesthetics, the artwork presents itself as an autonomous whole cut off from the maker’s intentions. The work’s ‘formally controlled complexity’ creates the determining context for all meanings.” Bordwell, *Making...* 67.

contextualizes the later developments of the 1970s—and its primary innovation is to conceive of the film as not unified by authorial intent or overarching patterns but instead riven with contradictions which the interpretation demonstrates to reveal significant social and ideological conflicts.¹⁹ Bolstered by perduring interpretive practices, relatively stable academic forums and university presses, and the aforementioned characteristics of explicatory and symptomatic criticism, then, meaning-making assumes, according to Bordwell, a uniformity regardless of the particular theory or doctrine which motivates interpretive practice. Before we examine explicitly the relationship which obtains between theory and practice, however, there is one more element to Bordwell's study which is key to his constructivism, namely his commitment to cognitivism. Moreover, as in our brief glance at the four types of meaning that can be constructed, the following survey of Bordwell's cognitivism remains a somewhat schematic introduction to what is a comprehensive account of the mental life of both the academic critic and ordinary spectator. At the close of this next section, however, the implications of the preceding and current descriptions will be incorporated into a broader discussion.

Bordwell turns to cognitive theory for understanding the inductive or inferential processes in interpretive practice because he believes the procedural and routine organization of concepts to be central to understanding the making of meaning. Neither a psychoanalytic or behaviorist account of intellection prove to be adequate.²⁰ Of Thompson's list of the four psychological modes or

¹⁹ "By and large, symptomatic interpretation in film studies has preferred to show how repressed material has social sources and consequences. An 'objectively' analyzable film secreting something significant about the culture which produces or consumes it: since the 1940s, this has been the text constructed by the most influential versions of symptomatic criticism....The concept of the contradictory text, predicated on repressed meanings that disrupt explicit or implicit ones, permits the critic to take a more synthetic and dialectical stance. The critic may unmask ideology by pointing out all the patent distortions in the film, but go on to 'save' the film by showing how it either contains progressive elements or embodies in its very incompatibilities some instructive indications of how fiercely ideology must struggle in order to maintain its authority." Bordwell, Making... 73, 88.

²⁰ "For psychoanalytic theory in general, the paradigm cases are the neurotic symptom, the bizarre dream, the bungled action, the slip of the tongue. These are the central phenomena that Freud sought to explain. Out of the explanations he built an account of human mentation that went much farther, to include all normally unexceptional behavior and much of artistic activity. On the whole, cognitive theory focuses on a different set of core phenomena. It is, in general, more concerned with normal and successful action than is the Freudian framework....In general, cognitive theory wants to understand such human mental activities as recognition, comprehension, inference-making, interpretation, judgment, memory, and imagination. Researchers within this framework propose theories of how such processes work, and they analyze and test the theories according to canons of scientific

constructs or levels which inform any account of spectatorship—physiological (nonconscious), preconscious, conscious, and unconscious—the neoformalist commitment to an active viewer predisposes it to claim nothing for the unconscious that cannot be explained in terms of the other three.²¹ Neoformalism, although appreciative of the studies of the perceptual apparatus apparent in the work of Julian Hochberg,²² focuses most of its attention on explicating the preconscious and conscious procedures operative in cognition. Meaning is made, according to Bordwell, via the ascription of semantic fields to the perceived textual cues of a film. This imposition or “mapping,” however, is not direct, but instead is mediated by assumptions, hypotheses, schemata, and heuristics which lead to the selection of certain cues over others thus resulting in the interpreter’s model film.²³ This procedure, as noted previously, falls within larger historical and institutional contexts and, moreover, comprises only the conceptual processes of Bordwell’s cognitivism. Immediately following the explication of these constructs we will examine the other component of Bordwell’s cognitive approach, his proposal that interpreters behave socially as rational agents or problem-solvers.

A semantic field is best understood as denoting the relations or organizational patterns extant between meanings.²⁴ Preexisting meanings or frames of reference are inserted into relationships

and philosophical inquiry. More specifically, the cognitive frame of reference posits the level of mental activity as an irreducible one in explaining human social action.

Like most strands of contemporary film theory, cognitive theory rejects a behaviorist account of human action. Classic behaviorism insists that human activity can be understood without appeal to any ‘private’ mental events. By contrast, cognitive theories hold that in order to understand human action, we must postulate such entities as perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, desires, intentions, plans, skills, and feelings. That is, there is a gap between intelligible and intentional human action and the physiological mechanisms that execute it. According to the cognitivist tradition, this gap is filled by mentation of some sort.” Bordwell, “The Case...” 12-14.

²¹ See Thompson, Breaking... 26-29.

²² Dudley Andrew’s editorial to an issue of Iris devoted specifically to cinema and cognitive psychology sums up the importance of Hochberg’s work: “Hochberg’s minutely planned program delves deliberately into the co-ordinated operations of the senses and the mind in the experience of representations. As a careful reading of his essay will establish, Hochberg does not really present a physiological theory but a complex understanding of perception that rather quickly involves the integration of sensory pickup into higher (more mental) systems. His controlling question is one all of us should find most familiar: How universal is vision, particularly when three-dimensional experience is represented in the flatness of pictures and movies? At what point does culture and learning play a genuinely significant role? It will not do to proclaim *ex cathedra* that perception, or the apparatus, is ideological through and through. We can and must devise experiments that will test universality at various levels. This is among the first principles of cognitivism.” Dudley Andrew, “Editorial” Iris 9 Spring (1989) 4.

²³ See the diagram on page 203 of MM.

with each other during interpretive practice and the critic must arrange them so as to build a coherent and plausible interpretation. The interpreter responds to the cues provided by the film at hand in selecting from a diverse array of possible meanings, meaning types (explicit, implicit or symptomatic), and relations between those meanings.²⁵ This process of selection occurs within the context of the institutional parameters already outlined and is governed by the need to mobilize semantic fields which demonstrate an ability to be both discriminating (marking cues considered to be important while leaving aside those considered to be marginal) and comprehensive (offering coverage of the film as a whole).²⁶ It is possible, furthermore, to distinguish explicatory and symptomatic criticism based upon the semantic fields that they typically deploy.²⁷ Finally, Bordwell specifies the ways in which semantic fields are organized by the critic; clusters, doublets, proportional series, and hierarchies are ingredient to the argumentative structure of the interpretation.²⁸

²⁴ "A semantic field is a set of relations of meaning between conceptual or linguistic units....A semantic field is...a conceptual *structure*; it organizes potential meanings in relation to one another. Such fields may be organized in different ways." Bordwell, Making... 106.

²⁵ "Texts, as occasions for perception, cognition, and emotion, possess properties which can function as *cues*—'prompts' for meaning-making. In order to assign explicit, implicit, or symptomatic meanings to the cues, the critic must bring to the film some hypotheses about appropriate semantic fields." Bordwell, Making... 105.

²⁶ "At any particular moment in the history of critical interpretation, the critic's institutional context will consider certain semantic fields schematic or unsophisticated. (Today, the good/evil dichotomy is a pariah.) Yet every interpretive semantic field, as a conceptual abstraction, is apt to seem reductive. The critic must check this tendency by keeping aware of contemporary standards of delicacy, sensing exactly what aspects and how much detail of the film should furnish evidence for a semantic field....The modern academic interpretive institution assumes that critics should seek to account for the text as a whole (even if it is conceived as a contradictory whole)." Bordwell, Making... 107.

²⁷ "Broadly speaking, explicatory criticism has gravitated toward what we might call 'humanist' meanings—semantic fields revolving around moral categories....The explicatory critic typically conceives of the film's meaning in terms of the significance of individual experience. Thus the meaning of a film will often revolve around individual problems (suffering, identity, alienation, the ambiguity of perception, the mystery of behavior) or values (freedom, religious doctrines, enlightenment, creativity, the imagination)....Post-1968 symptomatic criticism, as befits a hermeneutics of suspicion, traffics in somewhat different semantic fields. The individualist perspective is replaced by an analytical, almost anthropological detachment that sees sexuality, politics, and signification as constituting the salient domains of meaning. The theme of fate is replaced by the duality power/subjection. Love is replaced by desire, or law/desire. Instead of the individual there is subject/object or phallus/lack. Instead of art there is signifying practice. Instead of society there is nature/culture or class struggle." Bordwell, Making... 108-109.

²⁸ "A cluster is a semantic field in which items have a semantic overlap and a low degree of implicit contrastiveness....The interplay of themes in the film is often presumed to be a cluster of more or less strongly associated semantic units that are not set in rigorously inclusive or disjunctive relation to one another....To think of current interpretive practice is automatically to think of semantic fields organized as polarities. Active/passive, subject/object, absence/presence—these and other semantic doublets pervade contemporary criticism....After the

Mediating the direct application of the chosen semantic fields are reasoning processes (assumptions, hypotheses, schemata and routines) which guide the inductive process.²⁹ Two basic assumptions which direct the mapping of semantic fields onto the cues provided by the film concern both the legibility and suitability of the chosen cues.³⁰ Two principle hypotheses which also guide the inductive process account for how texts are able to evoke meaning: the hypothesis that textual units cohere, and the hypothesis that the text bears some relation to an external world.³¹ Schemata are organized bodies or structures of knowledge which are active in all human

critic constructs one doublet, the impulse is to create more. Cruse calls such a semantic structure a *proportional series*, whereby *a* is to *b* as *c* is to *d*....In mainstream film criticism, proportional series become chiefly *oppositional series*....looser relations hold between the items in the opposing columns. The chief such relation is analogy....Semantic fields can also be structured hierarchically, either in branching or nonbranching [itself divided into the graded series and the chain] forms....A hierarchical field orders semantic units by relations of inclusion or exclusion." Bordwell, Making... 115, 117, 118, 120-121. Bordwell provides many examples of these semantic field structures.

²⁹"...it is misleading to present semantic fields as being projected straight onto the text. The critic has to know what aspects of the film may legitimately—that is, according to institutional protocol—prompt the interpretive act. In my terms here, the critic must learn to recognize appropriate textual *cues* for constructing interpretationsThe semantic fields, of themselves, provide no indications of what may properly bear them. Nothing about the nature/culture doublet stipulates that I must map it onto people rather than abstract patterns on the hero's wallpaper or vowels in street signs or those punches in the frame corners that indicate reel changes. Something else must mediate, helping the critic assign semantic fields to a proper range of textual features." Bordwell, Making... 132.

³⁰"The critical institution steers the interpreter away from trivia toward those zones which are taken to be (a) presumably effective in spectators' responses (either potential or actual), and (b) traditionally capable of bearing meanings. With point (a), we again encounter the dependence of interpretation upon comprehension. The critic takes as given, at least initially, a posited 'ordinary' viewing that makes referential sense of the film (identifies agents and settings, follows a story or argument). If explicit meaning (the film's point, moral, or message) is assumed to be uncontentious, this too can be taken for granted. The 'output' of these processes of comprehension creates, more or less tacitly, points of entry for interpretation. As for criterion (b), that of traditional acceptability, the interpreter relies upon her or his training, study of exemplars [paradigmatic or prototype selections of interpretation], disputes with other critics, and other prior experiences to determine what cues should be selected." Bordwell, Making... 132-133.

³¹"Some presumption of unity is essential for the construction of referential and explicit meanings....Again, interpretation shadows comprehension in starting from the premise that the text, as a singular and materially bounded entity, has some degree of internal coherence. Of course, the elevation of unity to a major feature or even a criterion of value is a historically variable process....But this is not to say that critics will always and everywhere *find* such coherence. 'Organic' critics have their notion of tension-in-harmony and variety-in-unity. Contradictory-text proponents argue that effects of unity merely camouflage deeper rifts. The point is that for the working critic, the hypothesis of unity is in force until it is knocked down; the text is presumed coherent until proven otherwise. Even the critic who discloses gaps and contradictions must initially posit a unity that is undermined by textual processes. One could, moreover, argue that all critics adhere throughout their inquiry to a hypothesis of *minimal coherence*—say, the presumption that everything in any text is significantly related (if only by negation) to everything else and to the pertinent semantic fields....

The other primary hypothesis I want to examine is that the text, until shown otherwise, is held to be related in some way to an external world—one of general human affairs and concerns—or a historical context. In making referential meaning, the ordinary perceiver brings into play real-world assumptions about space, time, causality,

mentation; in order to recognize, negotiate, and complete whatever specific goals we may set ourselves it is necessary to employ schemata (i.e., frames, scripts, models) which are simplified representations or diagrams, organized according to a basic logic and structure, and the essential components of many different activities.³² Bordwell allots two chapters in MM for expounding four principle shemata which govern film interpretation: category schemata make possible the assigning of a film to some kind of class or group or genre; person-based schemata equip us to attribute to a diversity of film-related phenomena human characteristics; synchronic schemata enable us to conceive of the film text as a succession of isolatable moments; and diachronic schemata make possible the conception of the film text as a linear unrolling or progression.³³ Moreover, schemata, in meeting the needs of ongoing events and goals, are continually switched or exchanged with those schemata considered to be more appropriate which, in turn, foregrounds questions as to how they are used in the construction of meaning. According to Bordwell, inductive procedures or routines consist predominantly of heuristics which conduct how differing schemata

identity, and so forth. She also makes use of vast bodies of 'encyclopedic' knowledge....The film's diegesis cannot be *wholly* other than the world we know. It should thus come as no surprise that the critic must posit some text-world relations in the course of building an interpretation. More specifically, these relations are taken—under a *regulative* hypothesis—to be verisimilar. In the course of problem-solving, the critic often faces a 'mimetic moment': the need to posit some correspondence between a textual entity and some other construct derived from prior traffic with realms of experience attributed to an intersubjective external world...my formulation is indifferent as to theories of what the 'external world' is like....Like the coherence hypothesis, the mimesis hypothesis is a regulative one, resting on 'default' or *ceteris paribus* ('all things being equal') conditions....I must be very clear here. I do not argue on ontological or epistemological grounds that films directly copy life. I assert only that critical practice requires the interpreter to draw upon schemata and procedures built up in the context of situations outside this film, and, indeed, outside any film." Bordwell, Making... 133-135.

³²"Human induction achieves its goals by using organized, selective, and simplified bodies of knowledge. For example, to understand an event as a *purchase* or a *sale* summons up a conceptual structure consisting of two agents, buyer and seller; a piece of property; and money. These are taken to be the necessary components of the situation. The transaction is mentally represented as an exchange of the property for the money. In understanding that I sell a bike to Ben, you pick out the pertinent features of the empirical situation according to this structure and you assign them to the buyer/seller/property/money/exchange slots. You map, one to one, the conceptual structure onto the concrete base....the schematic structure is 'basic' in that one starts with it under default assumptions and then adapts it to the concrete situation. However incomplete or in need of revision the structure may be, it remains a point of departure. Whatever we call such structures—frames, scripts, models, or, as I shall here, schemata—they centrally mediate our cognitive activity....The concept of a 'schema' runs back at least to Kant, who seems to have applied the term to both the knowledge structure (conceived, it would appear, primarily as a mental image) and the rule or procedure by which the mind produces and uses such structures. Both usages can be found in the cognitive theory literature as well. For my purposes here I shall refer to the data structures used in interpretation as *schemata* and to interpretive activities...as *procedures or routines*." Bordwell, Making... 136-137.

³³See MM, chapters 7 and 8 for illustrations of these schemata.

are to service interpretive activity.³⁴ The result or output of all interpretive activity—the confluence of semantic fields, assumptions, hypotheses, schemata, and heuristics—is the mental construct or model of the film at hand. This assemblage is an approximation of the film *per se* because differing semantic fields, schemata, and heuristics may be used to foreground what are designated to be relevant textual cues.³⁵

One more component of the cognitivist perspective contributes to Bordwell's analysis of interpretive practice, namely, the conception of critics as rational agents who seek to fulfill the obligations laid out by the various institutional venues for interpretation. This represents the social horizon for cognition or meaning-making and is predicated on several interrelated theses. As noted earlier the production of knowledge via induction is not constrained to private subjectivities (contra the interpretive account) and while the preceding overview of semantic fields, schemata, heuristics and mental models may seem individualistic, the cognitivist framework also seeks to

³⁴"Schemata are retrieved, applied, adjusted, and rejected in the course of all perception and cognition. Within interpretive problem-solving, schemata are typically employed in what psychologists call a 'top-down' manner: guided by more or less explicit goals, the critic tests abstract schemata against the empirical case. (By contrast, some aspects of comprehension, such as perception of shape or movement or color, are 'bottom-up,' or data-driven. Still other aspects of comprehension, such as story construction, involve both top-down and bottom-up processing.) Thus it becomes necessary to consider how schemata are *used* in a cycle of interpretive action. The routines or procedures in question consist mostly of *heuristics*, rules of thumb that have proven useful in meeting the interpretive institution's demands for novelty and plausibility....A heuristic can be spelled out, as in St. Augustine's advice: 'We must meditate on what we read till an interpretation be found that tends to establish the reign of charity.' This is no theory, merely a recommended step toward solving a problem. It is like the suggestion 'In the classical narrative cinema, to see is to desire.' Unlike an algorithm, a heuristic does not guarantee a solution, but is is the best strategy for solving the ill-defined problems characteristic of interpretation in the arts." Bordwell, Making... 137-138. Bordwell's illustration is the punning heuristic; see MM, 139-142.

³⁵"In mapping semantic fields onto the film, guided by schemata and heuristics, the critic produces approximations of the film at hand—mental *models* of it. Unlike schemata, which are stable, persistent, and of general application, mental models are 'transient, dynamic representations of particular unique situations.'Using various schemata (such as those of genre and textual structure) and skills of analogical inference, the critic may build up several versions of the film before finding an acceptable fit. The one that fits—that, in the critic's judgment, solves the interpretive problem, yielding sufficient particularity and 'coverage'—becomes *the* model, the final 'output' of the mapping process. That output is not just semantic fields plus certain aspects of the film. The critic produces a totality—the film unified under a description which organizes those aspects of the film she has picked out and weighted with semantic values. In constructing an interpretation, the critic has in a sense reconstructed the text....And as semantic fields and the aspects of the film activated will vary among critics, so will the model films produced....Because of the selectivity and 'perspectivism' involved in the process, the model film is inevitably an approximation. It offers a thinned-out revision of the film as comprehended (itself a reconstruction of that posited entity, the 'film itself'). At the same time, however, by being more cleanly organized and freighted with definite conceptual significance, the model film becomes a sharper, neater version." Bordwell, Making... 142-144.

explain intersubjective or group mentation. The four components just listed, which together comprise Bordwell's explication of the reasoning processes involved in constructing interpretations, are likely to be common to filmmakers and film viewers alike.³⁶ The inventorying of shared semantic fields, schemata, heuristics, and mental models, however, does not lead to a theory of how these "public-domain" constructs provide and implement the learned and skilled activities necessary to both film viewing and interpretive practice; Bordwell believes that the theoretical and empirical commitments of cognitivism qualify this approach to provide such knowledge.³⁷ Most importantly, Bordwell proposes that we treat filmmakers, critics, and spectators as agents who act in accordance with some standard and degree of rationality. The struggle to achieve either the individually or institutionally-mandated goals of any activity presuppose that the agent is able to adjust reasonably and align his or her intentions and, therefore, actions to be in accordance with the pursuit of those goals.³⁸ The various explanatory constructs offered by the cognitivist

³⁶"...there is the possibility of studying how mental representations enable groups to organize cultural life. The very concepts of schema and processing involve intersubjectivity: Insofar as knowledge is a shared social resource, knowers are likely to acquire, store, and use that knowledge in similarly structured ways....To study the history of filmmaking is at least in part to bring to light the schemata for narrative and style employed by filmmakers and audiences....Perhaps film studies itself has relied on mental models that get successively elaborated by members of the institution. Film interpretation can be seen to rely on a relatively small set of schemata and heuristics that novices learn by ostension and that experts deploy through imitation and extrapolation. It would likewise be possible to study the history of contemporary film theory as an ongoing revision of inherited schemata....In other words, one might consider the history of film theory much as Gombrich renders the history of visual art or, more recently, some scholars have treated the history of science, as a process whereby vivid images or metaphors are disseminated, recast, filled in, mapped onto diverse phenomena, and elaborated to fit specific institutional purposes." Bordwell, "A Case..." 28-30.

³⁷"The study of social cognition can display a second tendency as well, the examination of how shared schemata and heuristics mediate the performance of highly skilled tasks....It would be worth following the flow of decisions made by scriptwriters, set designers, camerapersons, performers, directors, editors, and other filmmaking workers with an eye to the tacit knowledge structures and heuristics that govern their work. Similarly, it could prove enlightening to study *in situ* how children acquire the skills of comprehending film and television programs (what questions do they ask? what schemata and heuristics are presupposed by their skills?); how 'competent viewers' make sense of ordinary and unusual texts; and even how critics render a film interpretable. In the naturalistic vein, such questions can only be answered by concrete empirical work—guided, needless to say, by problems and hypotheses. The cognitive perspective can pick out such problems and propose some hypotheses." Bordwell, "A Case..." 30-31.

³⁸"Assume that actions performed by intentional agents are minimally rational. We make inferences about Lea's actions on the basis of the 'practical syllogism': Lea intends to accomplish some purpose, she believes that certain actions will enable her to accomplish that, and the actions she takes correspond to her beliefs. With some adjustments, the same practical syllogism can guide inferences about actions taken by institutions. The regulative assumption that perceived means are adjusted to intended ends is presupposed by any coherent theory of social action....Rational-agent theory may inspire film scholars in a variety of ways. The practical syllogism would seem to be a basic schema that spectators use in making sense of characters' behavior. It is also possible to treat film-

framework, then, provide an understanding of the psychological and social aspects of the reasoning processes which are operative within interpretive practice. The making of meaning, however, involves the crafting and shaping of arguments for the proposed interpretation and Bordwell supplements his introduction of inference and its institutional and cognitive determinants with a consideration of the rhetorical conventions sanctioned by every interpretive institution, deployed by every critic, and present in every piece of criticism.

Bordwell's anatomy of the rhetorical conventions extant in academic film interpretation opens with a recuperation of both the structure and the aims of rhetoric. Making meaning, according to Bordwell, relies upon *inventio* (the devising of arguments), *dispositio* (their arrangement), and *elocutio* (their stylistic articulation); this conception of rhetoric, therefore, goes beyond the inventing of incidents of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.³⁹ Furthermore, the aim in employing rhetorical strategies is not to engage in Machiavellian sophistry but, instead, to set up plausible interpretations which persuade or incline the reader to accept what has been said about the film.⁴⁰ In devising the argument the critic relies upon appeals to his or her own critical

makers as intentional agents in the fashion Elster and others suggest, always remembering that this is a regulative principle and that any social theory presupposes that intentional acts have unintended consequences. Moreover, considering film scholars themselves as rational agents may shed some light on how certain interpretive traditions have been generated and perpetuated." Bordwell, "A Case..." 31-32. Bordwell adapts the rational-agent model for his study of the choices operative in Ozu's filmmaking, but with some important qualifications: "For all its power, the rational-agent model needs supplementing since as a regulative principle it falls short of explaining more 'involuntary' aspects of the filmmaker's actions. However intentional a social practice may be, it will also have unintended causes and consequences. Within film studies three approaches to identifying involuntary social meaning have emerged: the 'expression' approach, the 'reflection' approach, and the 'symptomatic' approach....Here I want only to introduce them, show how they can enrich the rational-agent approach, and suggest in turn that a historical poetics of cinema can make each one more exact and exacting." Bordwell, Ozu... 166.

³⁹"This scheme allows me to discuss how a wide range of factors, including the critic's persona and the constructed reader, will shape the finished interpretation. The classical outline also lets us trace how the schemata and heuristics that operate in the problem-solving process emerge as premises and evidence for arguments. Throughout, I shall be insisting that rhetoric is a dynamic factor in exploring issues, sharpening differences, and achieving consensus within a community." Bordwell, Making... 205.

⁴⁰"Few critics like having their arguments treated as instances of rhetorical conventions, and so this chapter risks seeming cynical or destructive. Such is not my intent. I am hoping that contemporary critics' commitment to the analysis of how positions are 'discursively constructed' will make my inquiry seem not only timely but revelatory. Critics who believe that discourse can never be a neutral agency ought to welcome analysis of the intersubjective presuppositions and implications of their own writing. Further, and more plainly, for me rhetoric does not amount to a disinterested manipulation of language. One can be sincere and rhetorical at the same time; indeed, rhetoric can help one be sincere....Rhetoric is the shaping of language to achieve one's ends, and in the act of shaping the language, the ends get sorted and sharpened. The rhetor's purposes may be cynical or selfish ones,

persona, the reader's emotions, the role or identification imputed to the reader, the examples provided by the film, and pseudological proofs to justify the reader's consent to the interpretation.⁴¹ The arrangement or organization of interpretive arguments includes the components marked out by Aristotle and revised by Cicero and these can be structured to follow the comprehension of the film's narrative (beginning to end) or as a grid which molds the film to the framework of the argument.⁴² Finally, the stylistic articulation of the interpretation makes use of conventional tactics like specialized diction (e.g., jargon), quotation marks around questionable terms, embedded parentheses or the connection of words via slashes (e.g., language/politics/desire) to yield a suggestion-rich *bricolage* of criticism.⁴³ Together, then, *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*

but they may also be—should be—ones which are grounded in socially desirable goals.” Bordwell, Making... 205-206.

⁴¹ “...the critic must establish her expertise—by reviewing the literature or the state of a question, by making fine distinctions, by displaying a range or depth of knowledge about the film, the director, the genre, and so on. These ethos-centered appeals create the critic's persona—a *role* (Partisan, Judge, Analyst) and a set of *attributes* (rigor, fairness, erudition)....Another aspect of invention is *pathos*, the appeal to the reader's emotions. This is evident in belletristic film interpretation, and is no less present, though more circumspectly, in academic writing....Whatever the critic's approach, she will also create identificatory roles around which the reader's emotions can crystallize. One such role is that of the constructed reader, a kind of parallel to the rhetor's own persona. The other role is that of the 'mock viewer,' the hypothetical spectator who responds in the fashion best suited to the critic's interpretation....Invention's case-centered proofs are no less significant than its ethical and pathetic ones. An argument often passes or fails by its use of *examples*....The film critic's examples are principally those nodal passages of the film that bear ascribed meanings....Still, examples would not carry much force if tacit and widely accepted beliefs were not also giving the critic's case a logical cast. The *enthymeme* is an incomplete syllogism; the audience, from its stock of knowledge and opinions, supplies premises never set forth in the argument....All the problem-solving processes I have brought out in previous chapters can operate enthymematically. When the critic personifies the camera or claims that a character's surroundings reveal a psychological condition, she is using an inferential procedure as a warrant for the conclusion. The rhetor typically makes certain interpretive moves seem logically inevitable by turning semantic fields into hidden meanings, schemata and heuristics into tacit premises, inferences into argumentative points and conclusions, and the model film into the film itself.” Bordwell, Making... 206-209.

⁴² “The typical film interpretation follows the scheme laid down by Aristotle and revised by Cicero [introduction: entrance, narration, proposition; body: division, confirmation, confutation; and conclusion]...Any piece of criticism may rearrange these components. Very often, the division of points is spread piecemeal throughout the essay, and the confutation (if present at all) is set close to the opening....The body of the essay offers the critic an important organizational choice. Following the tradition of interlinear commentary and Lansonist *explication de texte*, she can move step by step through the film, letting 'plot order' structure the argument....Alternatively, the critic can organize the essay around the conceptual structure of the interpretation.” Bordwell, Making... 212-213.

⁴³ In an analysis of a selection of criticism Bordwell notes how these stylistic tactics work to implicate or construe a certain kind of reader: “Here quotation marks make terms function in oblique, deprecatory ways, and the diction is faintly French ('combinatory' and 'real' as nouns). Many names are mentioned, but only Braudy's is footnoted. The constructed reader can catch references to Brecht's theory of representation, Burch's account of off-screen space, and the Bazinian tradition in Renoir criticism. To those in the know, 'condensation' and 'displaced' cite Freud and Lacan, 'deconstruction' recalls Derrida and Burch, 'reality effect' and '*analogon*' summon up

contribute to the process of making meaning and Bordwell goes on to demonstrate that these rhetorical conventions obtain across seven theoretically diverse interpretations of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (MM, chapter 10).

The preceding recitation of the key components of Bordwell's study on academic film interpretation functions to provide us with the material to evaluate Bordwell's contention that interpretive practice or making meaning demonstrates a uniformity despite the inveterate and disparate theoretical doctrines which motivate critics, journals, and institutions alike. The conventionality of reasoning processes and rhetorical strategies exerts a not inconsequential coercion over interpretive practice (and the resulting interpretations themselves) and, moreover, provides the impetus for Bordwell to conclude that since interpretation suffers from stagnation and atrophy it is vital for film studies as a scholarly endeavor to adopt qualitatively different projects.⁴⁴ Before examining the neoformalist alternatives to interpretation—film analysis and historical poetics of cinema—it is necessary and should prove useful to examine two theses which underwrite Bordwell's study of interpretive conventions: the nature of the intersubjectivity of interpretive practice at the psychological, social, and institutional levels and the nature of the relationship between theory and interpretive practice.

Barthes, and 'enunciative apparatus' echoes Benveniste, Baudry, Metz, and Bellour. The embedded parentheses, as in the morpheme 'human(ist),' have, like the connection of words by slashes or spaces, become an emblem of theoretical discourse as such. Strictly speaking, the passage relies on the device of the shibboleth: 'a catchword or formula adopted by a party or sect, by which their adherents or followers may be discerned, or those not their followers may be excluded.'" Bordwell, Making... 218-219.

"This book was written out of a belief that the great days of interpretation-centered criticism are over; that the basic strategies and tactics have all been tried; and that this book itself, by laying out a logic of interpretive practice, will have suggested what a routine activity criticism has come to be." Bordwell, Making... xiii. "Film interpretation is in no crisis; it is in stagnation. As MM indicates, I believe this to be due to the centrality of fairly routinized critical practices. The state of things could be improved by recognizing that the pursuit of knowledge is central to an academic field. Knowledge consists not only of information but also of conceptual structures, modes of inquiry, and practices of problem-solving and question-answering. In this pursuit, some non-teleological conception of progress—if only the elimination of error, of untenable theories, of partial questions and answers—is indispensable. We have indisputably made progress in our understanding of film history; we have made, I am convinced, some progress in film theory. If there is no progress in film criticism, it is because scholars have not examined the models and methods they deploy and have not resolved to improve on them. I remain convinced that historically and theoretically informed analytical research into how films are designed and used offers one path to a richer, more expanded, knowledge-based criticism." Bordwell, "Film..." 113.

Making Meaning is replete with instances of Bordwell's contention that interpretation is best understood when we are able to analyze the common determinants involved in the production of meaning. We have seen how semantic fields, schemata, and heuristics are construed to be inductive processes shared in all human mentation.⁴⁵ The adoption of a cognitivist framework over that offered by the psychoanalytic approach is due in no small part to the former's consideration of normative psychological actions (see footnote 19 above). The institutions of criticism provide the context in which such inferential procedures are employed by mandating the problems to be solved and the rhetorical tactics to be used in the construction of meaning.⁴⁶ Of the four types of

⁴⁵ "There is considerable evidence that these structures [clusters, doublets, proportional series, hierarchies] reflect the ways in which speakers of a language store items in the mental lexicon." Bordwell, Making... 115. "If we agree that these [semantic] fields, at work in criticism of all the arts, are so general as to be uninformative, should we simply discard them? We cannot do without semantic fields, for several reasons. First, interpretation needs *some* abstractions. If we seek to build implicit or symptomatic meanings, we must go beyond the concreteness of referential meanings. Moreover, we cannot ban broad semantic fields from interpretation as long as the same fields may be used in comprehending a film's overt 'point' or 'message'....Second, the broad fields to which Crane and Levin object pervade our culture. There are no strictly 'artistic' semantic fields. All are learned and used across a wide range of social activities. This is what makes interpretation 'relevant': it connects a novel, painting, or film to semantic fields which interest people generally. To refuse to employ such fields would, in the eyes of most critics and consumers of criticism, render interpretation irrelevant to broader social life. Finally, certain semantic fields are probably so ingrained that we, and perhaps other cultures, cannot do without them. Individual/group, culture/nature, order/disorder, appearance/reality, and others have been used throughout history to ascribe significance to human life. The interpreter can hardly give them up. Perhaps here we confront an anthropological Kantianism: certain meanings may simply constitute the grounds, or the limits, of interpretive reason....

Of course, particular schemata are culturally variable....But in every society, human reasoning utilizes *some* schemata, and the principles undergirding their formation and use must be cross-cultural. This presupposes, in turn, that practical inductive reasoning is a fundamental feature of human thought, achieved by native endowment, cultural evolution, or a combination of both." (MM, 127-128, 137) At one point in illustrating how person-based schemata are in operation when we construe a character in the film to be a person Bordwell states: "It is evident that constructing characters on the model of the person is fundamental to comprehension. The simplest 'referential' construal gets nowhere if it does not identify persons or personlike agents in the film. In fact, this process would seem to be a culturally universal feature of humans' ways of making sense of texts....Humans are predisposed, biologically and culturally, to attend to humanlike agents in representations. The character-as-person schema seems obvious because it is ours; it is us." (MM, 153)

⁴⁶ "To perform the role of film interpreter is to accept certain aims of the interpretive institution and to act in accordance with norms that enable those aims to be reached....As rational agents, interpreters seek out strategies for correctly performing the tasks set by their institutions. Thus my study of the logic of critical interpretation can fruitfully ground itself in the cognitive psychology of problem-solving. Put generally, the goal which the institution of criticism sets the film interpreter is this: Produce a novel and persuasive interpretation of one or more appropriate films. This goal will shape the mental set, the assumptions, and the expectations with which the critic approaches the task....My construal of this or that film is a product of my problem-solving skills applied to a task largely defined by forces lying outside my personal history, according to norms of thought and writing established long before I came on the scene....The critical institution—journalistic reviewing, essayistic writing, or academic criticism—defines the grounds and bounds of interpretive activity, the direction of analogical thinking, the proper goals, the permissible solutions, and the authority that can validate the interpretations produced by or-

meaning and the distinction made between comprehension and interpretation it is evident that the film's intersubjectively discriminable elements (i.e., its referential and explicit meanings) provide almost no grist for either the work or debates of the interpretive mill since it is possible to view the film many times and come to a consensus as to what has been seen and heard (see chapter one, footnote 48 above). This predilection for the analysis of the commonplace also surfaces in Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's study of the classical Hollywood cinema. The random sample of films was generated in order to isolate the ordinary film for study (as opposed to the canonized, exceptional, and masterwork) since the typical movie, by definition, conforms to predominant stylistic norms and production practices of the period and is, therefore, most useful in determining the classical Hollywood cinema group style.⁴⁷ Given this multifaceted bulwark raised in the defence of Bordwell's thesis concerning the overriding conventionality of interpretive practice we are prompted to ask how Bordwell does, in fact, conceive of the relation of theoretical doctrine to the production of meaning.⁴⁸ That is, what relation obtains between theory and practice? Does theory play any determinative role for interpretation in Bordwell's account?

dinary criticism." Bordwell, Making... 7, 29, 33.

⁴⁷ "Film historians have not generally acknowledged the place of the *typical* work. In most film histories, masterworks and innovations rise monumentally out of a hazy terrain whose contours remain unknown.... 'I believe,' remarks Roman Jakobson, 'that a very important thing in analyzing trends in the cinema or the structure of a film, is the necessity of considering the base, the *background* of the spectator's habits. What films is the spectator used to seeing? To what forms is he accustomed?' My analysis of the norms of the classical style thus gives privileged place not to the aberrant film that breaks or tests the rules but to the quietly conformist film that tries simply to follow them....In the stylistic analysis of the cinema, the practice of unbiased sampling is unprecedented, but we believe it to be a sound way to determine historical norms. When the sample turned up what might be regarded as auteur films, we accepted this as inevitable in a random sample and treated these films exactly as we did others." Bordwell *et al.*, The Classical... 10. At least one critic, Andrew Britton, questions the validity of isolating the so-called ordinary or normal film; see chapter four, the section entitled "the Bordwell regime."

⁴⁸ Although Bordwell has issued a strong caution against our reliance upon interpretive-driven film criticism because of its numbing conventionality (see footnote 43 above) his criticism is nuanced enough to recognize that the institutions of criticism, at their best, instruct initiates in fundamental reasoning processes and that some interpretations can be revelatory in their appreciation of a film: "This is not to disparage critics for obeying norms. Whatever creativity is, puzzle-solving and persuasion would seem to partake of it. No interpretation is produced by rote. The apprentice learns to construct an institutionally significant problem. The skilled critic finds a fresh analogy, produces an exemplar, or pulls off a powerful rhetorical effect. In all such cases, we see how creativity is *enabled*, not constrained, by institutional practices of language and reasoning." Bordwell, Making... 40. This qualification, however, as is made painfully clear by MM, is reserved for only a few, certainly atypical examples of contemporary interpretive practice. Indeed, MM overwhelmingly targets those interpretations best described as mundane and banal: "...the account in MM takes as its model the most formulaic 'readings,' not the ones which struggle to achieve a complex and rich coherence...MM set out to talk about interpretation in general, not only the best or most enlightening interpretations. Still, the book does propose that the variety and richness of critical

Bordwell believes that interpretations of any theoretical commitment invariably, inevitably, and inescapably draw upon the (innate and learned) conventions of all human reasoning and language as the preceding overview of MM has made clear. As instantiated in contemporary film criticism these interpretive conventions function and regulate the production of meaning without regard to the various ideological, social, or political commitments which are believed to engender both interpretations and their supporting institutions. Film criticism, in Bordwell's view, has come to resemble a multi-headed hydra which nonetheless shares the same body; the institutional and the cognitive form the base to a diverse array of superstructural and theoretical allegiances.⁴⁹ Bordwell's account of meaning-making, however, runs contrary to the main thesis upon which the contemporary critical edifice is built namely, the belief that a given theory, say psychoanalysis or feminism, determines the resulting interpretation.⁵⁰ Theory is said to justify, authorize, and sustain all interpretive effort; symptomatic criticism, particularly, subscribes to the centrality of theory and the rise of symptomatic criticism to its present position of domination in academic film interpretation rests firmly on the belief that theory does not merely service interpretive practice but that it is coincident with it.⁵¹

interpretations come from an interplay of schemata and semantic fields. The expert critic has mastered several productive resources of making meaning and is able to mesh them in a way which captures a great deal of the text's detail. But this skill relies nonetheless on the same basic moves executed by less skilful critics." Bordwell, "Film..." 103. Bordwell does, though, allot a few pages of discussion in the concluding chapter of MM to the value of interpretation-centred criticism; see MM, 256-258.

⁴⁹"The abstract tenets of 'theory' or 'method' and the evolving and differing schools of criticism become superstructural phenomena. Interpretive rhetoric, as a vehicle of the reasoning process characteristic of interpretation, forms the permanent basis of public critical activity." Bordwell, Making... 34. "In MM I try to show that even this sort of [theory-based, interpretive] writing relies on pretheoretical and cross-theoretical concepts and tactics, and that these bind rather than differentiate critical schools." Bordwell, "Film..." 110.

⁵⁰"According to this line of argument, no description of anything is conceptually innocent; it is shot through with presuppositions and received categories. Therefore every critical interpretation presupposes a theory of film, of art, of society, of gender, and so on. Stanley Fish pushes this notion toward a thoroughgoing 'coherentist' account, whereby every interpretation necessarily confirms some underlying theory; there is no Archimedean point outside the theory on which the interpreter can stand." Bordwell, Making... 5.

⁵¹"Hence the present situation, whereby in many American universities film criticism is legitimated by virtue of the theory that underwrites it, not by reference to claims about the intrinsic value of cinema or even the strengths of particular interpretations. 'Theory' justifies the object of study, while concentration on the object can be attacked as naive empiricism....theory became an invocatory term, functionally parallel to the appeal to values or art or human nature in explicatory criticism, and it could be used as a 'black box' to sustain both film interpretation and filmmaking." Bordwell, Making... 97.

Bordwell's questioning of the hegemony exercised by symptomatic criticism takes many forms; his recasting of interpretation, the maintenance of a distinction between comprehension and interpretation, and his explication of the alternative institutional and cognitivist account work to set up the relation between theory and practice in a different way. Specifically, he also offers a rejoinder to the predominant view that an interpretation is deductively derived from the critic's theory.⁵² Accompanying this rejoinder is his demonstration that the presumed theoretical differences between the explicatory and symptomatic schools of criticism are largely undermined by the practical conventions which obtain throughout the history of film criticism; moreover, symptomatic criticism was so successful because it participated, with the older explicatory criticism, in both critical and practical conventions which antedated its own development in the 1970s. Bordwell thus challenges the commonplace that the history of film criticism is best understood as divided into pre- and post-1968 paradigms by initiating a historical recovery of those critics—for example, Barbara Deming and Parker Tyler—who in the 1940s and 1950s deployed the notions of contradictory texts, structuring absences, and arbitrary closures. Moreover, symptomatic critics like

⁵²"On conceptual grounds, the deductivist conception is far from cogent. A theory has conceptual coherence, and it is designed to analyze or explain some particular phenomenon. Assumptions, presuppositions, opinions, and half-baked beliefs do not add up to a theory. My conviction that credit sequences come at the beginning and end of movies, that the film's star is likely to portray the protagonist, and that Technicolor is aesthetically superior to Eastmancolor does not constitute a theory of film. Nor can a theory be inferred from my entire (very large) stock of such beliefs—a stock which, incidentally, contains fuzzy, slack, and contradictory formulations. Even if every interpreter tacitly harbored a full-blown theory of film, it would not necessarily determine the details of any given interpretive outcome. Two psychoanalytic critics might agree on every tenet of abstract doctrine and still produce disparate interpretations. In any event, no critic acts as if every theory automatically extruded an interpretation that is challengeable only in terms of that theory. Critic B can agree with Critic A's putative theory but suggest that certain aspects of the film still need explaining. Or Critic B can accept the interpretation as valuable and enlightening while proceeding to dispute the theory. Neither critic assumes that the theory dictates the interpretation." Bordwell, *Making...* 5. Later, Bordwell provides a summary: "...one can ask whether a particular theory of meaning determines the concrete details of interpretive practice. Given the institutional framework within which every critic operates; the problem-solving nature of interpretive thinking; the need to produce novel and plausible interpretations; the cutting and stretching of theoretical constructs to fit the film at hand; the general indifference of practicing critics to explaining or defending theoretical concepts beyond the interpretive needs of the moment; the rhetorical appeal to 'theory' as legitimating one interpretation over another; the critic's shift to explication when confronting films that oppose classical cinema and mimic the theory of textual contradiction; and the persistence of the strategies and tactics I shall be examining in the next several chapters [GL: and which we have already reviewed]—given all this, there is strong evidence that film critics' conception of symptomatic meaning, like the notion of implicit meaning, operates chiefly as an enabling set of assumptions [and not as a coherent theory]. The critic is expected to accomplish concrete tasks, and he wants some conceptual scheme that might help out. If symptomatic critics were to surrender the enabling theory without embracing another, equally efficacious one, they would lack something to do." (MM, 104, italics mine)

Colin McArthur and Robin Wood have moved, in the course of their criticism, from constructing explicatory to symptomatic interpretations. The language of conversion aside (which tends to suggest a radical reorientation with the adoption of a new theory), this movement, together with the symptomatic precursors of the 1940s and 1950s, perhaps demonstrates a degree of compatibility between explicatory and symptomatic criticism which has not been recognized in the histories of film theory or criticism.⁵³

Still more germane to our immediate task is an examination of how theory is used by symptomatic critics to generate interpretations. Does it function as it claims to? In example after example Bordwell demonstrates that the claims of theory are, in fact, marginalized in the actual circumstances of interpretive practice and behave, as in the words of the second quoted passage in footnote 52, as an enabling set of assumptions.⁵⁴ Bordwell proposes that theory functions within

⁵³ See, for example, Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) who, although briefly acknowledging a continuity between pre- and post-1968 film theory, go on to reiterate the discontinuity commonplace and develop it into a book-length survey of post-1968 film theory failing to demonstrate any significant continuity with pre-1968 film theory. Bordwell states: "In indicating such similarities, I do not deny that there are important differences between contemporary symptomatic criticism and its earlier avatars. Yet it is noteworthy that virtually nowhere in the post-1968 tradition can one find an acknowledgement of these predecessors. There is scarcely any attempt to read them, let alone dispute them. Perhaps one proof of the institutional authority of contemporary symptomatic criticism is exactly this partial and suppressive—or repressive—awareness of its own history." Bordwell, *Making...* 99.

⁵⁴ In the context of discussing the structure of hierarchically-ordered semantic fields Bordwell notes that interpretive critics often choose to ignore a portion of the semantic field: "The Lacanian Imaginary/Symbolic/Real trio is, in practice, frequently handled as an opposition between the first two terms. Wood interprets *Alphaville* as centering on the battle of Superego and Id, but he does not assign a place to the Ego. A skeptic could argue that by ignoring some semantic values demarcated by the theory, the criticism is weakened as a theoretical enterprise; but again *the norms of practical criticism outweigh scruples about theoretical coherence*. Rough opposites are usually easier to work with than a strict taxonomy, which may, in the name of rigor, generate extra categories that do not 'fit the film.'" Bordwell, *Making...* 122, italics mine. In arguing for the universal employment of the mimetic hypothesis within interpretation (see footnote 30 above), Bordwell observes that "Contemporary film theory has spent a great deal of time damning mimesis as illusory (characters are not 'real people,' art does not copy life), but, as with the coherence hypothesis, the demystifying or contradictory-text critic must presuppose that some verisimilitude is at least sought; otherwise the critic could not reveal the text's antimimetic machinations....in making meaning, *all critics, whatever their philosophical or ideological commitments, hypothesize particular text-world correspondences*. Once again, theory proposes (doctrines) but criticism disposes (of films)." (MM, 135, italics mine) Related to the preceding observation, Bordwell argues that the basic recognition of film characters as persons at least serves as a point of departure for symptomatic interpretation despite its critique of mimesis: "Once more I need to clarify my claim. The critic does not believe that the film presents 'real people.' The critic constructs the characters by means of a schema she also applies to real people (and animals, computers, and whatnot). This schema shapes our conception of agents within the film, and whatever character constructs result may be more or less consistent, variable, or fleshed out than any conceptions we have of the people we know around the house or the gym. Moreover, *the examples cited in this chapter and earlier ones overwhelmingly show that critics of all stripes, whatever their articulated 'theory' of character, rely at the outset on*

interpretive practice to distinguish one theoretical institution from another and to unify the practitioners of those institutions, rather than securing interpretations.⁵⁵ Negatively, the function of theory is denied as crucial to the interpretive endeavor; Bordwell posits that appeals to theory or theoretical knowledge are not needed to sustain interpretive practice, for given an awareness of the semantic fields, assumptions, hypotheses, schemata, and heuristics which concurrently inform actual interpretive practice anyone should be able to produce meaning.⁵⁶ Moreover, the theories

folk-psychological intuitions about persons. Criticism as we know it would not be possible if the critic did not assume that, for instance, a person's overt speech and action are *ceteris paribus* caused by traits, goals, or other internal states." (MM, 156, italics mine) These and other examples lead Bordwell to the following conclusion: "I have also argued that when interpreters 'apply' theory, they do so principally in a piecemeal, ad hoc, and expansionist manner. Theory functions as a black box; if it gets the job done, there is no need to look inside. While the constraints on 'pure' theorizing are logical and broadly empirical, the constraints on using theory in interpretation arise from the needs of the immediate task....For such reasons, the interpretive process has become quite uniform across theoretical schools. Both an auteurist and a Lacanian can employ the punning heuristic; a feminist and a deconstructionist can find that an enclosed setting expresses the character's entrapment, or that the camera is a viewing agent. 'Theory' will be selectively assimilated by the normalized routines of interpretation." (MM, 250-251, italics mine) "...to speak of applying a single theory is misleading, for characteristically these interpretations are quite eclectic in their appropriation of concepts, terms and arguments. One finds, for instance, 'use-value' and 'defamiliarizing' used in the same essay as 'the split subject' and 'liminality.' Not only do the concepts go unanalyzed, but their disparate and even conflicting doctrinal sources are not acknowledged." Bordwell, "Film..." 110.

⁵⁵"We are now in a position to understand another function of self-consciously theoretical discourse within film criticism. Theoretical doctrines are often parceled out into enthymemes, topoi, and maxims that assist the rhetorical phase of interpretation. *'Theory' has become a binding institutional force, creating tacit beliefs to which the rhetor may appeal. For instance, this book's analysis might be more persuasive to certain readers if whenever I mention critical 'practice' or 'discourse,' I were to attach a quotation of two from Foucault.* If debate within explicatory criticism rests on the premise 'My theme can lick your theme,' disputes within symptomatic criticism appeal to something like 'My theory can lick your theory.'" Bordwell, Making... 211-212, italics mine.

⁵⁶"Note that no mastery of theory need play a part in this [interpretive] process. A critic trained in the proper assumptions, hypotheses, schemata, and routines should be able to produce an acceptable interpretation without benefit of theoretical knowledge. This is not to say that these activities do not have theoretical implications; they do in any realm of reasoning. Nor is this to say that film theory, like other bodies of knowledge, cannot help in particular cases. Nor is it to underestimate the importance of theory as a rhetorical appeal....I claim only that skill in creating, understanding, or defending theoretical arguments is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the solving of interpretive problems. As usual, we must look beneath what critics say and examine what they—concretely, practically—do." Bordwell, Making... 144. "...though it is possible to abstract a critical 'theory' or 'method' from individual 'readings,' and thus to reify that theory or method as a self-sufficient procedure of discovery or validation, employing such an apparatus will not carry any critic all the way through an interpretation. Decisions about cues, patterns, and mapping must still be made by 'just going on,' as Wittgenstein puts it, and following the tacit logic of craft tradition. Further, I have tried to show that in the operations of interpretation, such skills are more functionally significant than many of the theoretical positions enunciated by distinct methodological schools. Indeed, the schools often take the practices as unexamined premises for their more programmatic statements." (MM, 202-204) "A theory can provide the critic with plausible semantic fields (for example, sexual relations as power relations); particular schemata or heuristics (for example, looking as a privileged cue); and rhetorical resources (for example, the appeal to a community holding the same theoretical doctrines in common). But the critic does not need to call on theory in order to produce interpretations. If theory as a body of doctrine consists of propositional knowledge, critical interpretation is principally a matter of proce-

that are claimed to promote interpretation do not, in Bordwell's view, even behave as theories.⁵⁷

Given the actual psychological, social, and institutional determinants of interpretive practice together with the actual functioning of theory in interpretations (i.e., the piecemeal, ad hoc, expansionist, and eclectic way in which theory is appropriated; see MM 26-27 and the last two quotes in footnote 54) Bordwell concludes that the interpretive critic is best described as pragmatic.⁵⁸

This lengthy section has set out the main components of Bordwell's anatomy of interpretation and examined the nature of the psychological, social, and institutional conventions which obtain despite the many contending theoretical commitments. In the desire to grasp and explicate what is common to interpretive-centred criticism, however, Bordwell does not overlook what in the terms proposed by his analysis may account for the observed differences among interpretations.⁵⁹

dural knowledge, or know-how. Producing an interpretation is a skill, like throwing a pot. The potter need not be a chemist, a mineralogist, or a professor of pottery. In some cases, learning 'theory' may help people acquire certain interpretive skills, but it cannot replace those skills." (MM 250)

⁵⁷"...interpretation is not conducted in a theoretically perspicuous way. For instance, interrogation of one's presuppositions would seem to be the theoretical act par excellence, but critics seldom indulge in it. Why do oppositional works rarely seem susceptible to symptomatic analysis? On what theoretical grounds can one defend the claim that to look is to express power? What are the explicit criteria for identifying a film's false resolution? What is the basis for taking the image displayed on-screen to be the trace of 'the camera,' for assuming that camera to have a 'look,' for assigning that look to a filmmaker or narrator or enunciator or viewer? Why should spectatorial activity be made synonymous with 'identification'? Why should one personify the text as a body, or indulge in puns for the sake of interpretation? Most basically, by what criteria can one identify a textual gap or contradiction? Similarly, interpretive critics constantly ignore the theoretical precept that empirical claims should be open to counterexample....Contemporary criticism, in aiming to interpret everything it can find, has usually set itself against theoretical principle by refusing to stipulate when something will *not* count as a valid interpretive move or as an instance of meaning. Let me be clear: *within the interpretive institution*, such conceptual moves do not count as errors. They help produce interpretations that are judged to be novel and persuasive. But this shows that the criteria governing *this* practice ill-accord with the conventions of another one, that called theorizing." Bordwell, Making... 251-252. Bordwell notes elsewhere that: "As for symptomatic reading in particular, it is not clear that the theory is comprehensive and coherent; nor are the ideas drawn from Lacan, Althusser, Macherey, Freud, and Marx that back up critical inferences always applied systematically and cogently." (MM, 297, footnote 148) Noël Carroll's Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies of Contemporary Film Theory provides an indepth critique of the ways in which contemporary film theories attempt to answer the questions which Bordwell outlines here.

⁵⁸"Neither inductivist nor deductivist, the critic is better described as pragmatic—arguing to the particular case when wishing to attack a theoretical position, arguing to theoretical correctness when wishing to assail an alternative interpretation. In neither case need an exact relation of theory to practice be spelled out. Theoretical assumptions can simply function as a cluster of enthymematic premises, and the rhetor can appeal to any one as the occasion demands." Bordwell, Making... 252.

⁵⁹"My emphasis on the conventions that run across different interpretive schools may sometimes seem oblivious to the disparities and disputes that riddle the institution. By tracing varying responses to the same film, I can show that such incompatibilities have a rhetorical dimension. Further, these differences can best be understood in terms of the categories which this book sets out. Interpretations vary according to semantic fields, textual cues, schemata, procedures, and, not least, rhetorical strategies. These studies of *Psycho* thus let me review in concrete

Moreover, Bordwell's cognitivist and institutional approach anchors interpretive practice to a series of specific yet universally available reasoning and linguistic practices thereby offering an account which can be queried according to a variety of theoretical criteria (unlike the abstractions perpetuated by the dominant perspective).⁶⁰ Finally, Bordwell's indictment against the excesses of interpretive-centred criticism provide a context from which to launch an examination of what a neoformalist analysis of film and a historical poetics of cinema have to offer to remedy the situation. Prevailing interpretive conventions are, despite appearances, deeply traditional in their assumptions; the need to move beyond the appearance of the text to embrace a latent symbolic meaning is the prime interpretive reflex to be found throughout the history of criticism and it has engendered a common body of strategies.⁶¹ This long history is instantiated and legitimated by institutions which standardize the conventions to form interpretive schools that perpetuate selected

terms many of the aspects of interpretation discussed in earlier chapters. We shall see that the critical institution offers a diversified but not unlimited range of interpretive moves....What permits the endless variety of meanings to be generated from a film are in large part the critical practices themselves, particularly the indefinitely large variety of semantic fields and salient cues that can be 'processed' by a set of schemata and heuristics in force. The ambiguity sought by the New Critics, the polysemy praised by the structuralist, and the indeterminacy posited by the post-structuralist are largely the product of the institution's interpretive habits." Bordwell, Making... 224, 245.

⁶⁰"Although this book is not about film theory as such, my analysis of the norms governing practical criticism should be judged on theoretical criteria. First, the account distinguishes between what it will and will not explain....Furthermore, my account possesses degrees of generality. It distinguishes broad concepts (for example, symptomatic meaning) from middle-range ones (for example, the bull's-eye schema) and fine-grained ones (for example, the tactic of associational redescription). One advantage of this feature is that even if the account proves wrong-headed on one level, it might still prove fruitful on another. The account also seems to me reasonably uncommonsensical, so it has a chance of being surprising. It is corrigible; one could try to find often-used schemata or heuristics that my account overlooks. It is falsifiable empirically, in that one could point to pieces of indisputably interpretive criticism and claim that my outline provides no explanation of what is going on there. The account seeks to be conceptually coherent; one could, for instance, argue that the schema/heuristic distinction is logically untenable. All these criteria—broad but not unlimited scope, internal coherence, empirical adequacy, the ability to be disconfirmed—are ones by which a theoretical argument ought to be judged, and my account of interpretation seeks to meet them. If critics are as pragmatic as I claim, though, they will not be satisfied with an arid functional analysis. My argument also tries to put the practicalities of interpretation in fresh perspective. The problem-solving emphasis squares well with the sense that, at least in mainstream institutional circumstances, critics operate as rational agents. In addition, the categories I have laid out enable us to specify our everyday assumptions more precisely....we might now be able to see that disputes about interpretations often turn on different presumptions about appropriate inferential moves or rhetorical devices." Bordwell, Making... 253.

⁶¹"I am not making the commonplace complaint that interpretation impoverishes the work. The standard retort to this is that every ratiocinative act 'reduces' the work, since we cannot know the work without the mediation of some conceptual schemes. This argument is correct, as far as it goes. But some conceptual schemes are more nuanced and comprehensive than others. It is one thing to say that the text's particularity can be known only through some conceptual frame of reference [to which Bordwell concurs]; it is another to insist that all such frames are equal in power and precision." Bordwell, Making... 259.

schemes or methods of interpretation. Due to this institutional dynamic which standardizes the realm of meanings upon which the critic can actually draw in the interpretive process, the spectrum of meanings available for interpretation has been narrowed. This limited range of interpretive practices works both to screen out the non-interpretive critical analysis of a film's formal and stylistic features,⁶² and eventuates in a criticism which Bordwell describes as boring, predictable, barren, and bland.⁶³ This litany of the problems extant in contemporary interpretive practice prompts us to turn to the consideration of an example of neoformalist film analysis to determine how it differs in its treatment of films.

INTERPRETATION/ANALYSIS: *breaking the glass armor*

Bordwell's Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema and Thompson's Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis together provide a response to the ongoing critique and litany of complaints that any type of commitment to a formalism is unable to either account for the production of meaning or to generate meanings itself. The previous section detailed the ways in which Bordwell's anatomy of film interpretation excavates the interpretive practice which underlies all meaning-making; Bordwell thus provides a cogent explanation for the construction of meanings in interpretation-centered criticism. The present section will both outline the differences between interpretation and neoformalist analysis and provide an examination of what the latter yields when applied to a specific film; Thompson's meanings, then, are inseparable from her narrative and stylistic analyses.

⁶²"Many of a film's nuances now go unremarked because the interpretive optic in force has virtually no way to register them. A more concrete way to put the charge is to say that in recent film studies interpreters have paid scarcely any attention to form and style....For both the old New Criticism and the new old criticism, style is chiefly a means to meaning: a window through which the critic watches characters embody semantic fields, or a momentary diversion—an intriguing camera movement, an abrupt cut—that can be 'read' in its turn....Perhaps most interpreters believe that form and style are now well understood. This is a useful fiction to keep 'readings' rolling along. Film interpretation charges its debts to the account of classical aesthetics, but it pays very little back." Bordwell, Making... 260-261.

⁶³Bordwell laments that "we live in an era of ordinary criticism" which is only prolonged by the interpretive conventions which MM has detailed. (MM, 261) Bordwell's use of the term "ordinary criticism" is derived from Kuhn's idea of "normal science" which Bordwell had explicated earlier (MM, 25). For more detail on the faults and excesses of contemporary critical practice see MM, 258-263.

Neoformalist film analysis is predicated upon and unified by several interrelated theses concerning (a) the fecundity of the concepts introduced and developed by the Russian Formalists (e.g., the device, the dominant, defamiliarization, motivation, backgrounds), (b) the film as a system or web of devices (of which the motivations and functions must be determined) with the concomitant decentering of meaning, (c) the relationship between approach and method—or rather, *methods*—which is not to be taken as analogous to either the prevailing view that a deterministic relation between theory and practice obtains or any of the other models of that relation which Bordwell also addresses in his critique,⁶⁴ and (d) the purposes of analysis (primary among them, the analysis as midwife to a greater understanding of the film). Theses (a) and (b) have been dealt with earlier and will not, therefore, be subject to the same degree of scrutiny to be extended to theses (c) and (d). Moreover, Thompson also operates with many of the distinctions and definitions concerning meaning-making that have been outlined in the previous section. The recasting of the critical process to allow for the recognition that inference or induction play a large role in

⁶⁴That is, that the interpretation *tests* the theory; that the interpretation *illustrates* a theory; or that the theory offers *insights* to guide the interpretation. There are problems with each of these paradigms: "...film interpretations do not conform to the 'testing' model. Unlike a scientific experiment, no interpretation can fail to confirm the theory, at least in the hands of the practiced critic. Criticism uses ordinary (that is, nonformalized) language, encourages metaphorical and punning redescription, emphasizes rhetorical appeals, and refuses to set definite bounds on relevant data—all in the name of novelty and imaginative insight. These protocols give the critic enough leeway to claim any master theory as proven by the case at hand. Merely finding confirming instances does not suffice as a rigorous test of a theory in any event. This the error of 'enumerative inductivism.' A confirmed scientific hypothesis must also pass the test of 'eliminative inductivism': it must be a better candidate than its rivals. At any given time, a scientific claim is tested against a background of alternative theoretical explanations. But this condition is usually not met within the interpretive institution. Even interpretations which tacitly claim to be the most adequate do not characteristically present themselves as confirming one theory at the expense of others....This [the claim that an interpretation illustrates the theory] is a much weaker claim than the inductive ['testing'] and deductive [deterministic] conceptions. To make an interpretation a parable of a theory is not to undertake to establish the truth of the theory. Any doctrine, be it psychoanalysis or Scientology, can be illustrated by artworks. Moreover, this proposition runs into a problem already mentioned [see footnote 52 above]. If not every set of beliefs relevant to the interpretive act counts as a theory of cinema, then the interpretation may illustrate the beliefs but will not illustrate a theory....this [the claim that a theory offers insights for interpretation] makes the relation of theory to the work only contingent. An unusually wise critic, wholly innocent of theory, might be brimful of insights which could yield intriguing interpretations. And once again, this view surrenders any concern for the theory's claims to truth. From this perspective, a critic could use the I Ching, numerology, astrology, or any fanciful system as long as it generated hunches that led to acceptable interpretations. In fact, the critical institution does not permit such wide-ranging research methods. Only certain theories count as worth mining, and those are assumed to be valid or accurate on grounds other than their applicability to the film at hand... 'Insight' does not suffice as a criterion to guide critics' choice and use of theories." Bordwell, Making... 4-5, 6.

what is known as interpretation, the fundamental distinction between comprehension and interpretation, the four types of meaning, and various cognitivist constructs (e.g., schemata, textual cues) all play either an implicit or explicit role in Thompson's work. These, too, will not be invoked except where the immediate context warrants such consideration.

Neoformalist analysis is to be distinguished from interpretation because of its understanding of the relationship between approach and method(s). At the very least an approach constitutes a rough theory of art, for the minimal precondition for an approach is an interlocking system or constellation of aesthetic assumptions regarding films and film-related phenomena.⁶⁵ This body of related assumptions or approach meets the criteria for a theory which Bordwell outlines in relation to his critique of interpretation-centered criticism (see footnote 60 above); that is, an approach allows for the film analyst to root out contradictory views on the cinema and, construed positively, strive for an order among governing aesthetic principles. The internal coherence and network of assumptions operative within an approach will not permit the type of expedient and crude use of individual principles as witnessed in an interpretation's appropriation of theory (see footnote 54 above). Clearly, those interpretive theories derived from the writings of Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, and Barthes do not function as approaches; psychoanalysis, for example, furnishes a procedure for extracting from the text a reading or interpretation. A procedure or method does not constitute an approach, for Thompson, as we shall see shortly, believes it to be useful to distinguish the two because they are qualitatively different in design and purpose.

Thompson's initially adumbrative definition of a method (which may appear to serve a merely perfunctory role)⁶⁶ is developed by noting that the implications and consequences of the prevailing understanding of the relationship between theory and method (e.g., the method as instantiating the

⁶⁵"An aesthetic *approach*, then, as I am using the term here, refers to a set of assumptions about traits shared by different artworks, about procedures spectators go through in understanding all artworks, and about ways in which artworks relate to society. These assumptions are capable of being generalized and hence constitute at least a rough theory of art. The approach thus helps the analyst to be consistent in studying more than one artwork." Thompson, Breaking... 3.

⁶⁶"I will consider a *method* to be something more specific: a set of procedures employed in the actual analytical process." Thompson, Breaking... 3.

theory's premises, the theory as prescribing every aspect of the method's application) are detrimental to films in particular and the critical institution in general.⁶⁷ In Thompson's view an intriguing film both prompts the analyst to interrogate the assumptions of his or her approach (to see if they are able to account for the film's effects) and to construct a method to meet the challenges provided by the film at hand.⁶⁸ For Thompson, therefore, method denotes how the approach's broad assumptions are structured specifically to meet the challenges proposed by an individual film; furthermore, no two films will elicit exactly the same kinds of questions or provoke the deployment of the same method, for every film is slightly different (even remakes of the same story employ different actors).⁶⁹ Films can effect changes upon an approach because the questions and resulting methods that we generate to come to terms with the film's effects are the consequences of the gaps in our approach. The neoformalist approach, therefore, does not impose the same method upon each and every film but, sensitive to the nuances of each film, incorporates as one of its central tenets the need to be modified.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Thompson reiterates Bordwell's claims that the analysis of a film rarely tests or effects a change in the interpretive method, that the broad assumptions of methods (e.g., that "every film simply plays out an Oedipal drama") work to efface the differences of individual films thus rendering films and criticism boring, and finally, that the challenge to revise our approach wanes because new analytical developments are seen to originate outside of the cinema and not due to a film-specific question or difficulty: "Indeed, revision, for critics who develop a method and then apply it in order to prove it, tends to come from outside the field of film. Developments in linguistics or psychoanalysis may alter the method, but the medium of cinema usually has little effect on it. (This is often because in such cases the original approach itself—psychoanalysis, linguistics, etc.—lies outside the field of aesthetic studies.)" Thompson, Breaking... 4.

⁶⁸ "...I will be assuming here that we usually analyze a film because it is intriguing. In other words, there is something about it which we *cannot* explain on the basis of our approach's existing assumptions. It remains elusive and puzzling after viewing. This is not to say that we begin with no approach at all. Rather, our general approach will not dictate fully how we would analyze any given film. Since artistic conventions are constantly changing and there are infinite possible variations within existing conventions at any given moment, we could hardly expect that one approach could anticipate every possibility. When we find films that challenge us, that is a sure sign that they warrant analysis, and that the analysis may help to expand or modify the approach. Alternatively, we may sense a lack in the approach as it stands and thus deliberately look for a film that seems to offer it difficulties in that weak area." Thompson, Breaking... 4-5.

⁶⁹ "It [neoformalism] is *not*, as I have already suggested, a method as such. Neoformalism as an approach does offer a series of broad assumptions about how artworks are constructed and how they operate in cueing audience response. But neoformalism does not prescribe *how* these assumptions are embodied in individual films. Rather, the basic assumptions can be used to construct a method specific to the problems raised by each film....what I am calling the 'approach,' is what allows us to judge which of the many (indeed, infinite) questions we could ask about a work are the most useful and interesting ones. The method then becomes an instrument we devise to answer these questions. Because the questions are (at least slightly) different for each work, the method will also be different." Thompson, Breaking... 6, 7.

⁷⁰ "...unless we wish to deal with the same theoretical material over and over, we must have an approach that is

Neoformalism is also to be distinguished from interpretation-centred criticism because it de-centers the production of meaning (which, as Making Meaning makes clear in example after example, is often the sole task of the interpretive critic) and, instead, engages in the analysis of the various devices that make up the film system and their functions and motivations. Underwriting the preceding distinction are two contending views of what a film (or, for that matter, any artwork) is and how it functions in human life. For our purposes here the best way to focus the differences extant in these contending views is to begin with the Formalist conviction that the form/content dichotomy often employed in the analysis of film is misleading since it perpetuates a communications theory of art which theorizes that all art is a container or medium for the transmission of ideas or messages (e.g., the film's content or theme).⁷¹ The maintenance of the form/content dichotomy, therefore, inevitably assigns interpretation a privileged place within criticism since interpretation is popularly conceived to be the revelation, discovery, and excavation of preexistent meanings.

Contrary to the communications model, neoformalism posits that meaning represents just one device at work in the film's entire system; a film draws upon and transforms many different sorts of material to achieve defamiliarization and the analyst does more with a film than produce an interpretation or reading of its meanings.⁷² There are a large number of constitutive devices in a film that can serve as the foci of the neoformalist approach; *mise en scène*, sound, camera, frame,

flexible enough to respond to and incorporate the results of those issues. This approach must be able to suit each film, and it must build into itself the need to be constantly challenged and thus changed. Each analysis should tell us something not only about the film in question, but about the possibilities of film as an art. Neoformalism builds into itself this need for constant modification. It implies a two-way interchange between theory and criticism." Thompson, Breaking... 6.

⁷¹ Elsewhere, Thompson writes that the Formalists "viewed artworks as collections of devices interacting to create a formal system; themes, meanings, and characters, as well as stylistic elements, make up these devices. As Shklovski put it, 'It is true that in a work of literature we also have the expression of ideas, but it is not a question of ideas clothed in artistic form, but rather artistic form created from ideas as its material.' Although the end product is not a meaning or theme, these do contribute their share in creating the whole film. The concept of 'content' has no place in Formalist criticism." Thompson, Eisenstein's... 33.

⁷² Here we see the justification for Thompson's decision to use the term *analysis* rather than *interpretation* to describe her activity with the films which follow the introduction to Breaking the Glass Armor: "Neoformalism does not do 'readings' of films. For one thing, films are not written texts and do not need to be read. For another, 'reading' has come to equal 'interpretation,' and, as we have seen, for the neoformalist, interpretation is only one part of analysis. The main critical activity, therefore, is 'analysis.'" Thompson, Breaking... 34.

editing, and optical effects are just a few of the potential sites of analytical interest. The four types of meaning, like any other device of the film, can contribute to the defamiliarizing effect of the film,⁷³ serve a number of other functions within the film,⁷⁴ or assume the role of the dominant in the film thus inviting interpretation.⁷⁵ The neoformalist use of interpretation, however, always depends upon the relative importance of meaning within the entire system of the film, for the analysis of the functions or roles that various devices play and motivations that account for their presence are primary.⁷⁶ Interpretation is, therefore, decentered in neoformalist analysis.⁷⁷

⁷³ "All of these types of meaning—referential, explicit, implicit, and symptomatic—can contribute to the defamiliarizing effect of a film. On the one hand, familiar meanings may themselves be defamiliarized by striking treatments. Indeed, most meanings that are used in films will of necessity be existing ones. Truly new ideas rarely appear in philosophy or economics or the natural sciences, and we can hardly expect great artists to be great and original thinkers as well. (Of course, some critics do expect the artist to be a sort of philosopher, with a vision of the world; this assumption underpins auteurist criticism in particular. The Russian Formalists, however, viewed that makers of art as skilled craftspeople working at a particularly complex craft.) Rather, artists usually deal with existing ideas and make them seem new through defamiliarization. The ideas in Ozu's *Tokyo Story* boil down to one explicitly stated theme: 'Be kind to your parents while they are alive.' This idea is hardly earth-shaking in its originality, yet few people would deny that this film's treatment of it is extremely affecting." Thompson, Breaking... 13.

⁷⁴ "Meanings do not exist in artworks only to be defamiliarized. They can help in defamiliarizing other elements. Meanings can play the part of justifying the inclusion of stylistic elements which themselves will be the main focus of interest. The rather simple, almost clichéd notions in Tati's films about how modern society affects people serve in part as a pretext for unifying a string of highly original, perceptually challenging, comic bits." Thompson, Breaking... 13.

⁷⁵ "Some artworks foreground meanings and invite us to interpret them. The works of Ingmar Bergman, especially those of the 1960s and 1970s, contain obscure imagery that cannot be understood without considerable interpretation. In a different way, Jean-Luc Godard's films elicit interpretation as a major viewing strategy, as we shall see with *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, in which even the film's basic referential level is made obscure so as to guide us toward implicit meanings." Thompson, Breaking... 20.

⁷⁶ Function "is the purpose served by the presence of any given device. Function is crucial to understanding the unique qualities of a given artwork, for, while many works may use the same device, that device's function may be different in each work. It is risky to assume that a given device has a fixed function from film to film. For example, to use two of the clichés of film studies, bar-like shadows do not always symbolize that a character is 'imprisoned,' and verticals in a composition do not automatically suggest that characters on either side are isolated from each other. Any given device serves different functions according to the context of the work, and one of the analyst's main jobs is to find the device's functions in this or that context....Devices perform functions in artworks, but the work must also provide some reason for including the device to begin with. The reason the work suggests for the presence of any given device is its *motivation*. Motivation is, in effect, a cue given by the work that prompts us to decide what could justify the inclusion of the device....There are four basic types of motivation: compositional, realistic, transtextual, and artistic." Thompson, Breaking... 15, 16. Thompson also notes: "The Russian Formalists differentiated only three, and transtextual motivation is not included in Boris Tomashevsky's seminal exploration of motivation in his 'Thematics'....David Bordwell borrowed the term *transtextual* from Gerard Genette to account for how artworks appeal directly to the conventions established by other artworks—a type of appeal not explicitly covered in the original three categories." (16, footnote 12). See chapter one's brief discussion of motivation for more detail.

⁷⁷ "The analyst, in formulating an appropriate method, must decide what type and degree of interpretation is appropriate to the overall analysis. But analysis of function and motivation will always remain the analyst's central

There is one more aspect to neoformalist analysis which distinguishes it from interpretation-centered criticism namely, the goals of analysis. Bordwell's commitment to a cognitivist approach which posits an active spectator able to deploy semantic fields, schemata, and heuristics in the construction of a model film implies the ability of the spectator to become familiar with and to learn the novel defamiliarization strategies and backgrounds that a particular film may use. The viewer, for example, becomes skilled in comprehending the norms which comprise films in the mystery genre by recognizing and learning the narrative structures and stylistic conventions which usually attend films of that genre.⁷⁸ The analyst's primary responsibility is, therefore, to aid in the development of viewing skills appropriate to the films a spectator may experience; the analyst is a midwife to a greater understanding of the challenges which a particular film or genre of films may present to a spectator.⁷⁹ The education of a spectator's viewing skills also works to broaden the (deeply entrenched) viewing habits resulting from a thorough familiarity with the cinematic conventions native to the classical Hollywood paradigm; films that are often labelled indiscriminately as "foreign films" require a different set of viewing skills and neoformalist analysis can equip the spectator so that he or she will find the film experience to be more rewarding.⁸⁰ Preeminent

goal, and it will subsume interpretation." Thompson, *Breaking...* 21.

⁷⁸The process of learning is a key element of Bordwell's cognitivism: "According to MM, it might seem that the critic can only see what s/he is primed and prepared to see. But to say that people perceive and understand through mental constructs—categories, assumptions, and the like—is not to say that they don't expand their cognitive repertoire through encounter with the world. Our cognitive resources are not cookie cutters, and the world is not soft dough; we do not stamp out the same shape in every transaction with reality. When we learn anything, on this account, we start with rough and approximate constructs. We increase them in number or expand their scope or refine them in delicacy as we find that they do not discriminate sufficiently among the data we encounter. Thus the critic confronts what MM calls 'recalcitrant data,' which forces her or him to adjust or revise or reject overly simple frames of reference." Bordwell, "Film..." 103. Schemata and mental models, for example, demonstrate this ongoing process of revision and change (although the mental constructs themselves are perduring); see footnotes 33 and 34 above.

⁷⁹"...the critic is not an arbiter of tastes, but an educator who places at the disposal of the spectators certain skills—skills that allow them to become more aware of the strategies by which films encourage spectators to respond to them. The neoformalist critic assumes that spectators are able to think for themselves, and that criticism is simply a tool for helping them to do it better in the area of the arts, by widening the range of their viewing abilities. In the case of familiar films, this process can consist of pointing out in the work additional cues and patterns as the potential objects of a more active understanding. For more difficult films, the neoformalist critic can help develop new viewing skills. A combination of these goals is most appropriate to very difficult or highly original films." Thompson, *Breaking...* 33.

⁸⁰"If a viewer has few viewing skills appropriate to, say, a film by Jean-Luc Godard, the sudden confrontation with such a film can be discouraging. The building up of viewing experience takes time, and we may need to see a number of films of a given type before we begin to be comfortable with their challenges. Indeed, people who have

among the goals of the analyst, however, is to provoke the reader to return to the difficult film (which may have incited considerable consternation upon first viewing) to try out and thereby develop his or her new viewing skills in the experience of the actual film.⁸¹ The aims of neoformalist film analysis work, then, to distinguish it from the practice of interpretation-centered criticism wherein the interpreter envisages the film to be the occasion or starting point for the development and validation of a theory which is, in turn, considered to be the endpoint of interpretation.

The use of rhetoric and style employed in the construction of an interpretation or analysis also provides another means of comparison: whereas interpretation showcases and foregrounds terms and concepts which seek to generate a "play" of "infinite readings" (see, for example, footnote 43 above), neoformalist analysis employs its terms and concepts in the service of a better understanding of the film. The neoformalist commitment to devise lucid and somewhat self-effacing arguments which assist in the acceptance of an analysis is not an appeal to a notion of a scientific objectivity which would posit analytical language to be "transparent" or, moreover, revelatory of a belief that terms of analysis can be free of value (as in positivism) but, rather, a rhetorical decision to style language in such a way as to appeal to the virtues of sobriety and restraint which may also promote a type of satisfaction or pleasure. Interpretation-centered criticism does not, according to Bordwell, have a monopoly on pleasure or playfulness just because it ostensibly draws upon theories which privilege these features of human experience and thought (i.e., the psychoanalytic preference for the pun); the neoformalist commitment to cognitivism and rational-agent theory does not preclude the rhetorical characteristics of engagement and excitement.⁸² The neoformalist distinction between approach and meaning, its

been nurtured on an almost-exclusive diet of classical films may simply reject the notion that film viewing should be challenging and even difficult. In such cases, film analysis can help give them the knowledge needed to build up these new viewing skills more quickly, allowing them to find these difficult films more interesting." Thompson, Breaking... 33.

⁸¹"This is not to say that the neoformalist critic simplifies these films for the less-experienced viewer. Rather, analysis should try as much as possible to point out and preserve the difficulties and complexities of the film, but should suggest at the same time the perceptual and formal functions of the problematic aspects. Neoformalism does not want to explain the film, but to send the reader back to it and to other films like it with a better set of viewing skills." Thompson, Breaking... 33.

⁸²"The rigid split textual analysis/poetics of film allows Larry Crawford to create yet another polarity:

marginalization of the production of meaning as just one consequence of its conception of the film as system, and the role of the analyst and goals of analysis work together to maintain a useful distinction between analysis and interpretation.⁸³

One illustration of what the neoformalist approach is able to accomplish is found in Thompson's analysis of Otto Preminger's 1944 film, *Laura*.⁸⁴ Elsewhere in Breaking the Glass Armor Thompson maintains that the search for the film's dominant constitutes the initial step and guiding procedure of the analyst since the dominant is the central structure which organizes and

pleasure/asceticism. Here we are on familiar ground. Textual analysis is supposed to enact in its very composition and style a 'staging around pleasures of seeing, hearing, reading film and writing.' I, on the other hand, advocate a discourse that wears the blinders of Jerry Falwell stalking down Forty-Second Street. I suppose it is no defense to say that the project I propose strikes me as even more fun than a subsegmentation. As for rhetoric and style, one may take pleasure in tight arguments, carefully reasoned exposition, subtle and supple presentation. And one may find acutely uncomfortable the mandarin nomenclature, eclectic theorizing, and macaronic arguments that crop up in film studies today. The modes of textual analysis which I find unpleasurable are two: the 'scientific'—little argument but a shotgun blast of data (descriptions, photographs, charts, tables) with diverse appended observations; and the 'poetic,' or para-Barthesian, in which a series of ever more paradoxical and equivocal comments and digressions are linked via painfully clever puns, metaphors, and rodomontade. Neither, I confess, yields me much rapture. But since Larry Crawford accuses me of blindness to issues of pleasure, I can quickly refute him:

To historicize analytical praxis is to recognize that the critical issue is not who sees the text (no one simply sees, or seizes, the text) nor even who sees in—or seasons—the text (as if that vision did not always already fade, perpetually phase and faze), but rather, recalling the necessary absence at the heart of representation, who speaks: the problem of the dialogic, of analytical enunciation, and to historicize *that* is to reckon in the totality of the cinematic apparatus—studio (the Renaissance source of the word is telling), camera (the chamber within the chamber, the 'black box' to be fed with information), division of labor, theatre, architecture (the frame is *masked*, like the Lone Ranger), seat, sloping aisle (pathway to paradise), Rockettes, Raisinettes: *raison d'être* of a textuality that has no limits.

Perhaps if I had framed my argument about the significance of history in this fashion, Larry Crawford would have found it more compelling. But writing like this (composition time: 2 minutes, 12 seconds)—is a matter of willed strategy. You can choose to ad *jouissance* or not, and too often film analysts make the wrong choice." Bordwell, "Textual Analysis Revisited," Enclitic 7.1 Spring (1983) 94-95.

⁸³"...people will object to separating analysis from interpretation. Yet there is a principled difference between pointing out pertinent relations of parts and wholes (analysis) and positing abstract meanings (interpretation). You can analyze composition and color in a painting, melodic motifs and harmonic texture in a musical piece, prosody and plot in literature, and so on. Your analysis need not be guided by interpretive assumptions (using interpretation in the sense I have adopted [i.e., implicit and symptomatic meanings]), and there need not be an interpretive payoff. If you show patterns in the spatial relations of shots across a sequence, you are producing an analysis. You may make the interpretive move of ascribing an abstract meaning to the patterns you disclose, but you could also stay at the analytical level, perhaps by discussion of denotative and diegetic functions which these patterns perform. Again, distinguishing interpretation from analysis is traditional. Some may find analysis arid or boring and find interpretation exciting. But disparaging analysis in favor of interpretation presupposes that the distinction between the two holds good...." Bordwell, "Film..." 97.

⁸⁴It is recommended that the reader view the film in order to comprehend fully what Thompson does in her analysis. *Laura* has been released on video and comprises one film in the Twentieth Century Fox Studio Classics series.

transforms the other devices or elements at work in the film. Without the isolation of the dominant, the analyst fails to comprehend the film as a dynamic, interrelated system and, instead, goes about his or her analysis in an eclectic fashion. Furthermore, the dominant is also an indicator of the way in which a film can engender defamiliarization since it comprises the mark by which a given film both follows and resists the cinematic conventions extant at the time of its production and reception.⁸⁵ *Laura*'s dominant becomes apparent at what in hindsight is seen to be the structural center or midpoint of the film wherein police detective Mark McPherson, in the course of investigating the death of Laura Hunt via a search of her apartment, falls asleep in the apartment. Laura appears suddenly and McPherson awakes and eventually solves the mystery of the identity of both the real victim and murderer. The question or problem suggested by the film (and posed by many viewers) is whether or not McPherson dreams the return of Laura or whether Laura really does, in fact, appear. Up until this point in the film we have never seen Laura independent of someone else's perspective (much as we never assume Charles Foster Kane's point of view in *Citizen Kane*) and we wonder if this appearance of Laura will signal the advent of her point of view. The film's initial premise of Laura's murder together with Waldo Lydecker's extensive flashbacks of how he came to know and then "love" Laura do not lead us to expect Laura's arrival at her apartment. Moreover, similar to Lydecker's obsession over Laura, the film cues us in a variety of ways to recognize that McPherson is moving in an equivalent direction. McPherson's

⁸⁵ "Finding the dominant is important for the analyst, since it is the main indication of what specific method is suitable to the film or group of films. The work cues us as to its dominant by *foregrounding* certain devices and placing others less prominently. We can begin by isolating those devices that seem to be the most intriguing and important; in a highly original film, these will tend to be the most unusual and challenging, while in a more standard film, they will be the most typical and recognizable. A list of devices does not equal the dominant, but if we can find a common structure of functions running through them all, we can assume that this structure forms or relates closely to the dominant. Finding the dominant provides a beginning for analysis....Put another way, the dominant is a guide to determining saliency, both within the work and in the work's relation to history. By noticing which devices and functions are foregrounded, we gain a means of deciding which structures are the most important to discuss. Similarly, in comparing the work to its context, we can determine through the dominant its most salient relationship to other works. Without some such notion, we would be condemned to study every device in a film with equal attention, for we would have no way of deciding which were the more relevant. Of course, most critics *do* make the intuitive assumption that some elements or structures are more important in a work than others. But the dominant as a tool allows us to examine such relations explicitly and systematically. As we have seen, it also enables us to perceive a dynamic rather than a static interaction between the subordinating and subordinated devices." Thompson, Breaking... 43-44, 92.

sleep, in conjunction with the appearance of the dead woman, causes us to wonder if Laura is real or the figment of McPherson's fantasy. The dominant of *Laura* is, then, shifting point of view (POV) and the analytical task becomes the determination of how the film structures its devices to sustain the ambiguity we have noted. Two questions, therefore, form the parameters for Thompson's method in the analysis of *Laura*: do spectators believe the second half of the film to be a dream, and secondly, what are the grounds or cues provided in this key sequence for constructing the film's second half as a dream?

The first question involves an examination of the film's reception. There are several extra-filmic factors which have contributed to the public reception of *Laura* as if it were, in large part, a dream. The unexpected success of the film prompted the studio to commission Johnny Mercer to write lyrics for composer David Raskin's arrangement of Laura's theme; the lyrics suggest that Laura is, in fact, a fantasy figure. Moreover, actress Gene Tierney, who played the role of Laura, revealed in her 1979 autobiography that she also considered her character to be dreamlike.⁸⁶ These extra-filmic factors aside (both of which enter into our understanding of *Laura* because the film has been designated a classic and, consequently, the film's music and star's reflections are details accompanying this canonization), the second question involves noting the context provided by other films of the period; *Laura*'s November 1944 release met a movie-going public predisposed to be sensitive to both the appearance of flashbacks and dream imagery in the course of a

⁸⁶ "In her autobiography, Gene Tierney refers to her character as 'the dreamlike Laura.' Moreover, the lyrics of the song 'Laura,' written, several months after the film's release, by Johnny Mercer to David Raskin's already-popular tune, explicitly suggest that the character is a fantasy figure. The song begins:

You know the feeling
Of something half remembered,
Of *something that never happened*,
Yet you recall it well.

After describing fleeting glimpses of Laura, 'the face in the misty light,' it concludes:

That was Laura,
But she's only a dream.

The song was commissioned by 20th Century-Fox to promote a film that was already a surprise success, and the song itself went to the top of the hit parade, with the Woody Herman record selling over one million copies. The lyrics may have been written in response to an existing perception of the film among studio personnel and the public, or it may have been intended by the studio to promote such a response. In either case, at least some audiences going to *Laura* would have known the song before seeing the film and hence would have had an extra-filmic cue to watch for dream structures." Thompson, Breaking... 164.

film. Films like *The Power and the Glory* (1933), *Citizen Kane* (1941), and, more immediately relevant, *Passage to Marseille* (released March 1944), *Curse of the Cat People* (also released March 1944), *The Mask of Dimitrios* (released July 1944), *The Woman in the Window* (released October 1944),⁸⁷ and *Experiment Perilous* (released December 1944) had functioned to familiarize audiences with a developing body or background set of stylistic and narrative conventions for identifying the presence of a flashback and other forms of personal subjectivity, such as the dream. Central among these conventions was the track-in-and-out camera movement which, as we see in *Laura*, is used to film McPherson's succumbing to sleep.⁸⁸ These extra-filmic factors and background conventions reinforce a certain understanding of the film—and are to be seen as necessary but not sufficient conditions for comprehending the film as an extended dream. We are still left, however, with the confusion as to which POV asserts itself at the film's conclusion; that is, if the film is Lydecker's flashback (his are the first and last words of the film, both in voice-over) what do we make of McPherson's 'dream' and its role in fingering Lydecker as the killer? Conversely, if the second half of the film is a dream, representing the playing out of McPherson's desire for Laura and mistrust of Lydecker, does this mean that the mystery is never "really" solved and that the narrative closes within McPherson's dream? Furthermore, if the second half of the film is not a flashback or a dream how are we to assess Lydecker's last voice-over; that is, are these the off-screen words of a man just fatally wounded or are they too reminiscent of Lydecker's opening

⁸⁷This film warrants special mention by Thompson because of its close release date to *Laura* thus making it a very pertinent background: "More directly relevant for us, however, are the cues used in [Fritz Lang's] *The Woman in the Window*, which presents some remarkable parallels and contrasts to *Laura*'s treatment of its apparent dream. The films were released at almost exactly the same time and thus could not have influenced each other. (Neither could the original novels be the source of the coincidence, as the dream is not part of *Once Off Guard*, the basis for the Lang film.) Yet *The Woman in the Window* takes a similar premise—a man becoming captivated by the portrait of a woman he does not know—and turns it around by having a series of apparently real events turn out to be a dream." Thompson, *Breaking...* 166. Thompson compares the cues for the dream sequences in both films.

⁸⁸"Such classical background films suggest that Hollywood had a repertory of cueing devices which its practitioners could call upon to create a number of different situations: ellipses, flashbacks, dreams, and fantasies. These devices included dissolves (wavy or plain), tracking movements, dialogue, gestures, and especially music. A great burst of such devices all at once could create a montage sequence (often with additional special effects). A quick dissolve would just signify time passing. But in between, there was a wide latitude from which to choose, and filmmakers could combine cues to create ambiguity....*Laura*'s use of such cues is also, I would argue, ambiguous." Thompson, *Breaking...* 167-168.

voice-over thus suggesting that the entire film is the recollection or narration of a dying (as in the construal offered previously that the film's action represents Lydecker's flashback) or dead man? (A comparable narrative would then be writer-director Billy Wilder's 1950 film, *Sunset Boulevard*.) Given these questions, all of which revolve around POV, particularly as provoked by the centrality of the dream sequence, Thompson proposes five levels of POV structures to be analyzed in the film.⁸⁹

To specify the generic level of POV structures used in *Laura* denotes that the film draws upon some of the conventions of the detective genre. *Laura*, as is common with other films belonging to this genre, manipulates POV to delay the successful resolution of the mystery and, as a consequence, the spectator is left with gaps in his or her knowledge concerning several key characters and events. Moreover, the film opens by establishing Lydecker's POV voice-over as that of the narrator and thus invokes the convention that narrators are usually reliable conveyors of story information. Lydecker's series of flashbacks (at the restaurant dinner with McPherson) reinforce his importance and centrality as the primary source of information about Laura; since the film sets up the solution of Laura's murder as the detective's goal and narrative endpoint (conventions of the detective genre), we rely and depend heavily upon Lydecker's testimony and become increasingly reluctant to doubt him. Finally, additional manipulation of POV in *Laura*—in concert with the conventions of the detective genre—is also apparent in that we are kept from assuming either Shelby Carpenter's or Laura's POV, for both of these characters know for certain that Laura is still alive. Once Lydecker is revealed as the murderer the film drops individual POV and shows us Laura, Lydecker, and McPherson's actions.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ "The 'dream' is a device of subjectivity, which hints that we might expect to find other patterns related to point of view (POV) to be important in an analysis of how the dream is motivated and how it functions. Even without intensive scrutiny, it is apparent that *Laura* centers around two major POVs: initially that of Waldo Lydecker and subsequently that of Mark McPherson. The dividing point comes after the restaurant scene in which Lydecker relates the long series of flashbacks to McPherson. At the end of the syuzhet, the last scene *apparently* departs from both these POVs for the solution of the enigma. Already we can expect that the film's dominant involves shifting POV structures. To be able to determine how the 'dream' and shifting POVs organize the form of *Laura*, we need a method for analyzing POV." Thompson, *Breaking...* 168.

⁹⁰ "When at last the narrative reveals its secret...it also drops the sustained use of individual characters' POVs (although the case is ambiguous; it *could* still be McPherson's dream, and Lydecker's guilt could be part of his wish

Thompson also notes how a character's POV can motivate/justify the inclusion of a story event and, conversely, how a story event can motivate/justify the inclusion of a character's POV (this is the **causal** level). The story events of the film, on four separate occasions, lend themselves to maintaining that the dream sequence could be real and integral to the narrative.⁹¹ At such moments the film seems to bare the device or display overtly that a dream sequence does begin after McPherson falls asleep. There is, however, the possibility of understanding the film apart from these cues, for we may follow the solution of the mystery without any recourse to an explanation predicated upon McPherson's having dreamed this all up; if we fail to isolate the significance of these four references to dreaming it is still possible to comprehend the film.⁹² Thompson then asserts that McPherson's character traits (which comprise a level of his POV structure within the film) provide a strong motivation or cause for the inclusion of the dream sequence device.

McPherson's lines and behavior work together to signal a character who is somewhat mentally imbalanced, whose POV might include the ability to fantasize and dream about a dead woman. It

fulfillment). The final scene appears to be an 'objective' or 'omniscient' presentation of events; by that point, the aim is no longer the sustaining of a mystery. Rather, the narrative seeks to generate suspense, and thus it must let us know as much of the situation as possible....For this purpose, limited POV would be a liability." Thompson, Breaking... 171.

⁹¹ Thompson lists the four references to dreams: "1) In Laura's apartment, Carpenter claims that he had told McPherson the wrong program for a concert he had attended because he had fallen asleep at the concert. Lydecker moves into the frame at this point and says, 'Next he'll produce photographic evidence of his dreams.' This remark calls attention to the nature of the cinematic representation of McPherson's 'dream.' 2) Shortly before McPherson falls asleep in Laura's apartment, Lydecker stops by the apartment and speaks with McPherson. In accusing McPherson of being in love with the dead woman, Lydecker asks, 'Have you ever dreamed of Laura as your wife?' 3) As McPherson is about to leave Laura alone in her apartment in the last scene, he tells her: 'Get some sleep. Forget the whole thing like a bad dream.' Their first kiss follows this line. This is the only line about dreams that does not bare the device. Instead, McPherson speaks of the earlier portions of the narrative as being like a dream, thereby reversing the contextual cues of the film (the track-in-and-out) which tell us that the *second* portion of the film is a dream. This expansion of the notion of dreaming over the whole film gives a slight motivation to the specific dream device. 4) The poem Lydecker is heard reading on the radio as he enters Laura's bedroom contains an explicit declaration of the narrative's strategies: 'Out of a misty dream, our path emerges for awhile, then closes within a dream.' The transgressive property of *Laura*'s structure is precisely that it achieves closure without ever coming out of the 'dream' signaled when McPherson falls asleep by the portrait." Thompson, Breaking... 172.

⁹² "These references to dreaming do not recuperate the ambiguous dream device of *Laura*'s return. If we notice them as baring the device, they will help point up its unconventional and playful nature. If we do not, they have little effect on how we will perceive the part of the film after Laura returns. Lydecker's remark about McPherson having dreamed of Laura as his wife, coming shortly before the 'dream' cues occur, would seem to encourage us to notice those cues and take them provisionally as the beginning of a dream. However we interpret these lines, the causal structures of the narrative do not necessitate the inclusion of the dream imagery, nor do they provide another type of motivation for it." Thompson, Breaking... 173.

is in the moments leading up to McPherson's nodding off, however, that we see his character traits—more specifically, his predilection for obsessing about a dead woman—exert a significant effect on the causal structures of the film. Even Lydecker's brief visit to Laura's apartment at this moment, although motivated as yet another attempt by him to reclaim the possessions which he bought for Laura, actually functions to reinforce our understanding of McPherson's state of mind *vis-à-vis* Laura; this story event (Lydecker's visit) is motivated/justified causally by McPherson's character traits.⁹³

At a spatial level, POV is constructed by the attachment of camera framing and movement to a character's actions.⁹⁴ Although there are relatively few optical POV shots in the film (where the camera assumes the exact perspective of a character), *Laura* can be partitioned into two POVs, those of Lydecker and McPherson. As noted previously, Lydecker's voice-overs and flashbacks dominate the first section of the film but at the parting of the two men, after their restaurant dinner, the camera becomes attached to McPherson and assumes his POV until the closing moments of the film.⁹⁵ Once again, the dream sequence device at the centre of the film proves to be a

⁹³ "...most of the setup for McPherson's susceptibility to a wish-fulfillment dream comes in the scene just before he falls asleep. A relatively long stretch of time passes with little straightforward causal progress. McPherson's drinking (the length and amount of which are suggested by a dissolve partway through the scene) plays a large part in cueing us toward a dream. The track-in to McPherson as he falls asleep places the liquor bottle in prominent close-up. In addition, McPherson wanders through Laura's bedroom, looking at her bed, handkerchief, perfume, and clothes; this already strongly suggests that the character is entertaining a sexual fantasy....The primary reason for his [Lydecker's] presence is the other portion of his talk with McPherson, which sets up for the spectator an awareness of McPherson's obsession with Laura. Lydecker reveals that McPherson has put in a bid for the portrait; he taunts the detective about his fantasies of life with Laura. His parting words make all the hints explicit: 'You'd better watch out, McPherson, or you'll end up in a psychiatric ward. I don't think they've ever had a patient who fell in love with a corpse.'" Thompson, Breaking... 173-174.

⁹⁴ "Theoretically the filmmaker is free to cut to any locale or angle at any time. But in practice, Hollywood has mapped out a range of spatial possibilities (the 180° rule, the shot/reverse shot, establishing shots, signals like fades and dissolves for changes of locale, etc.); most films in the classical Hollywood tradition motivate the framing and editing through the presence of narratively significant action. Characters provide much of this action." Thompson, Breaking... 174-175.

⁹⁵ "The relatively unimportant role McPherson has played throughout Lydecker's telling of Laura's story [the long series of flashbacks] prepares the way for the extreme shift that takes place as the two men leave the restaurant. They talk briefly before parting; at this transitional point, the spatial configuration favors neither man. As Lydecker turns and walks right, away down the sidewalk, the camera executes a complex movement which, combined with McPherson's actions, serves to mark forcefully the moment of passage from Lydecker's POV to McPherson's....From this moment to the apparent end of McPherson's POV with the revelation of Lydecker as the murderer, most scenes begin either with McPherson's arriving at a locale or with his being already present as others arrive to talk with him." Thompson, Breaking... 177-178.

crucial moment, for up until this point in the film not a single device is independent of either a characters' actions or attentions. Since we have assumed McPherson's POV, we take the track-in-and-out camera movement to mark a feature of his current mental state (i.e., the transition into a dream). If the camera movement is not linked to McPherson's subjectivity or occurring within the context of his POV we can assign it a narrational function in that these 'dream' cues are metaphors for the way in which McPherson treats the returning Laura in the rest of the film (i.e., he treats her as his dream girl). As it stands the cues are ambiguous, neither confirming that what follows is a dream or merely McPherson's treatment of the real Laura from a POV heavily influenced by his desire.⁹⁶ At film's end extended character POV or spatial attachment is dropped and we intercut between Lydecker, Laura and McPherson until Lydecker is shot and Laura and McPherson walk offscreen towards him. The camera does not move to keep the couple within the frame but instead tracks in on the destroyed clock and the film then concludes. Several factors, however, complicate the ending of the film. Lydecker's voice-over could be understood to mark a return to his POV. More importantly, the final track-in on the clock, unmotivated by the spatial POV of Lydecker, Laura, or McPherson, forces a closure on the film without resolving our questions as to the status of the dream sequence.⁹⁷ Ambiguity is preserved.

⁹⁶"If we take the camera movements to be similarly linked to McPherson's attention, then we almost have to understand them as a dream cue, with the camera timed to reach him just as he nods off, and then pulling back as if we have entered into the fantasy world in his mind. (This notion of getting physically closer to characters in order to 'enter their minds' is a metaphor worked out in rather literal-minded fashion in Hollywood's repertory of camera devices, though a fade or dissolve would frequently be added to suggest the moment of actually penetrating the mental state....If we posit for a moment that the camera movements do not cue a dream, what function *do* they perform? Most likely they could be taken as a narrational comment on the remaining action: McPherson, obsessed as he is with Laura, treats her as a dream object rather than as a real woman. Yet there is no conventional cue available to the filmmaker to signal to us whether this will be a metaphorical dream (i.e., part of the film's overall dream imagery) or a real one." Thompson, *Breaking...* 179-180.

⁹⁷"Whatever meaning the spectator attributes to the moment [the track-in on the clock], it marks a move away from the diegetic world to a meaning or meanings imposed from a more omniscient narration. This extradiegetic force creates closure for the narrative without resolving the questionable status of the dream. A scene with McPherson waking to realize that Laura was really still dead would not in itself create closure; he would still have his case to solve, and the dream would have been just another red herring. For this reason, the narration ends up painting itself into a corner. It must close the narrative within the dream or risk trivializing the dream device by having McPherson wake up. By moving away from the characters at the end, the narration seems to leave them in the dream, while it imposes a sense of finality on the film as a whole." Thompson, *Breaking...* 181.

At a **temporal** level, *Laura* invokes the past through a number of POV structures, most notably Lydecker's flashbacks at the beginning of the film. These, together with Lydecker's opening past-tense voice-over, lead us to believe that Laura is dead and we have no expectations of seeing her outside of the context provided by Lydecker's extended memories.⁹⁸ The voice-over itself perpetuates an ambiguity because its relationship to the images that we see is not clearly specified by the film and we are hard pressed to determine if what we see represents Lydecker recalling the immediate past or if he speaks from a greater temporal distance (i.e., does the entire film represent the dying Lydecker's flashback?).⁹⁹ The flashbacks and voice-overs as POV structures work, then, to misdirect, waylay, and retard our comprehension of the film and, together with the dream sequence cues, add to the ambiguity of the film.

There are two main components to Thompson's analysis of the fifth and final level of the POV structures which form the dominant of *Laura*: first of all, Laura fits the descriptions of the use of women in art proposed by John Berger (*Ways of Seeing*) and Laura Mulvey ("Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema") namely, the woman as passive object for the male gaze. Secondly, the film proposes two kinds of men which relate in different ways to Laura whether her presence be manifested in portrait or 'dream' form. Building upon the POV structures and patterns noted in her analyses of the generic, causal, spatial, and temporal levels extant within the film, Thompson demonstrates that at the **ideological** level these same structures work in a pattern or system of explicit

⁹⁸"Because the flashbacks occupy such a long stretch of the syuzhet time, they bolster the idea that we will never see Laura in the 'present' sections. The flashbacks provide the spectator with as much of Laura's presence as the star billing of Gene Tierney would seem to warrant. Moreover, once the shift to McPherson's POV comes, we might expect that his reading of Laura's diary might lead to a parallel set of flashbacks for the second half of the film. Thus the possibility of her return is camouflaged by the temporal structure of the syuzhet." Thompson, Breaking... 181-182.

⁹⁹"At the opening of the film, Lydecker begins a past-tense voice-over narration; even before the first fade-in, he says, 'I shall never forget the weekend Laura died.' This statement suggests that the narration is placed somewhere in the future in relation to the images that immediately appear. But what is the temporal status of the voice? At a later point in the opening shot, Lydecker says, 'I had just begun to write Laura's story when another of those detectives came to see me.' Are we to take the voice-over as a part of that written story? Is the voice speaking after the entire series of fabula events, or at some point between the syuzhet's opening and the discovery that Laura is not dead?...the failure of the narrative to assign the voice-over a clear temporal relation to the images serves its own ends....By making unclear the temporal relation of his [Lydecker's] words to the fabula events, the narration is able to cover over its misleading claim that Laura is dead." Thompson, Breaking... 182.

and implicit meanings. The portrait of Laura is emblematic for the particular conjunctions of power and possession which attend Laura's presence throughout the film; Laura is to be looked at and possessed by Lydecker, the portrait painter Jacoby, and McPherson.¹⁰⁰ The filming and character of Laura herself also work to position her as the object of the male gaze, as fulfilling the desires of a variety of men; similar to the character of Kane which propels the film *Citizen Kane*, Laura, although the film is titled with her name and she exerts a profound presence throughout its duration, is never given her own POV but is always filtered for us through the perspectives of others.¹⁰¹ Laura's own occupation, that of a designer of advertisements, is also complicit in suggesting that women are objects of a gaze, for most of Laura's work (with the exception of Lydecker's pen endorsement) involve women models in some position of display.

The second component of this ideological level follows from the two common ways of displaying women described by Mulvey; women are either objects of voyeurism or fetishism and Thompson applies this distinction to ascertain the differences between Lydecker and McPherson. Lydecker's primary interaction with Laura is that of the voyeur who watches and listens while Laura and Carpenter dance, who watches from a cold winter street as Jacoby and Laura meet in

¹⁰⁰"The equation of the ability to gaze at the portrait with the possession of the woman it depicts becomes quite evident in the scene just before the 'dream' begins, as Lydecker asks for his clock and other things back: 'You want the portrait? Perfectly understandable. I want my possessions—my vase, my clock, and my screen. Also perfectly understandable.' The painting is simultaneously an artwork to be owned and a woman to be possessed....The film goes even further and includes the portrait's painter within the story, as Laura's lover. For Lydecker, the portrait arouses jealousy of Jacoby because he reads the position of the woman within it as a record of the creation of the painting ('Jacoby was in love with her when he painted it'). Her turned body and outward glance are, in Lydecker's view, directed at Jacoby. McPherson, on the other hand, takes the gaze much more simply to be directed at him as he stands or sits before it. If indeed the second half of the film has elements of a wish-fulfillment dream, it is partly because the Laura who returns is the idealized object from the painting, beautiful and submissive to the character whose POV we as spectators adopt—McPherson." Thompson, Breaking... 184.

¹⁰¹Here it becomes evident that the importance of Thompson's study of POV as the dominant of the film allows her to make the following assertions. "We do not simply look at Laura; we look at her as others do. In this case there are two 'main controlling figures'; we do not necessarily 'identify' with them in any straightforward way, but their presence and POVs manipulate our own view of much of the action....she [Laura] is all things to all the men of the narrative, responding to them submissively; her apparent defiance of some of the men occurs only when she is prompted into it by another man. This makes her the perfect object of McPherson's fantasy 'dream' of the second half. Suddenly the seemingly promiscuous, sophisticated Laura of Lydecker's flashbacks becomes the potentially faithful and loving wife of the detective. Her behavior toward McPherson is so submissive at times as to support the pattern of a wish-fulfillment dream. When he questions her about her relationship to Carpenter—had she decided to marry him? is she in love with him?—she responds in the negative, exactly matching McPherson's desired image of her." Thompson, Breaking... 185-186.

her apartment, and who has hired detectives to watch and report on Laura's liaisons with other men. McPherson, in contrast, makes a fetish out of Laura's portrait and handles a variety of her bedroom items; as an inquiring detective his desire is intrusive in its groping physical familiarity with Laura's belongings while Lydecker remains aloof and distant in his desire. This opposition of Lydecker and McPherson, voyeur and fetishist, is, moreover, aligned by Thompson with the stereotypical Hollywood opposition between intellectual and "man of action" wherein the former is marked as cultured, aesthetically-refined, of a privileged class, physically scrawny, and effete while the latter is seen to be practical, earthy, a man of the people or member of the lower class, strong (capable of roughness and violence), and artistically/culturally ignorant. Laura is clearly drawn to the McPherson type and here the object of his gaze, the focus of his fetish, and the fulfillment of his dream fantasy meet in her capitulation to his desire.¹⁰² We have, then, contending POVs that create the character (or object) of Laura and subject her (or it) to a high degree of torsion thus working to promote the view of her as a chimera and reinforcing the cues in the film which would lead spectators to construe the second half of the film as an extended dream sequence.

In sum, the POV structures of *Laura* at the generic, causal, spatial, temporal, and ideological levels work to create an ambiguity that the spectator cannot resolve one way or the other. Does the film represent McPherson's dream or Lydecker's flashback or does it relate the "real" events of a murder-mystery? Thompson's analysis enables the spectator to become intimately familiar

¹⁰²"In the fantasy-fulfillment of desire during the second part of the film, Laura turns to McPherson as a new lover. His pursuit of her culminates in the questioning at the police station, where he gets her to admit she does not love Carpenter. Laura is at first annoyed by his false arrest of her. But at his reply, 'I had reached a point where I needed official surroundings,' she suddenly realizes he is in love with her; she smiles and tells him, 'Then it was worth it, Mark.' Her first use of his given name foregrounds the moment of her sexual surrender. This surrender is brought about by the very characteristics that set McPherson apart from Lydecker—his strength, his roughness, and his physical dominance over her. The scene carries a definite suggestion that Laura not only submits to McPherson's domination, but enjoys the surrender precisely because it has been forced from her. Thus the use of the two men's opposing POVs indirectly supports the implication that women are naturally drawn to certain qualities in men and not to others. The film suggests that men have qualities either like those of Lydecker or like those of McPherson, that intellectualism and physicality are mutually exclusive traits. Women clearly wish to submit themselves to [in Lydecker's words] 'disgustingly earthy relationships.' Such connotations suggest that gender roles in many Hollywood films are unfair not only to women." Thompson, Breaking... 191.

with all aspects of the POV conundrum presented by the film and, therefore, equips the spectator with the viewing skills necessary to go back to the enigmas of the film to see and hear—to experience—with better definition and clarity the intriguing characteristics of *Laura*.

INTERPRETATION/ANALYSIS: *summary*

Thompson's analysis of *Laura* has demonstrated that neoformalism is not adverse to interpretation but that it must be anchored firmly in and built up from a thorough awareness of and familiarity with the film's narrative and stylistic features.¹⁰³ We can understand Thompson's analysis as an attempt to account for the film's explicit and implicit meanings (e.g., the generic, causal, spatial, and temporal levels of POV structures) before going on to construct legitimate symptomatic meanings (e.g., the ideological level of POV structures). In this way neoformalist film analysis finds its focus on the components involved in the comprehension of a given film before moving to interpret those features; neoformalism assigns a methodological priority to the analysis of the film's features and does not lay down a theoretical template to which the film must conform. In the analysis of *Laura* we have also seen how specific features of the neoformalist approach (i.e., the dominant, the background, textual cues, the film as system of narrative and stylistic devices) have worked together to comprise a method specific to the challenges presented by the film. The POV structures of another film could be analyzed utilizing the foregoing concepts but even films like Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window* or Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* which employ dreams and flashbacks (respectively) present different configurations of device, function, and motivation.

It is also possible to see that neoformalist film analysis, by paying attention to what is involved in the comprehension of *Laura*, produces knowledge about the film that is available to a wide

¹⁰³Thompson's analyses are not confined to films widely considered to be formally challenging (i.e., Tati's *Play Time*, Godard's *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*, and Ozu's *Late Spring*) but also consider the conventional Hollywood production (Neill's *Terror By Night*) and those films which have been seen as conceived to be conceptually opposed to a formalist understanding of art namely, realist works (De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* and Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*). We do not, unfortunately, have the room to consider these analyses but the reader is encouraged to view the films and read Thompson's analyses to find out what the neoformalist approach offers for understanding these films.

variety of spectators, despite their often incommensurate theoretical commitments. Because it is inductive and consensual, this type of knowledge about a film has been usually overlooked and marginalized in favour of ideological interventions that ostensibly demonstrate and support difference—thus the political import of interpretive practice. At this point, however, it is important to remember that what an interpretation does with Thompson's delineation of the patterns and POV structures at work in the film is constrained by the institutional, rhetorical and cognitive parameters analyzed by Bordwell in MM. The conventions of interpretation, as we have seen, work to promote the hegemony, unity, and totality considered to be politically repressive by and inimical to the very theoretical commitments and interpretive practices dedicated to the liberation and freedom of various groups (e.g., feminist, gay/lesbian, and third-world filmmaking). Contrary to popular belief, neoformalism, by employing Bordwell's demonstration of the conventionality of making meaning clears the ground for neoformalist film analyses which target those formal, stylistic, and narrative features which set off one film from another. Thompson's film analyses honour the individuality and difference of the films that she considers because of, as we have seen, her commitment to the tenets of the neoformalist approach.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴On several occasions practitioners of interpretive criticism have called for the incorporation of formal analyses to inform their theoretical and ideological presuppositions, yet it appears that the powerful conventions and traditions of interpretation work to preclude such a merger. In 1978 Christine Gledhill could identify the need for a merger and remark that a shift from interpretation to an examination of the relationship between the formal/aesthetic features of the cinema and ideology would hold promise for feminist criticism: "...we cannot understand or change sexist images of women for progressive ones without considering how the operations of narrative, genre, lighting, *mise-en-scène*, etc., work to construct such images and their meanings. More complexly we have to consider the relationship between these formal mechanisms and ideology. The crucial shift from interpretation of meaning to an investigation of the means of its production locates the identification of ideology in aesthetic structures and film-making practices themselves, which as organizing principles produce their own ideological effect in the material they organize....Although it is necessary to move away from concrete women in society in order to grapple with the social and aesthetic specificity of cinematic practices, the current concern with how meaning is produced tends to stop at producing readings of films that are illuminating to Feminist film theorists...." Christine Gledhill, "Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism," Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings 4th ed. Eds. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, Leo Braudy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 94-95. More recently, in 1983, Dana Polan has suggested that such a merger between the formal and ideological is becoming recognized as desirable: "...psychoanalysis and materialism—to cite two theories that have been of major significance in recent film theory—have come more and more to realize the necessity for a theory of form and therefore for a dialogue with Formalism." Polan, "Terminable..." 76. This ongoing flirting with form on the part of symptomatic critics is, however, difficult to assess given their penchant for misrecognizing neoformalism. The attempts to integrate the formal and ideological by these critics are sabotaged, according to Bordwell and Thompson, for a number of reasons. First of all, the interpretive conventions that obtain for the critical institution and its practitioners (as delineated in MM) would seem to coerce formal analysis

Neoformalism offers a clear alternative to the predominating conventions of academic film interpretation, an alternative able to consider questions of meaning and ideology commensurate with and proceeding from a formal analysis. As this chapter acknowledged at the outset, however, there is more to an assessment of neoformalism than merely responding to the critical agenda laid down by those antagonistic to Bordwell and Thompson's endeavors (i.e., neoformalism's supposed inability to speak to the production of meaning or generate meaning itself). The preceding analysis of *Laura* demonstrated that, free of the constraining misconstruals of neoformalism extant in much of the critical literature, Thompson is able to provide a key into comprehending the dominant features of the film. As we shall see in the concluding chapter—Robert Ray's characterization of neoformalism as classicist and positivist notwithstanding—Bordwell's historical poetics of cinema also asserts its legitimacy in the domain of film studies. Instead of remaining in a position defined by those hostile to neoformalism and structuring our arguments as rebuttals, therefore, the concluding chapter becomes proactive by laying out and examining critically the features of Bordwell's historical poetics of the cinema.

into subservience to the production of ideological interpretations or readings (see, for example, Robert Ray in chapter two, footnote 71, above). Bordwell's response to Robert Ray's A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980, for example, critiques a "formalist foreplay...that begin[s] with a schematic summary of the 'invisible style' of Hollywood cinema before passing quickly to 'reading.'" Bordwell, "Historical..." 398, footnote 60. Moreover, as Thompson's rejoinder to Polan makes clear, there exists a far-reaching incompatibility between the contemporary theoretical paradigm and neoformalism that would also seem to militate against such a merger: "For a successful blend of approaches to be possible, psychoanalysis would have to provide an epistemology compatible with Formalism's ontology and aesthetic—and it clearly does not. Psychoanalysis is not concerned with perception and everyday cognitive processes in the way that neoformalism must be in order to retain its concern with defamiliarization, backgrounds, and the like. This is not to say that neoformalism is at present a complete theory, since much more reflection and research needs to be done. But the point is that neoformalism offers a reasonable sketch of an ontology, epistemology, and aesthetic for answering the questions it poses, and these are not commensurable with the presuppositions of the Saussurean-Lacanian-Althusserian paradigm." Thompson, Breaking... 29.

HISTORICAL POETICS: *introduction*

AS WE HAVE witnessed at the close of chapter one, the “contending histories” section of chapter two, and at points in Bordwell’s anatomy of academic film interpretation and Thompson’s film analysis in chapter three, it is important yet difficult to sort out and work through the perceived and real differences between neoformalism and those methods or interpretive practices propounded by its critics. The problems associated with such a differentiation are compounded by the different uses to which reasoning and rhetoric are put in the argumentation for a particular approach (see, for example, chapter three, footnote 82) and are made yet more complex because critical attention is directed at a variety of levels within the opponent’s argument (see, for example, the examination of the film-dream analogy in chapter one, footnote 48 and compare it with the more foundational significance for art historiography of Derrida’s critique of the frame in chapter two, footnote 67). The previous chapters have provided indications of what are considered to be the sites of contention in the field of film studies and it would be productive to make use of these indications to construct a more coherent and total view of what is an important dialogue in contemporary film scholarship. This goal is to be achieved by the examination of Bordwell’s writings on his proposed historical poetics of cinema, particularly as they are scrutinized in Robert Ray’s critique of both Bordwell’s “Lowering the Stakes: Prospects for a Historical Poetics of the Cinema” and his work with Staiger and Thompson on the classical Hollywood cinema.

It has become apparent that there is a degree of misrecognition (intentional or not) that attends almost every analysis of Bordwell’s work but such critiques are also accompanied by substantial and strongly-worded disagreement with Bordwell’s overall strategy or design for film scholarship. Ray is both representative and unique in his overview of Bordwell’s endeavors because he marshals a diversity of individual criticisms in service to his broader typology of two possible knowledges and their attendant analytical procedures (that is, the “classical” and the “baroque” epistemic paradigms). He serves, therefore, as an excellent foil for some of Bordwell’s

more general and programmatic statements *vis-à-vis* the direction and characteristics of film scholarship and the knowledge that it should, in Bordwell's assessment, seek to generate. This chapter is, in fact, an extended meditation on what Bordwell and Ray represent and how their interaction reveals the current state of film studies. We begin by suggesting Ray's critique in broad outline and then determining if it provides an accurate portrait of Bordwell's endeavors by providing a summation of a historical poetics of cinema with some attention to the details targeted by Ray's typology. We then assume a broader comparative context and conclude with an analysis of what is foundational to the operative epistemologies of these competing regimes.

HISTORICAL POETICS: *the “Bordwell regime”*

Robert Ray's critique of Bordwell's historical poetics of cinema—"The Bordwell Regime and the Stakes of Knowledge"—addresses several aspects of neoformalism which are important but it is his more broadly conceived epistemological typology which is most pertinent to the goals of this chapter. Ray places Bordwell's proposals for film scholarship (= historical poetics of cinema) in a context that, although developed initially by Heinrich Wölfflin to demarcate two recurrent modes in art history (the classical and the baroque), is appropriated by Ray and freighted with an epistemic significance to the effect that the classical and baroque become two competing paradigms for understanding and structuring knowledge. Taking the characteristics of Wöfflin's two art historical modes Ray devises a dichotomy suited to capturing, he believes, that which is distinctive about modernism and postmodernism and their competing regimes of knowledge. Classicism or modernism utilizes a style and produces a knowledge that is linear, closed, clear, and which possesses attributes characteristically identified as Apollonian. The baroque or postmodern, on the other hand, delights in a style and knowledge which are non-linear, open, less clear, and whatever can be marked as Diogenesian in spirit. These, then, are the two master models that subsume all discourse about what counts as knowledge and from which, moreover, issue procedures for investigating and assessing art. The typology insists on conflating knowledge and art to demonstrate

the intimate connection between the two; that is, classicism and the baroque yield not only differing, competing bodies of knowledge about the arts but also engender diverging analytical strategies for arriving at, sustaining, and disciplining those regimes of knowledge. Outfitted with this conceptual apparatus, Ray assigns Bordwell's call for a historical poetics of the cinema a position equivalent to that assumed by preceding exemplars of classical knowledge, namely positivism and empiricism. As related in chapter one (footnotes 69-72), Ray marks Bordwell's epistemological and theoretical commitments as structurally identical to Comte's rationale for positivism and, moreover, indicative of Kuhn's paradigm of "normal science." The marks of Bordwell's allegiance to classicism are, during the course of Ray's critique, itemized and placed in the context of illustrating the different commitments entailed and exercised by both the classical and the baroque epistemologies. Before detailing the features of Ray's critique, however, it would be prudent to familiarize ourselves with the essential structural features of Bordwell's historical poetics of cinema as disseminated at several locations within the Bordwell corpus.¹

A primary component of Bordwell's writings on an historical poetics of cinema is the construction of a historical context or background that marks the proliferation of post-1968 interpretive strategies which are derived from extra-cinematic (anthropological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, etc.) theories that claim authority as privileged hermeneutics for unmasking socio-politico-cultural predispositions (i.e., the workings of ideology).² MM, as we have seen, takes as its focus and demonstrates extensively that a) such theories are appropriated in an ad hoc, fragmentary manner

¹ See 1983's "Lowering the Stakes: Prospects for a Historical Poetics of the Cinema," 1989's "Historical Poetics of the Cinema," and the concluding section to Making Meaning, "Prospects for a Poetics."

² "One indication of the vigor of film study in the 1970s was the speed with which theorists moved to confront and assimilate insights from other disciplines. Every few months, it seemed, literary theory, semiology, feminism, linguistics, marxism, psychoanalysis, and anthropology furnished provocative new ideas. One result of this trend was a tendency to frame ever more totalized accounts of cinema. The more concepts that one borrowed from such a range of ideas, the more colossal became the domain of film theory and the more general and abstract became the construct that theorists sought to build. At a certain point, a theory of the cinema blurred indistinguishably into theories of the psyche, of the human subject, of the social formation, of history, and of communication. By the early 1980s, film research came to resemble a reckless poker game in which the ante was constantly rising. A decent theory of cinema, it seemed, would have to include an abstract explanation of everything that might ever have impinged upon or been presupposed by any cinematic phenomenon." Bordwell, "Lowering..." 5. Chapter 4 in MM provides a brief history of symptomatic criticism and its theoretical sources.

often functioning enthymematically within interpretive practice and that b) the interpretations generated are often guided by inferential and rhetorical conventions which obtain across the diversity of theoretical commitments.³ Nevertheless, and despite the failings of this type of theorizing and interpretative practice, it functions to demonstrate that a historical poetics of cinema is not characteristic of this tradition and, in fact, signals a departure from it.⁴ That is, the series of questions examined by Bordwell and Thompson do not privilege wide-ranging interpretation above all other inquiries concerning film but, instead, grant a priority to constructing a knowledge of the film form's properties, functions, and reception within a historical context. The impetus for such an endeavor has roots in both Russian Formalism⁵ (as we have seen in chapter one) and in a tradition of historical poetics⁶; the set of questions and critical agenda issuing from these sources inform

³ Towards the conclusion of "Historical Poetics of Cinema" Bordwell provides three points of comparison between poetics and what he entitles SLAB theory (Saussurean semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, Barthesian textual theory) which comprises a helpful sketch of what MM examines in greater detail. SLAB provides the theoretical justification for contemporary academic interpretive practice and thus constitutes an important part of this predominating background. The three points are: a) Whereas poetics is problem- and question-centered, SLAB theory is doctrine-centered, b) Poetics, in its contemporary form, conducts systematic research; SLAB theory does not and c) Whereas poetics uses concepts to construct explanatory propositions, SLAB theory uses concepts to construct interpretive narratives. See Bordwell, "Historical..." 385-392.

⁴ "...I sketch this institutional background for another reason: to establish that historical poetics does not grow organically out of this history, and this for a very good reason. What I shall be discussing is not a method at all. In film studies... 'method' has been largely synonymous with 'interpretive school.' An interpretive school, I take it, consists chiefly of: (a) a semantic field with which particular theoretical concepts are associated; (b) a set of inferential procedures that render certain features of films salient and significant on *a priori* grounds; (c) one or more conceptual maps of textual progression across which salient features enact a transformation of the semantic field; (d) a set of characteristic rhetorical tactics for setting forth the writer's argument....Every recognized 'method'—phenomenological, feminist, Marxist, or whatever—can be described along these lines. They all aim to produce interpretations—that is, the ascription of implicit or symptomatic meanings to texts. A historical poetics of cinema does not fit this description. It does not constitute a distinct critical school; it has no privileged semantic field, no core of procedures for identifying or interpreting textual features, no map of the flow of meaning, and no unique rhetorical tactics. It does not seek to produce interpretations." Bordwell, "Historical..." 369-370.

⁵ "Since Russian Formalism has recently benefited from several fine explications, I can confine myself to some high points, organized around four interlocked questions: 1. What are the properties and functions of film form, especially in its aesthetic aspects? 2. What aspect of the spectator's activity can be explained with reference to film form? 3. How may we analyze films in order to bring their formal operations to light? 4. How may we situate film form and spectatorial activity in historical terms?" Bordwell, "Lowering..." 7.

⁶ "In the twentieth century, German-language art studies and Slavic literary theory laid the groundwork for a historical poetics. Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl, Erwin Panofsky, and later E.H. Gombrich showed how one could systematically describe forms and styles in painting and go on to explain their changes causally. The Russian Formalists...and the Prague Structuralists...proposed both concrete analyses of literary works and larger explanations for how they functioned in historical contexts. This tradition has been alive in film studies as well, crossing periods and doctrinal schools and recently emerging as a significant force in academic work. A historical poetics of cinema produces knowledge in answer to two broad questions: 1. What are the principles according to which films are constructed and by means of which they achieve particular effects? 2. How and why have these princi-

Bordwell's historical poetics of cinema. Two critical backgrounds, then,—post-1968 film theory/interpretive practice and the tradition of historical poetics—provide the context within which Bordwell articulates his scholarship. It is now important to detail briefly what the scholarship itself entails.⁷

In an analysis structurally similar to that employed in MM, Bordwell proposes that there are essentially three areas of active inquiry within poetics despite the considerable diversity of terms enlisted to name and describe those areas. Thematics, precompositional factors, or semantics are all concerned with, in some fashion, isolating and detailing the received themes, meanings, and other materials used in the construction of the art work. Constructional form, compositional factors, or syntactics all roughly denote an inquiry into the compositional principles or rules which are operative within the construction of the art work. The third area—stylistics, postcompositional factors, or pragmatics—all find a focus in examining how formal patterns in the art work effect a response or reception among spectators which may vary according to determinate contexts. Bordwell does not deny that his generalization and the proposed equivalency between terms is somewhat forced given that poetics is a hotly contested domain and that these terms are meant to differentiate divergent concepts and analyses, but he does maintain that these three basic areas of inquiry underlie the debates and arguments over nomenclature. A factor which engenders further complexity within the domain of poetics is the existence of two tendencies for locating and

ples arisen and changed in particular empirical circumstances? Historical poetics is thus characterized by the phenomena it studies—films' constructional principles and effects—and the questions it asks about those phenomena—their constitution, functions, consequences, and historical manifestations.” Bordwell, “Historical...” 371.

⁷ The next paragraph does not draw upon Bordwell's 1983 article—“Lowering the Stakes: Prospects for a Historical Poetics of Cinema”—since many of the terms and concepts that he develops there have already been examined in previous chapters (e.g., the form/material distinction, the device, the dominant, the background or norm, defamiliarization, function, the approach/method distinction, the artwork as a dynamic system, etc.). In fact, we now turn away from Bordwell's 1983 invitation to consider his 1989 article “Historical Poetics of Cinema.” The intervening 6 years saw the publication of several important books and articles promoting a neoformalist poetics and it is likely that Bordwell writes the 1989 article with an awareness of the various reactions to his initial call for a different program for film scholarship. The 1989 article, therefore, brings greater definition to Bordwell and Thompson's enterprise by positioning the movement in relation to other predominating approaches to film art. In keeping with Ray's intention to position Bordwell in relation to a broader philosophical agenda of competing epistemologies, then, we next focus upon Bordwell's explication of the domain of historical poetics and those areas—aesthetics and semiotics—congruent to it.

construing the source of stylistic or formal change within artistic phenomena; that is, in all three areas of inquiry, the poetician is confronted with the choice of utilizing either intrinsic or extrinsic causal explanations for change.⁸ Finally, our understanding of the domain of historical poetics can be enhanced if we distinguish it from both aesthetics and semiotics.⁹ Given these broad distinctions regarding the assumptions founding a historical poetics of cinema, we turn now to examine how Ray's typology seeks to illuminate what is at stake for film scholarship if Bordwell's proposal is widely adopted. Of equal importance is the determination of whether or not the typology executes an accurate critique of Bordwell and Thompson's proposals.

We may begin by asking what would prompt Ray and others to construe Bordwell and Thompson's work as founded in and issuing from a positivist epistemology, for this is Ray's main impetus in consigning neoformalism and a historical poetics of cinema to the classical position. Certain elements of Bordwell's endeavors, when associated with other (incriminating) evidence,

⁸ "Across history, poetics has had to steer a course between strictly 'immanent' accounts and strictly 'subsumptive' ones. Few poeticians have been willing to accept the consequences of an utterly intrinsic account of constructional processes; even Wölfflin, mistakenly treated as the model of the pure formalist, explained changes in artistic styles partly by changes in a culture's visual habits. On the other side, very few poeticians have sought to account for every phenomenon by appeal to processes in other social domains; even the Zhdanovite recognizes some special quality in art. For most poeticians, the constructional principles studied are not self-sealed, but they are also not in every respect subsumable to other principles....we can distinguish two tendencies within poetics. One tendency hypothesizes that the phenomenon we study has a considerable degree of self-regulated coherence. The early Shklovsky seems to hold this view; he seeks to explain the laws of fairy tale composition by purely poetic principles like repetition, retardation, and so forth. He gives *theoretical* priority to such factors. In film poetics, perhaps Burch's *Theory of Film Practice* approaches this position. The second tendency, articulated by the later Russian Formalists and the Prague Structuralists, gives immanent factors only a *methodological* priority. For example, as Tynianov and Jakobson point out, even if the immanent evolution of literature can explain the direction of change, it cannot explain *timing*, which must be governed by extra-literary causes. A comparable position is taken by Staiger, Thompson, and myself in studying the history of the classical Hollywood cinema. Here the analyst looks first to the 'immanent' factors that might be the most proximate and pertinent causal factors, but also assumes that virtually every explanatory task will require moving to those mediations that lie in 'adjacent' domains." Bordwell, "Historical..." 377.

⁹ "There remains, however, a core of questions and issues that cannot be wholly absorbed into the adjacent areas. It is useful to differentiate between the *practical theory* of an art and the *philosophy* of it. The 'practical theory' of music or poetry, for instance, rests upon *a posteriori* questions, involving empirical generalizations about conventions and practices in these arts. From this perspective, film poetics is a systematizing of theoretical inquiry into cinematic practices as they have existed. The philosophy of an art, on the other hand, inquires into its *a priori* aspects; it involves conceptual analysis of the art's logical nature and functions. On the whole, aesthetics concentrates upon such matters. As for semiotics, it concentrates on matters of meaning, which is only part of the effects for which a poetics seeks to account; on the other hand, if semiotics seeks to explain 'the life of signs in society,' it encompasses far more than any poetics can. Yet one should not discourage border crossings; if Barthes' *S/Z* offers a semiotics and Goodman's *Languages of Art* offers an aesthetics, both are splendid contributions to poetics." Bordwell, "Historical..." 378.

would seem to mark the scholarship as wilfully invoking the epistemic standards and investigatory procedures of the social and natural sciences.¹⁰ A lot of critical ire, to address a specific example for a moment, has been levelled at the idea of the unbiased sample used to provide the neoformalist study of the classical Hollywood cinema with the films from which to derive norms and stylistic paradigms. Ray designates the sampling to be a “gesture of scientificity”¹¹ while Andrew Britton doubts the procedure both because it is indicative of a commitment to the “kind of bourgeois sociology which originated the method” (i.e., a sociology which constructed the conventional as a particularly undesirable intersection of class and value) and because it leads to a cinema of banality, a cinema of the lowest possible common denominator which does not reveal that which is unique to the recognized masterpieces of the Hollywood cinema (which generate our initial critical interest in this cinema).¹² Here, again, however, we seem to confront a different

¹⁰Note, for example, Bordwell’s recasting of what he construes to be the underlying purposes motivating interpretive practice: “...one might capture the critic’s own sense of activity by asking two more object-centered questions. First, how are particular films put together? Call this the problem of the films’ *composition*. Second, what *effects* and *functions* do particular films have? If criticism can be said to produce knowledge in anything like the sense applicable to the natural and social sciences, these two questions might be the most reasonable points of departure.” Bordwell, *Making...* 263.

¹¹“They [Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson] pointedly rely on a computer-generated random sample of films, a gesture of scientificity which, as Michel de Certeau pointed out, compels belief ‘by citing a source of power’: using a computer becomes the twentieth-century equivalent of the Renaissance ‘Dedication to the Prince,’ ‘a recognition of obligations with respect to the power that overdetermines the rationality of an epoch.’” Ray, “The Bordwell...” 148. Also see chapter one, footnote 69 above.

¹²“What serious literary critic, undertaking a theoretical study of the 19th century bourgeois novel, would proceed on the basis of an ‘unbiased sample’ which might or might not include examples of the work of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Eliot, Stendhal, Flaubert, Hawthorne, Melville, Tolstoy or James, but which might very well be dominated by the collected works of Charlotte Yonge, Bulwer Lytton and Captain Maryatt?—and what information about the 19th century bourgeois novel would such an undertaking, persisted in, be likely to provide? We would certainly discover (as we might, and ought, to have known) that there are large numbers of inferior 19th century novels of varying degrees of documentary interest, but we would learn less than nothing about the novel as a form—for the simple reason that the *kind* of interest which the inferior works have is only comprehensible in the context of the incomparable artistic achievement excluded by the intrinsic bias of the unbiased sample. The idea that there is an ideal ‘normal,’ ‘typical’ or ‘representative’ film which could be constituted by this or any method is illusory; and it is equally an illusion to suppose that what the unbiased sample gives us is the normal work—as Mr. Bordwell and his colleagues, even if their critical sense did not alert them, might readily have deduced from the functions of unbiased sampling in that kind of bourgeois sociology which originated the method. The work of art which is, in the negative sense of the word, ‘conventional,’ is interesting not because it is ‘normal’ but because it represents the use of convention at its most inert and unconscious. The conclusion that this use of convention is ‘the norm’ is not a valid deduction but an unsupported, and clearly specious, value-judgment, the inconsequence of which asserts itself as soon as we admit that the concept of ‘normality’ might be used in a different way. It was ‘normally’ the case, throughout the studio period, that the Hollywood cinema produced large numbers of challenging and distinguished films and a smaller, but very considerable, number of major masterpieces along with the contents of the authors’ unbiased sample, but this ‘norm’ is so far from being

understanding of what constitutes the object of film-historical knowledge. For Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson the unbiased sample is meant to fulfil many functions and is not simply a rhetorical “gesture of scientificity”: it provides and demarcates the features and range of a stylistic norm or paradigm (e.g., the Hollywood, art, and Soviet montage cinemas), it enables the analyst to “chart the range of constructional options open to filmmakers at various historical conjunctures,” and to locate the ways in which “a film or a director’s work stands out” (as Bordwell does in his monographs on Dreyer and Ozu).¹³ Such a background is, therefore, a necessity for both isolating what is formally, thematically, and stylistically salient in film history and determining what historical significance may be ascribed to cinematic movements, directors, and individual films by the film historian and critic. The neoformalist construal of its historical object, the ordinary film, is seen to be in direct conflict with Ray’s own historical assessment of a series of popular and canonized Hollywood films because Ray wishes to demonstrate a “certain tendency” in popular American film, namely, the characteristics of a perduring and dominant American ideology. Ray’s historical survey, in other words, subsumes a formal and thematic analysis to the workings of an ideological masterplot and, moreover, makes use of box office successes to provide his films. This latter point is significant because it establishes that Ray is not, on his own grounds (see footnote 11 above), free from making his own “gesture of scientificity”—only, in this context, it is guaranteed by an inarguable economic determinant: the box office “take” on each of the films to be examined.¹⁴ What we witness in this interchange, I believe, is the unavoidable enabling presuppositions which attend and emerge at both a minor level (neoformalism’s ordinary film and Ray’s popular film)

detectable by their method, or favourable to their assumptions, that they impose a definition of the ‘normal’ which negates it—and which is intended to do so. This definition [Bordwell *et al.*’s ordinary film] is supposed to be ‘scientific,’ as that word is understood in the circles where the science of unbiased sampling is practised, but the more assiduously the authors claim that they are in the business of ascertaining an objectively verifiable standard of the ‘ordinary,’ the more blatantly obvious does it come to seem that the ‘ordinary film’ is *their* construction. That they should insist so loudly on the method’s ‘objectivity’ is an indication of the strength of their *parti pris*, and when we consider the banality of their findings—a banality which, in all seriousness and with righteous confidence, they attribute, not to their analysis but to its object—we very quickly discover what that *parti pris* is.” Andrew Britton, “The Philosophy of The Pigeonhole: Wisconsin Formalism and ‘The Classical Style’” *CineAction!* No. 15, Winter (1988/89) 551-52.

¹³Bordwell, “Historical...” 381, 382.

¹⁴Ray, “Introduction,” *A Certain...* 3-21.

and at a more foundational level (contending histories and historiographies). What is intriguing, however, is that whereas Bordwell and Thompson (and all formalisms) are positioned as unconscious of their commitments (illustrative of a naïve positivism which dismisses ideology), the same is never said to hold for Ray and other ideologically up-front theorists, historians, and critics. These critics are positioned as immune to the hidden operations of ideology because of their critical self-awareness and virtuosity at juggling “subject positioning,” “suture,” “the power of the gaze” and “the Oedipal trajectory” while Bordwell *et al.* are seen to be duped continually by such obvious and terribly misguided ploys as the need for evidence, the importance of asserting a distinction between comprehension and interpretation, and the methodological priority given to a film’s formal features (all seen to be marks of positivism and Ray’s classical epistemological paradigm).¹⁵ We have seen during the course of this thesis, however, that neoformalism and a historical poetics of cinema need not be positioned as theoretically naïve or ideologically unaware; Bordwell and Thompson’s concepts and procedures, while perhaps bearing a *prima facie* resemblance to classical epistemology, cannot be dismissed as positivism.¹⁶ (I would also posit that

¹⁵This situation is paralleled in the all-too-common interpretive practice of reading the mainstream Hollywood film as oblivious to its ideological significance and, conversely, reading the self-styled alternative, marginal, or oppositional film as self-conscious of its ideological workings. That is, whereas the first is often subjected to symptomatic interpretation, the latter (e.g., the feminist, gay/lesbian film) is usually submitted to implicit interpretation. “More recently, most interpretive schools have tacitly agreed to treat mainstream films symptomatically while assuming that some form of alternative cinema harbors only implicit meanings....E. Ann Kaplan suggests that although Hollywood cinema systematically represses the woman’s voice, a countercinema can ‘examine the mechanisms through which women are relegated to absence, silence, and marginality.’....the oppositional film, in laying bare the contradictions of dominant cinema, would not itself be conceived as harboring repressed meanings. If *Touch of Evil* [which makes use of Hollywood conventions] contains its contradictions in order to address a unified subject position, the structural/materialist film, according to Heath, aims to break down unity and address a spectator ‘at the limit of any fixed subjectivity, materially inconstant, dispersed in process, beyond the accommodation of reality and pleasure principles.’” Bordwell, Making... 101-102.

¹⁶To position Bordwell’s historical poetics of the cinema as an arid, ahistorical Formalism which positivistically lists the formal features of a film and refuses to turn to other cultural domains is simply mistaken. “Poetics does not put at the forefront of its activities phenomena such as the economic patterns of film distribution, the growth of the teenage audience, or the ideology of private property. The poetician may need to investigate such matters, and indeed many others, but they become relevant only in the light of more properly poetic issues. Underlying this hierarchy of significance is the assumption that, while everything in our world is connected to everything else, one can produce novel and precise knowledge only by making distinctions among core questions, peripheral questions, and irrelevant questions.” Bordwell, “Historical...” 371-372.

Bordwell must be sufficiently conscious of ideological questions given his analysis of them in MM).

The other marks of positivism that Ray also ascribes to neoformalism—the call to narrow the scope of inquiry into film phenomena preeminent among them¹⁷—reveal a similar treatment at Ray's hands and are not assessed with an eye to their nuances. Establishing a direct equivalence between Comte and Bordwell, for example, overlooks that whereas Comte, Voltaire, and the early Wittgenstein, asserted procedures—at least on Ray's account—that refused to acknowledge that there were other legitimate aspects to the phenomena under study (e.g., Voltaire's denunciation of the metaphysical) Bordwell willingly admits that neoformalism and a historical poetics of cinema cannot and will not address every important feature of or question raised by the cinema; Bordwell, that is, does not insist that his investigation is the only legitimate project.¹⁸ The extensive evidentiary base manifest in CHC is read by Ray to indicate Bordwell's “obsession with legitimization”¹⁹ rather than, as Bordwell would have it, ingredient to the argument which CHC presents.²⁰ Moreover, the citation, within that evidentiary base, of primary sources (e.g., trade journals) is to be understood as complementing the unbiased sampling of films in order to construct a historical background as free as possible from the anachronistic myopia characteristic of those who impose contemporary cinematic projects and their attendant norms on earlier periods in film history.²¹ These marks of a positivist commitment operating within neoformalism are, therefore, at almost every turn, misread so that they may bolster the power of Ray's typology.

¹⁷ “...he [Bordwell] would have us further narrow (at least temporarily) the domain of film studies, and restrict its practitioners to a single paradigm (formalism) for the sake of orderly empirical investigation and validation.” Ray, “The Bordwell...” 155.

¹⁸ “What makes this prospect [a historical poetics of cinema] attractive at this moment is that, compared to the philosophical imperialism of much contemporary theory, Formalism has fairly modest aims....Abstract as these questions are [see footnote 5 above], they do not address every important matter (e.g., issues surrounding ideology or sexual difference). But my assumption is that no single theory can answer all the questions that one may want to ask. At this point in the history of film study, we are best served by framing limited questions.” Bordwell, “Lowering...” 7.

¹⁹ Ray, “The Bordwell...” 148.

²⁰ See chapter one, footnote 46 above.

²¹ In her discussion of backgrounds, Thompson notes: “...appropriate backgrounds are not infinite in number. Because neoformalist analysis depends upon an understanding of historical context, some backgrounds will clearly be more relevant than others. For example, there has been a trend in the past decade to look at primitive

HISTORICAL POETICS: *irreconcilable differences*

The preceding overview of some of the features of the interaction between Ray and Bordwell may be, however, entirely beside the point. Ray makes it clear that Bordwell is used and the typology constructed to provide an example and to illustrate the particular features of classical as opposed to baroque knowledge.²² In fact, at this point we come back to the typology and to the binary opposition between classicism/modernism on the one hand and baroque/postmodernism on the other with the recognition that Ray's project is to interrogate each epistemic paradigm in the light of the three questions listed in footnote 22 below and not to offer counter-arguments to Bordwell's research. Moreover, the narrative which Ray constructs to respond to these questions invariably champions the paradigm of baroque or postmodern knowledge, decries the current state of post-1968 film theory as moribund, Kuhnian "normal science," and calls for the uninhibited release and development of more baroque epistemic strategies, such as tracking the associations suggested by words.²³ Ray believes that the continual reanimation or recombination of words,

(pre-1909) films against the background of modern experimental cinema. As a result, analysts sometimes ascribe some sort of radical form and ideology to these early films. Yet such a proceeding is arbitrary, since it ignores the differences in norms between the two periods. Early filmmakers were experimenting with a new medium in which norms did not exist, except as borrowed from the established arts; over the first two decades, specifically cinematic norms were themselves established. But by the time modern experimental filmmakers began working, the norms had been in existence for a long time, and the filmmakers were reacting specifically against them. Hence to equate these two types of film simply remains an intriguing game, not an historically valid method of comparison. The notion of backgrounds does not legitimate any whim of the analyst." Thompson, Breaking... 24.

²²"I will not argue with David Bordwell. Instead, I am interested in what might happen if I take a different tack and *change the subject*...using CHC not as an occasion to debate its conclusion (with which I agree) but speculate about what we think of as knowledge, how it develops and circulates among disciplines, and how it is transmitted by our pedagogy and writing....While the book obviously symptomizes the current state of film studies, it may also tell us something about classicism's effect on what many people in the humanities are now calling 'the crisis of knowledge.'...let us not argue with what BST [Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson] have accomplished. Instead, let us be grateful for the information they have given and say that, offering us a *stake*, a *share* in their enterprise, they have left us to ask these questions: Can knowledge benefit from prolonging a field's revolutionary [=baroque] moments?....If film studies must consolidate around a paradigm, is formalism the one best satisfying our needs?....Do we still need a discipline called 'Film Studies'?" Ray, "The Bordwell..." 149, 158-159, 169, 175.

²³In a passage which is akin (except for its conclusion) to Bordwell's view of the dangers of contemporary interpretive practice Ray states: "...in decrying current film scholars' mechanical, uncritical deployment of received theories and terminology, Bordwell is in fact describing an already entrenched *normal science*, an activity which, according to Feyerabend, depletes even its practitioners' vocabularies....What is the answer to this impasse at which the humanities as a whole find themselves? 'These are the days,' Walter Benjamin once wrote, in advice that applies to us, 'when no one should rely unduly on his 'competence'. Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.' In other words, while we should retain normal science, we must become

phrases, and entire vocabularies is our best hope for engendering baroque knowledge and for avoiding the pitfalls of a fixed position.²⁴ Ray's endorsement of the baroque's predisposition for concept formation via languages which challenge the "naturalized conceptions of a neutral language" (i.e., the discourse of classicism) also presupposes that postmodern discourse, in flaunting its ideological commitments, somehow avoids the numbing and static descent into petrification (which classicism's "normal science" cannot avoid). Such a desired state—the belief that unlimited word-play and concept formation together with the absolute and ongoing recognition of ideological positions can result in the escape to freedom—is, I believe, an indication of what has been called the postmodern neutrality-postulate wherein constant movement via the preserving and outworking of an ironic disposition and discourse is seen as both liberation from fixedness and freedom from commitment.²⁵ That is, if we look to determine what serves as the guarantee of knowledge for Ray's position (i.e., without which there cannot be knowledge) we find the claim that everyone, knowingly or unknowingly, is universal in their submission to an ideological masterplot (even if that masterplot calls for a continual questioning—if not abolishment—of masterplots); for Ray, Bordwell falls within the parameters established by positivism and the classicist epistemology even if Bordwell himself will not admit it. Despite a discourse that valorizes and actively promotes movement, however, Ray and others like him still occupy a position—the lauding

even more tolerant of the baroque: the *surprising*, the *strange*, even the *preposterous gag* which, as Barthes saw, blocks trivializing recuperations and may ultimately lead to new knowledge." Ray, "The Bordwell..." 161.

²⁴Ray, "The Bordwell..." 165. Also see Ray's recounting of the "Sirkian phenomenon" wherein the critical reception of a particular director demonstrates the essential characteristic of baroque/postmodern knowledge, namely, its relentless power to read and reread and read yet again. As Ray concludes his examination of Sirk's reception: "This allegorical venture forms a sub-set of postmodernism's characteristic fact: the limitless possibilities for *reading differently* that *S/Z* takes as its subject. In this situation (intensified by mass media's appropriative, disseminating power), the 'network' (*S/Z*'s word) comprising the text is subjected to continuous re-routing, to *switching* in railroad parlance. (With the early railways, appearing so often in primitive American movies, the switchman redirected the track by *pulling up and moving a stake*.)" Ray, "The Bordwell..." 173. Bordwell's analysis of the "Sirkian phenomenon" does not find the director's films to be polysemous texts but rather demonstrates the conventionality of the inferential and rhetorical moves deployed by a series of critics. Bordwell, therefore, demystifies Ray's "limitless possibilities" which, as a current commonplace, has become naturalized. See Bordwell, Making... (see index entries on page 333).

²⁵This insight is owed to a class discussion initiated by Calvin Seerveld.

of neutrality, freedom, and autonomy is cloaked in the discourse of movement and critical self-awareness.

In ascertaining Bordwell's neutrality-postulate or that which serves to found or guarantee knowledge (i.e., without which there cannot be knowledge) we have to look to his deployment of what he believes to be universal "hollow categories" and their function within neoformalist historiography, analysis of interpretive practice, film analysis, and cognitivism. The neoformalist critic utilizes principles or categories which are open-ended in that they avoid determining or prescribing one method to be applied to all films; rather, neoformalist concepts function to make salient intra- and inter-textual relations which may be determinative for the film's formal system.²⁶ Bordwell's own call for a more phenomenal film criticism that would focus on describing and explicating a film's referential and explicit meanings follows from his ongoing reference to the fact that a film provides intersubjectively discriminable data that must be accounted for by the critic regardless of ideological conviction.²⁷ Bordwell's terms of analysis in MM subject, as we have seen, a diversity of theoretical commitments to cognitive, inferential, and rhetorical structures which obtain for all of interpretive practice. Indeed, Bordwell even admits that the conclusions of his own film scholarship, despite its differences from other endeavours, may be analyzed with reference to the conventions that he isolates in his anatomy of academic film interpretation.²⁸ In each of these areas Bordwell's analyses eventually find their endpoint in positing a series of *a priori* structures

²⁶"The Formalist critic approaches any task armed only with general principles, not specific procedures. The principal categories—defamiliarization, dominant, system, function, background, foreground, *syuzhet/fabula*—are relational ones, not presupposing any particular material manifestation in the work at hand. In some films, that is, shot-by-shot relations will be less functionally significant than, say, sound-image relations. As Kristin Thompson points out in her accompanying essay, the dominants of different works will make different units and properties salient for the critic." Bordwell, "Lowering..." 13.

²⁷See Bordwell, Making... 264.

²⁸"...I have sought to lay out certain middle-level concepts which interpreters employ and show how they embody the institutional choices which critics make. I offer not a hermeneutics—a scheme for producing valid or valuable interpretations—but a poetics of interpretation. An indication of this, I think, is the extent to which criticizing this book's conclusions will entail using its own concepts. The interpreter can probe the preceding chapters for implicit meanings, expose what is repressed, project new semantic fields onto nodal passages, trace out a journey of values or an Oedipal allegory, pun on my terms, deflate my rhetorical pretensions, and so on. Like every poetics of writing, mine hands over to the reader the tools with which my own discourse can be taken to pieces." Bordwell, Making... 273.

or categories that do not privilege a particular construal or preordain a particular concept or conclusion yet without which there cannot be the production of knowledge.²⁹ It is apparent, moreover, that contrary to Ray's belief that Bordwell's alleged positivism blinds him to his own epistemic commitments,³⁰ there are indications that Bordwell is aware of his pre-theoretical commitments. The series of quotes to be found in chapter three, footnote 45, demonstrate that Bordwell accepts the basic tenets of an "anthropological Kantianism" which provides not only categories and structures but also semantic fields that have become natural to human mentation.³¹ Bordwell's continual reliance upon and development of the implications of these "hollow categories" for film phenomena reveals, I believe, his epistemic warrant for the production and distinctions central to knowledge.

The positions occupied by Ray and Bordwell, therefore, move in incommensurable directions, derived in part from incompatible epistemic commitments (which have historiographical, theoretical and critical implications)—although not in quite the way that Ray's typology would suggest. Both, in differing ways, propose an epistemology and program of film study which relies on explicitly held neutrality-postulates that leave unaccounted for the deeper, implicitly-held pre-

²⁹ Bordwell cites norms as an example of a hollow category: "With no set point of arrival, committed to no *a priori* conclusions, seeking to answer precisely posed questions with concepts that will be refined through encounter with data, neoformalism deploys 'hollow' categories. While the 'Oedipal trajectory' and 'looking equals power' carry interpretable meaning whenever they appear, other concepts mark out fundamental constructive principles that have effects but no *a priori* meanings. An instance of such a 'hollow' principle is that of norms. The neoformalist assumes that every film may be placed in relation to sets of transtextual norms. These operate at various levels of generality and possess various degrees of coherence. For instance, in most studio-made narrative films, the credits sequence characteristically occurs before the first scene, but it may also, as a lesser option, occur after a 'pre-credits sequence.' Such norms, while 'codified,' are not reducible to *codes* in the semiotic sense, since there is no fixed meaning attached to one choice rather than the other. And no particular meaning automatically proceeds from Godard's decision, in *Détective*, to salt the credits throughout the first several scenes." Bordwell, "Historical..." 381.

³⁰ See chapter one, footnote 68.

³¹ In advocating cognitivism over the psychoanalytic paradigm as a means to displace the hermeneutic imperative operative in contemporary film studies (i.e., to generate explanations rather than explications) Bordwell writes: "One can argue that a powerful theory provides explanations rather than explications. The hermeneutic bent of film studies leads to the practice of describing texts in an informal metalanguage derived from a theoretical doctrine. But a description, even a moving or pyrotechnic one, is not an explanation. By contrast, the cognitive framework has a signal advantage. *It does not tell stories.* It is not a hermeneutic grid; it cannot be allegorized. Like all theorizing it asks the Kantian question: Given certain properties of a phenomenon, what must be the conditions producing them? It then searches for causal, functional, or teleological explanations of those conditions." Bordwell, "A Case..." 17.

theoretical commitments (though the shape of the latter may be intuited from a host of factors including those aspects emphasized by Ray's typology). At the moment the irreconcilable differences presented by Ray and Bordwell can either serve to provoke the student of film to investigate further and be demanding of both approaches in his or her scholarship or, conversely, yield to an epistemological agnosticism (i.e., cinema is so overdetermined that the very notions of isolable *proximate* and *pertinent* historical agents comprise an essentialist fantasy) and its accompanying course of action, a pragmatic eclecticism (i.e., an overdetermined cinema, together with the failure of abstract, totalizing theories of film, necessitates a retreat from theory and the development of a rampant interpretation-centred perspectivalism). My present situation has furnished a plethora of classroom experiences that serve to confirm the preceding description to be, in fact, the predominating state of current film studies. Intrigued and satisfied, at the moment, with the approach and knowledge extended by those authors, critics, historians and professors who work out of the presuppositions represented in neoformalism and a historical poetics of cinema, a few of which (historiography and criticism, primarily) have been examined and analyzed in this thesis, I find Bordwell and Thompson's scholarship to open up a plurality of possible avenues of research and to constitute a refreshing reminder and example of what film studies can be.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NEOFORMALISM (articles):

- Bordwell, David. "The Idea of Montage in Soviet Art and Film." Cinema Journal 11.2 (1972): 9-17.
- . "Passion, Death and Testament: Carl Dreyer's Jesus Film." Film Comment 8.2 (1972): 59-63.
- . "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift." Screen 15.4 (1974/75): 32-46.
- . "Citizen Kane, Addendum 1975." Movies and Methods. Volume 1. Ed. Bill Nichols. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.
- . "Camera Movement and Cinematic Space." Cine-Tracts 1.2 (1977): 19-25.
- . "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice." Film Criticism 4.1 (1979): 56-64.
- . "Textual Analysis Revisited." Enclitic 7.1 (1983): 92-95.
- . "Mizoguchi and the Evolution of Film Language." Cinema and Language. Eds. Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp. Frederick: University Publications of America, Inc., 1983.
- . "Lowering the Stakes: Prospects for a Historical Poetics of Cinema." Iris 1.1 (1983): 5-18.
- . "Jump Cuts and Blind Spots." Wide Angle 6.1 (1984): 4-11.
- . "Camera Movement: the coming of sound and the classical Hollywood style." The Hollywood Film Industry: A Reader. Ed. Paul Kerr. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.
- . "Adventures in the Highlands of Theory." Screen 29.1 (1988): 72-97.
- . "A Case for Cognitivism." Iris: A Journal of Theory on Image and Sound 9 (1989): 11-40.
- . "Historical Poetics of Cinema." The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches. Ed. R. Barton Palmer. New York: AMS Press, 1989.
- . "Letter to the Editors of *Screen*." Screen 32.4 (1991): 456-457.
- . "A Cinema of Flourishes: Japanese Decorative Classicism of the Prewar Era." Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History. Eds. Arthur Nolletti, Jr., and David Desser. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

- . "Film Interpretation Revisited." Film Criticism 17.2-3 (1993): 93-119.
- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. "Linearity, Materialism and the Study of Early American Cinema." Wide Angle 5.3 (1983): 4-15.
- . "Toward a Scientific Film History?" Quarterly Review of Film Studies 10.3 (1985): 224-237.
- . "A Salt and Battery." Film Quarterly 40.2 (1986): 59-62.
- . "Salt II." Film Quarterly 40.4 (1987): 61-63.

Thompson, Kristin, and David Bordwell. "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu." Screen 17.2 (1976): 41-73.

NEOFORMALISM (books):

Bordwell, David. The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981.

- . Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- . Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. Film Art: An Introduction. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1993.

Thompson, Kristin. "Introduction." Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

- . Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

SECONDARY SOURCES (articles and books):

Abel, Richard. "Review Essay: Split Decision." Quarterly Review of Film and Video 11 (1989): 43-57.

Allen, Robert C., and Douglas Gomery. Film History: Theory and Practice. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1985.

- Arroyo, José. "Bordwell Considered: Cognitivism, Colonialism and Canadian Cinematic Culture." Cineaction 28 (1992): 72-88.
- Bal, Mieke, and Norman Bryson. "Semiotics and Art History." The Art Bulletin 73.2 (1991): 174-208.
- Bennett, Tony. Formalism and Marxism. London and New York: Methuen, 1979.
- Brik, Osip. "The So-Called Formal Method." The Futurists, the Formalists, and the Marxist Critique. Ed. Christopher Pike. London: Ink Link, Ltd., 1979.
- Britton, Andrew. "The Philosophy of The Pigeonhole: Wisconsin Formalism and 'The Classical Style'." CineAction! 15 (1988/89): 47-63.
- Browne, Nick. "The Formalist's Dreyer." October 23 (1982): 80-88.
- Brunette, Peter, and David Wills. Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Bryson, Norman. "Introduction," Calligram: Essays in the New Art History from France. Ed. Norman Bryson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Carroll, Noël. "Formalism and Critical Evaluation." The Reasons of Art. Ed. Peter McCormick. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985.
- . Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Caughey, John, ed. "Preface." Theories of Authorship: A Reader. London and New York: Routledge, 1981.
- Conio, G. "Preface." The Futurists, the Formalists, and the Marxist Critique. Ed. Christopher Pike. London: Ink Links, Ltd., 1979.
- Eagle, Herbert. Russian Formalist Film Theory. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1981.
- Eikhenbaum, Boris. "The Theory of the Formal Method." Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views. Eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978.
- . "Literary Environment." Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views. Eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978.

- . "Concerning the Question of the 'Formalists'." The Futurists, the Formalists, and the Marxist Critique. Ed. Christopher Pike. London: Ink Links, Ltd., 1979.
- Erlich, Victor. Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine. 2nd, revised ed. The Hague: Mouton & Company, 1965.
- Gledhill, Christine. "Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism," Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. 4th ed. Eds. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Gombrich, E. H. "Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art," Meditations on a Hobby-Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art. London: Phaidon, 1978.
- Gunning, Tom. Rev. of Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Analysis, by Kristin Thompson. Film Quarterly 43.3 (1990): 52-54.
- Jakobson, Roman. "What is Poetry?" quoted in Ben Brewster "From Shklovsky to Brecht: A Reply." Screen 15.2 (1974): 82-102.
- . "The Dominant." Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views. Eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978.
- Jefferson, Ann. "Russian Formalism." Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction. Eds. Ann Jefferson and David Robey. London: Batsford Academic & Educational Ltd., 1982.
- King, Barry. "The Classical Hollywood Cinema." Screen 27.6 (1986): 74-89.
- Leff, Leonard J., and Jerold L. Simmons. The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1990.
- Matejka, Ladislav. "The Formal Method and Linguistics." The Futurists, the Formalists, and the Marxist Critique. Ed. Christopher Pike. London: Ink Links, Ltd., 1979.
- Mukarovsky, Jan. "The Aesthetic Norm." Structure, Sign and Function: Selected Essays by Jan Mukarovsky. Trans. and Eds. John Burbank and Peter Steiner. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978.
- Nichols, Bill. "Form Wars: The Political Unconscious of Formalist Theory." The South Atlantic Quarterly 88.2 (1989): 487-515.
- Pike, Christopher. "Introduction." The Futurists, the Formalists, and the Marxist Critique. Ed. Christopher Pike. London: Ink Links, Ltd., 1979.

- Pipolo, Tony. "The Poetry of the Problematic." Quarterly Review of Film Studies 7.2 (1982): 157-167.
- Pirog, Gerald. Rev. of Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis, by Kristin Thompson. Slavic and East European Journal 29.2 (1985): 213-215.
- Polan, Dana. "Terminable and Interminable Analysis: Formalism and Film Theory." Quarterly Review of Film Studies 8.4 (1983): 69-77.
- Preziosi, Donald. Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Pye, Douglas. "Bordwell and Hollywood." Movie 33 (1989): 46-52.
- Ray, Robert. "The Bordwell Regime and the Stakes of Knowledge." Strategies 1 (1988): 143-181.
- . A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "The Passion of David Bordwell." Film Comment 17.6 (1981): 77-79.
- Salt, Barry. "Peppery Salt." Film Quarterly 39.2 (1985/86): 61-63.
- . "Reply to Bordwell & Thompson." Film Quarterly 40.4 (1987): 59-61.
- . "Historical Poetics." Sight & Sound 60.1 (1990/91): 69.
- Shklovsky, Victor. "Art as Technique." Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays. Eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.
- Stam, Robert, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis. New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Steiner, Peter. "Jan Mukarovsky's Structural Aesthetics." Structure, Sign and Function: Selected Essays by Jan Mukarovsky. Trans. and Eds. John Burbank and Peter Steiner. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978.
- . "Three Metaphors of Russian Formalism." Poetics Today 2.1b (1980/81): 59-116.
- Tomashevsky, Boris. "Thematics." Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays. Eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.

Tynjanov, Jurij. "On Literary Evolution." Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views. Eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978.

Tynjanov, Jurij, and Roman Jakobson. "Problems in the Study of Literature and Language." Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views. Eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978.