Brecht and the politics of self-reflexive cinema

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In a 1940s Bugs Bunny cartoon, Elmer Fudd, once again forced by destiny and by narrative to chase Bugs, fires several times at his fleeing nemesis. The bullets fail to have their desired effect. Of course, the lack of deadliness is a typical quality of Warners cartoon bullets, but this time Bugs stops and comments to the audience:

"Folks, those bullets are fake; we're saving the real ones for the boys overseas."

For me, this moment aptly demonstrates the attitudes an artwork can adopt towards the material world and the dynamics of history. [1] First, a distance from worldly reality, a distance inherent in art and which makes it art. This is a distance of codes and of constructions — a distance which, if it allows the work to be a form of knowledge, does so only in a mediated or in a nonscientific fashion. [2] The cartoon is first of all a cartoon and not something else. Second, a distance in which the work turns in on itself and speaks about its own artistic conventions and presuppositions. This is an attitude of self-reflexivity, of the text making strange its own formal devices. For example, at the moment in question, the cartoon explicitly signals its cartoonness. Finally, there is a third attitude which the cartoon brings to the foreground at this moment: a movement out of the self-enclosed world of the artwork toward a real world which the mediations of art usually leave behind. The cartoon reminds us of an activity — killing — which cartoons normally distort. These attitudes — the inherent one which makes art art and not something else, and the forced ones which appear as a conjunction of or a conflict between self-reflexivity and social awareness — form the primary concerns of this essay.

To me, the two most important signs, if we may call them that, in my title are the question mark and the word "towards." For a skepticism motivates this paper, a discontent which manifests itself as a set of tentative forays into an overcharted region. To raise the question of the politics — intrinsic or otherwise — of self-reflexive film is to re-invoke issues of central importance in the history of film theory, if not art theory in general. How does film relate to a reality? To an audience? What is form? What is content? How are they political? If they are not political, how can they be made so? Here I don't pretend to be able to answer such awesome questions but merely to propose some movements towards their investigation, movements towards a politics of self-reflexive film.

In their recent manifestation, debates on these issues have generally come to revolve around a single object of inquiry: viewing. What does it mean to view a film? What happens ideologically when we view a world on a screen before us. At first glance, the activity of viewing may seem to be simple, both in its workings and in its ability to be understood. Yet the surface simplicity obscures a deeper intricacy. In Reading Capital, French philosopher Louis Althusser suggests that the great achievement of the modern age — an achievement which describes that
"discovery and training in the meaning of the 'simplest' acts of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading..."

Freud, he suggests, pinpointed the dimensions of speaking, Marx those of reading. Similarly, recent criticism of the visual arts — such as that criticism of painting by Pierre Francastel and John Berger or of film by recent writers in *Screen* — he is attempting, I would suggest, to understand ways of seeing.

Indeed, recent film theory's "critique of illusionism" derives from the same theoretical impulse as the critique of empiricism put forward by Althusser and others. To these theorists, empiricism or illusionism depends upon a conception of the subject-object duality as easily bridged. [3] The world manifests truth, and all one has to do is contemplate the world or its identical embodiment in human activity — texts — to gain insights into that meaning.

Clearly, André Bazin epitomizes the film version of this optimistic theory of the possibilities of meaning. With such notions as the close-up as window to the soul, as the destructiveness of conscious artistic intervention, and film as the revelation of the spiritual life (*vie interieure*) of the world, Bazin becomes the target for many, if not most, newer theories which see film as a production of meaning, as a site of work in the viewer's consciousness.

Narrative, and its ostensible canonization in Hollywood, also becomes a target. In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes clearly sees the hermeneutic and the proaletic codes (the codes of suspense and of the logic of actions, respectively) as the most determined and determining codes of fiction. Similarly, Noel Burch in an interview in *Women and Film* (No. 5/6) declares linearity — i.e., narrative — to be an inherent code of what he calls the "dominant cinema." Against narrative and against transparency, critics and artists suggest a whole range of deconstructive devices. Many of these strategies are based on a notion of work. Empiricism, it is claimed, invites passivity; all one has to do is contemplate and texts will deliver up their meaning. Subjects — be they viewing subjects, reading subjects, or historical subjects — will unite automatically with objects and with the knowledge of objects. To counter the encouragement of passivity, many recent critics push for a difficult art, an art that forces its audience into an active interpretive response. The problem of passivity further provides the impetus for a rediscovery of Brecht, who, for recent critics, has become the master of deconstruction, the champion of formal subversion. Burch, for example in *Theory of Film Practice*, adopts Brecht's theory but only after declaring it necessary to eliminate Brecht's concern for content. A new Brecht — Brecht the formalist — arises.

But there is also, and foremost, Brecht the realist. And it is this Brecht who will provide my perspective here. I believe that radical aesthetics — including film aesthetics — is falling prey to the rise of a new ahistorical formalism. This formalism is present in attacks on particular types of cinema practice and cinema structure — the practices, as I have mentioned, of narrative and of representation.

But more recently, with the French and British rediscovery of Freud through Jacques Lacan, the attack on representation has become even more pronounced. Whereas formerly a certain type of film practice which was alone in effecting a particular audience response (namely, passivity) was singled out for attack, now the very practice of representation undergoes criticism as being ideologically reactionary. In this view, the very structure of film viewing — audiences sitting before a screen and watching from a particular viewpoint (or perspective) — contributes to the constitution of the subject as a viewing subject — that is, a subject safely elevated by self-confidence to a privileged, unchallenged position vis-à-vis the screen world. Thus in an article on television in a recent issue of *Screen* (Summer, 1977), Gillian Skirrow...
Stephen Heath go so far as to declare that "there is a generality of ideological position." Certainly, the recent critics often differ as to the sorts of films which contribute most to this non-challenge to the supposed passivity of viewing. But at its limit, this psychological model suggests that the very (f)act of seeing a film, regardless of the film story, turns spectators into non-acting subjects. In his essay on "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," (Screen, Summer, 1974), Roland Barthes banishes content from art and declares that

"representation is not defined directly by imitation: even if one gets rid of notions of the 'real,' of the 'vraisemblable,' of the copy, there will still be representation for so long as a subject casts his gaze towards a horizon on which he cuts out an apex…"

Barthes is thereby able to declare that Brecht and Eisenstein are pre-political artists since they don’t break out of a presentational model. Jean-Pierre Oudart's examination of the influence of classical perspective on film and Jean Louis Baudry's description of the ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus also move in the same direction. [4] This rejection of representation suggests not only a subversion from within but also from without. Critics and artists push for new artistic experiences which will call the traditional boundaries of the arts into question. But the overriding question remains: Is this sort of aesthetic undermining the political?

In part, an answer depends on what we mean by political. To give a definition obviously open to disagreement, I would suggest that the political concerns itself with analyzing and then proposing answers to the contradictions of a particular historical situation. Obviously, the recent formalistic critics might contend that the formal innovations of works which challenge viewing experiences serve as such an investigation of historical contradictions. For example, in the 1972 postscript to Signs and Meaning in the Cinema Peter Wollen declares that a new art would cause the spectator to

"produce fissures and gaps in the space of his own consciousness (fissures and gaps which exist in reality but which are repressed by an ideology, characteristic of bourgeois society, which insists on the 'wholeness' and integrity of each individual consciousness)" (p. 162, my emphasis).

Wollen partially covers his own tracks by declaring that such a repression is characteristic of and not intrinsic to bourgeois society, but that disclaimer is itself uncharacteristic of the radical formalist approach where a rigid either/or divides the progressive from the reactionary. The new aesthetic, if I may reductively sum it up, bases itself on a belief that texts repress, that they lead to a domination of their subjects by placing those subjects in a particular position, physically, formally, perhaps ideologically. A text, in this sense, is an ensemble of codes which rationalize a particular way of relating to the world. And they make this rationalization attractive by not interfering with the fetishistic or voyeuristic perspective of the viewing subject. In his essay, "The Politics of Separation" (Screen, Winter 75/76), Colin McCabe goes so far as to call this seduction "the bribe of identity," thereby situating textual persuasion in the realm of crime.

It seems to be though that his sort of position leaves a lot of points unanswered or at least ambiguous. Before we can examine the validity of certain subversive strategies as answers, we need to make sure that the problem has been correctly understood. We need to examine the notion of textual domination.

Such a notion, especially as a critique of representation, rests upon a great number of assumptions. I would like to concentrate on two of these: that texts confirm the world and blind us to contradictions, and
that submission to a text means submission to its ideology. The belief in
a bribe of identity sees the texts as a complicity of codes, a rhetoric
which hides its own rhetorical nature. Thus, critics like McCabe see the
text as a force of domination over spectators. However, we need to
rigorously investigate such an argument. What does domination, in
terms of a work of art, mean?

All texts dominate. Without a degree of code-sharing between art
makers and art receivers, the artwork becomes a noise. To alter
McCabe's economic metaphor (which he obviously does not mean as a
metaphor), texts aren't bribes; they are contracts in which spectators or
readers willingly agree to relate to codes in a certain way and, I would
contend, with knowledge usually of the workings of many of these
codes. The signs of the contract appear throughout the texts; they may
become familiar to us but precisely because they are signs, we have to
learn them to be able to read or to view. And yet submission to a
contractual promise is only one side of the working of a text. Information
theory emphasizes not only that information ceases without a common
code but also that it ceases if a transgression of codes does not appear,
a transgression actually inherent in the system and which expands it.

Art, all art, bases itself not just on confirmation but also on contradiction.
Literary critic Frank Kermode has alternatively described this interplay
as one between credulity and skepticism (in The Sense of an Ending) or
between recognition and deception ("Novels: Recognition and
Deception," Critical Inquiry, No. 1). To a large extent, what we refer to as
self-reflexivity represents one more strategy in the interplay of a
technique intrinsic to and actually defining the process of art One sort of
pleasure comes from precisely this interplay of credulity and skepticism
(which may explain why detective fiction — which in many ways ideally
embodies many of the workings of the code of suspense — is so
popular). Self-reflexive art appeals in part because it heightens this
intrinsic interplay.

If we survey the development of the literary and dramatic arts, we
continually come across examples of art which signal awareness of
their own artifice. Literary critics often point to Laurence Sterne's 18th
Century novel Tristram Shandy as a special highpoint of conscious
artistic artifice; in a revealing comment, Russian Formalist critic Viktor
Shklovsky called it "the most typical novel in world literature." Yet in the
same literary period, Henry Fielding's Tom Jones goes as far as Sterne's
book in uncovering the codes which a reading of literature depends
upon. Fielding, for example, explicitly invokes the model of a contract by
comparing the novel to a meal where there is a certain interplay
between the fixed order of courses and the changing identities of the
foods within that order. But the difference between Tristram Shandy and
Tom Jones is one of degree, not a break. Similarly, both texts are no
more than a logical culmination of a tendency and a characteristic of art.
But the recent formal aesthetic has little awareness of degrees. Roland
Barthes, for example, has declared that modernism was not really a
possibility for art until 1850; he thereby ignores the fact that every
artistic period is an interplay between tradition and artistic revolution. We
need to examine different types and degrees of artifice and relate them
both to the history of their production and of their reception.

Standard humanist literary and art criticism has long been able to
accommodate transgressions of the rules. The usual schema is to see
such transgressions as necessary to a progress that otherwise would
stultify. Obviously this accommodation could be considered an instance
of coopting but only that which can be coopted can be coopted. Critics
have long been able to situate modernism in a non-revolutionary
aesthetic. One could cite many examples of this accommodation.
Recently two books of literary criticism (Robert Alter's Partial Magic and
Albert Guerard's The Triumph of the Novel) have celebrated what both
authors call "the Great Other Tradition," thereby expanding the
establishment, the canon, the Great Books of the Western World,
beyond the limits proscribed by F.R. Leavis. [5] Both critics (and there
are many others) turn aesthetic disturbances into positive, humanist values. To be more precise, they recognize literary, formal innovation for what it is: a non-threatening, typical component of art. Guerard, for example, refers to the novel's powers of "illuminating and imaginative distortion": literature can introduce an imbalance for the precise purpose of establishing a higher balance. Today's revolution is tomorrow's handservant of the established order. In its literal sense, the term avant-garde suggests nothing more than an advance force, a forward branch of the establishment.

The Russian Formalist Viktor Shlovsky argued for art as ostranenie: a making strange of the world. And indeed if art confirms, it also makes strange the normal order of things. Suspension of belief accompanies suspension of disbelief. But recent criticism would like to obscure this condition. Hollywood has been declared a paradigm of a fundamental lack of irony, of a celebration of art as transparency. The heritage of recent film critics from literary critical models with their high art/popular art distinction is obvious. Recent radical literary criticism has committed historical and theoretical errors by adhering to a conception of the novel based on 19th century forms. In fact, the 19th century novel is only one type of literature — and one that is itself not without its ironies and formal subversions. Similarly, there is no one type of Hollywood film; indeed, very few actual Hollywood productions would fit the abstract category of transparency which recent criticism has instituted as the Hollywood paradigm.

With the new formalistic critics a particular conception of Hollywood cinema is made to monolithically serve as the type of all classical films. A few exceptions crop up: the nonconformist auteurs like Nick Ray or Sam Fuller. But Hollywood itself is defined as conformist, as the ultimate briber, the ultimate concealer of codes.

All art is distanced. This is as true of Hollywood as of Laurence Sterne or Aristophanes. We learn to read through this distance from material reality, but we also learn to want new distances. Hollywood not only presents unreality as reality; it also openly acknowledges its unreality. In his book America in the Movies, Michael Wood even suggests that unreality can become formulaic. Campiness is not only a subgenre of films but a tendency of most if not all Hollywood films, and Wood suggests that this distance represents one cause of Hollywood's appeal. As he exclaims, Hollywood is "the only place in the world where anyone says, 'Santa Maria, it had slipped my mind.'"

For example, the Hollywood cartoon — a staple of Hollywood production — embodies many of the formal techniques claimed to be deconstructive. And yet, if any political concern can be attributed to these cartoons, that is so only in the etymological sense of political: that which deals with the polis, with the universal relations of people to each other and to the world. To modify my initial comments, films demonstrate not three attitudes but two. Films differ significantly not so much in their degrees of formal complexity as in their political attitude, their sense of the changing and changeable nature of the world. I would suggest that what I initially described as a separate category of attitude — namely, conscious and deliberate self-reflexivity — may be nothing other than an expansion and making manifest of inherent qualities of art.

This difference of attitude — between textual artifice (forced or not) and social attitude — is the difference between art and political art. Let's take a closer look at a Hollywood cartoon for an example. DUCK AMUCK (1953) is a virtual culmination of the experimental possibilities of the Hollywood cartoon. [6] The subject of the cartoon is the nature of animation technique itself. In DUCK AMUCK, Daffy Duck undergoes victimization at the hand of his animator, ultimately revealed to be none other than Bugs Bunny. Bugs tortures Daffy by playing with such film coordinates as framing, background, sound, and color. In an article on DUCK AMUCK in Film Comment, Richard Thompson rightly notes that the film manifests a high degree of emphasized formal complexity:
"The film is extremely conscious of itself as an act of cinema, as is much of Jones’ work. DUCK AMUCK is a good example of Noel Burch’s dialectic idea of film elements: foreground and background, space and action, character and environment, image and soundtrack are all in conflict with one another…"

Yet Burch’s dialectic idea, as he himself notes, is far from political and so is DUCK AMUCK. If DUCK AMUCK is a metaphor for the confusions of life (as Thompson suggests), it is a disengaged metaphor at best, for it fails to examine confusion through a politicized perspective. Indeed, the source of Daffy Duck's angst reveals itself to be none of the agents of social domination in the real world, but merely Bugs Bunny — another fictive character, whose power is tautological in origin. The film opens up a formal space and not a political one in viewer consciousness. DUCK AMUCK closes in on itself, fiction leads to and springs from fiction, the text becomes a loop which effaces social analysis. This is the project of all nonpolitical art, realist or modernist.

We may approach this issue from another direction if we examine those theories that deal with classical or traditional art's supposed function vis-à-vis the daily workings of the material world. The recent critics contend, as the earlier quote from Peter Wollen suggests, that bourgeois art works to instill a complacency in the viewer, a complacency both about the art object itself and about the world outside of art. But there is nothing necessarily consoling or optimistic about conventional art. Similarly, bourgeois life is not necessarily one of complacency and isolation from an awareness of contradiction. It depends on what kind of contradiction we’re talking about. That our day-to-day expectations can be thwarted is a normal and accepted possibility of everyday life. The conventional work of art does not banish contradiction; rather, it works by divorcing contradiction from it social causes. Bourgeois existence is often little more than a continual succession of disappointments, of subversions, all of which fissure our self unity and social unity as acting subjects. Art doesn't deny this malaise; it merely hides and denies its bases in historical forces. This is why contemporary culture can accommodate formally subversive art.

As long as such an art does not connect its formal subversion to an analysis of social situations, such art becomes little more than a further example of the disturbances that go on as we live through a day. And a work of art which defeats formal expectations does not lead to protest against a culture that deals continually in the defeating of expectations. This, I would suggest, explains much of the appeal of MARY HARTMAN, MARY HARTMAN. It may also help to explain the morbid underside of fan fascination with Hollywood — an underside of scandal magazines and, ultimately, of the elevation of such trashy books as Kenneth Anger’s Hollywood Babylon into coffee table respectability. We are used to having our realities deconstructed and so too it does not bother us to see the reality of the movie screen world deconstructed. In an article on MARY HARTMAN, MARY HARTMAN in Socialist Revolution (No. 30), Barbara Ehrenreich suggests that the TV series represents the triumph of contradiction: a show which attacks the consumer world is sponsored to sell the very sort of products its content disdains. And it succeeds. Ehrenreich presents this plenitude of contradictions as a stumbling block to socialist theories of popular culture. If it were merely a question of art inspiring blind optimism, criticism would be easy. Shows like MARY HARTMAN, MARY HARTMAN have made pessimism, discontent, and irony marketable. We need to deal with this realm of contradiction which obscures political contradiction.

And here we return to Brecht. Brecht also sees a distance between art and political art. Art automatically embodies a distancing, a making strange. But there’s nothing yet political about that. To be political, art has to be made so. In his essay, "The Modern Theatre Is the Epic Theatre," Brecht uses the example of opera to present his conception of
art as possessing intrinsic qualities of distance from reality to which the artist can add a sense of political engagement. As is well known, Brecht's theory of art reception emphasizes conscious knowledge over intuition. So does his theory of art creation. Like his teacher, Erwin Piscator, Brecht sees art as filling a programmed function. This implies conscious attention to form and to content.

This emphasis on conscious intention probably most separates Brecht from the Hungarian Marxist critic Georg Lukács. Lukács' approach to literary creation seems to fall quite often into an intuitionist theory of creation:

"Lasting typologies based on a perspective of this sort [i.e., based on the "selection of the essential and the subtraction of the inessential"] owe their effectiveness not to the artist's understanding of day-to-day events but to his unconscious possession of a perspective independent of and reaching beyond his understanding of the contemporary scene" (Realism in Our Time, my emphasis).

This belief on Lukács' part in unconscious awareness leads Brecht to call him a formalist, for it is precisely a belief like Lukács' that the 19th Century masters had the answers and that these answers are still relevant to the 20th Century which signals a refusal to situate literary production within the actual workings of history.

In fact, Brecht's aesthetic suggests that we need to expand and clarify the notion of realism. Significantly, Brecht referred to his own artistic project as a realism. Realism is no more (and no less) than a type of attitude to the world and to art. Realism is not a natural quality; it is a social quality. Brecht's theory most significantly distinguishes between realism — which he saw as the overriding impulse of his art — and unrealism, the setting up of false or limited or reified attitudes toward the world and worldly possibilities. In "Against Gyorg Lukács," he defines realism as

"discovering the causal complexes of society/unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who rule it."

Realism, thus, is a form of knowledge, a picturing of reality. To judge the efficacy of a particular realism,

"one must compare the depiction of life in a work with the life that is being depicted."

Like the Lacanian theories of the subject which recent critics draw upon, Brecht's theory depends on a notion of positioning, of the subject's place in the circuit of communication. But Brecht diverges from these critics in an essential way. For Brecht the attitudinal position of the viewing subject springs from an attitudinal position in the work — the political artwork embodies a difference between the way things are and the way they can be. Brecht's formal experimentation depends on content in two ways. First, form must change to reflect changing realities; otherwise, the formalism of a Lukács may result. Second, Brecht's political theatre is a theatre of possibility — a theatre showing that life doesn't only have to take on the forms it generally does. Political art compares an image of human beings as "unalterable" to one of them as "alterable and able to alter" (quoted from "The Modern Theatre Is the Epic Theatre"). As such, the new theatre shows that formal arrangements of life can change. We can do things we never thought possible. But the partial grounding in Brecht of groups like the Living Theatre — groups which disconnect the potentials of activism from its social(ist) responsibility — suggests that qualifications need to be placed on the sorts of possibilities that a Brechtian political art would encourage. Not all possibilities are equally valid; Brecht chooses validity on the basis of a socialist perspective. Hence, content once again makes its entrance. It is what the work says about the real world that matters. The artist must pay close attention to the world of possibility his/her work promises.
For Brecht, political art plays off a political redefinition of credulity and skepticism. To avoid the new world of possibility appearing as nothing but noise, the artwork must also make use of the old world as a standard. Meaning, and its realization in action, comes from the differences between the two world views. Political art defamiliarizes the world. But it does so by playing off our connections to that world.

This reading of Brecht has two important implications for our discussion. First of all, if the political text invites production from the spectator, this production is a source of pleasure. Obviously, Brecht sees the theatre as a site of learning, but that learning — that accession to knowledge — brings and is immersed in pleasure. The spectator finds joy in comparing a worldview which he or she now realizes is a strangling one to a worldview of possibilities. Pleasure comes from knowing the world can be remade. Pleasure, as Brecht says in Note 2 of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" is "the noblest function that we have found for the 'theatre.'" Or as he says later in the Organum, the audience

"must be entertained with the wisdom that comes from the solution of problems, with the anger that is a practical expression of sympathy with the underdog, with the respect due to those who respect humanity… in short, with whatever delights those who are producing something" (my emphasis).

Second, insofar as Brecht's political art includes the presence of the familiar world and yet presents a more attractive world, Brechtian art is an art of identification. In examining Brecht's theories, critics have too often declared that the theories allow no place for identification. In fact, Brecht's theory of art embodies two identifications: one empathetic and unquestioning — the one connected to the reified vision of the world — and a critical one — a new perspective of knowledge from which the old way is scrutinized. In his essay on "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," Brecht is emphatic about the need for identification in political theatre:

"The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on."

We need to carefully examine questions of art's relation to an audience and to the production of pleasure. Pleasure and the importance of artistic popularity come under attack in much of the new radical criticism. I would suggest that we are witnessing the rise of a break or gap between criticism and popular reception. This has several causes, among them the growth of a new, difficult art which demands strenuous audience participation. Recent criticism's emphasis on theory rather than practice (as in Althusser's elevation of philosophizing into a sort of practice), and the resulting romanticism of the intellectual, also contributes to this new esthete-ism. Aesthetic theory seems to be falling prey to a new elitism in which a select group of critics claim for themselves an exclusive knowledge of the workings of literary production. In his review of Charles Grivel's Production de l'intérêt romanesque (in Diacritics 6:1), Jean Alter calls this new totalitarian approach "terrorist semiotics," and he pinpoints many of its strategies of clique inclusion and popular exclusion: a scientistic mode of writing, neologisms, haughtiness, and an obscure range of references. Obviously a similar charge is being argued out in what we might call "the Screen resignation debate," where several editors resigned from Screen because of its intellectual elitism and subsequent disdain for the day-to-day needs of Screen Education.

Paradoxically, although the new critics situate themselves in opposition to humanist criticism, they invoke a division of taste parallel to the high culture/ mass culture distinction so beloved in humanist criticism. From Ortega y Gasset's dehumanization of art to Susan Sontag's erotics of art to Roland Barthes' distinction between pleasure and bliss, there is little change in the elitism of the critical endeavor. Recent critics see
themselves as possessing a heightened approach to literary appreciation (an approach which Barthes and others refer to as the “freeing of the signifier”) while mass audiences supposedly stumble along in realist naiveté. At worst, this approach refuses history. It regards a certain popular sort of viewing practice as debased, quotidian, and so it dismisses that practice, refusing to examine its social dimensions: how texts have been received, how they have mattered. When, for example, Peter Wollen suggests in "Semiotics and Citizen Kane" that “it is now possible to read there in the film an entirely different film, one which Welles probably never intended," I believe that Wollen blurs the more important issue: to analyze how the film has been read, to examine its influence on audiences who don’t see an entirely different KANE.

Terrorist esthetics feeds into and feeds from the precise sort of formalism which turns Brecht's theory into a theory of work, which downgrades realism, disdains identification, and condemns pleasure. In fact, we need to pay a more open attention to degrees of identification and pleasure.

At the very least, we can distinguish three possible forms of pleasure in a work of art. There is the pleasure of familiarity. This is the pleasure of uncritical, reified realism. Then there is pleasure which comes from art's dehumanization or from forced self-reflexivity. This is the pleasure of art as form, as aesthetic emotion, as Kant suggested. This is a pleasure which, as Barthes contends in The Pleasure of the Text derives its force by shying away from history, by trying to be outside ideology (although such an attempt is itself ideological). Then there is the pleasure elaborated by Brecht, the pleasure of an art which finally realizes the dream of the Roman poet Horace in his Ars Poetica (to which Brecht continually refers): to please and instruct. To please through instruction. To instruct through pleasure. An art whose content is a combination of the world and a better version of the world.

We also need to examine instances of defamiliarization in popular art, in a valuable article on audience response in Jump Cut, No. 4, Chuck Kleinhans distinguishes between self-reflexive and self-critical films, the latter being films which directly examine both their form and their content. If, as I have claimed, all films embody a self-reflexivity, then we need to go on to examine differing uses and degrees of self-criticism. Of course, such self-criticism is not necessarily in itself political. We need to go back to Brecht's notion of conscious political criticism, but we also need to be more receptive to the possibility that such a critical mode may be operative in films of the so-called “dominant cinema." This whole realm of investigation seems a promising one. But only if we can get beyond the dismissive attitude currently in fashion and move toward a knowledge important not only because it is knowledge but also because it matters.

Notes

1. I originally presented this paper at a panel on self-reflexive films at the annual conference of the Society for Cinema Studies in March, 1977. I have modified it somewhat for publication.

2. Coming from Kant who saw practical reason and imagination as distinct regions of the human mind, 19th Century Romanticism tended to privilege the artwork as a special and superior activity of the creative portion of the intellect. In contrast, a politically aware criticism places an emphasis on seeing artworks as results of practical human activity rather than a transcendent creative talent above and beyond social responsibility. Thus, the use of terms like code and text to refer to aspects of an artwork has a deliberate and polemical intent behind it. Such usage stresses that artworks are constructions, that they are objects produced by people and for people in particular social situations.

The text is the configuration of elements in a single work of art. Unlike Romanticism's theory of Organicism which treats the artwork as a
unified (organic) whole, the notion of the text concentrates on the individual elements and how they go together. For example, Cahiers du cinéma's famous analysis of YOUNG MR. LINCOLN extracts two elements from the text — its attitudes toward sexuality and politics — to examine how the film's ostensible unity actually conceals a set of divergent and even contradictory impulses.

"Codes are rules of communication whose application appears from text to text. Effective communication can only occur when senders and receivers share knowledge of the codes. The notion of the code is important in the examination of artistic media since it raises questions about the very extent to which we can consider an artistic text as an act of communication, and about the extent to which convention and rules govern the traditions and transgressions in art production and reception." (32)

3. The subject-object distinction has been one of the central concerns of philosophy throughout its history. The distinction concerns human beings (conscious subjects) and the possible ways in which they can come to know about and perhaps understand the world around them. Marx, for example, suggests that people can best live in the world not as passive observers but as active participants. Those film critics who attack film illusionism and its notion of film as a window on the world generally direct their attack against two targets. First, they criticize the passivity which illusionist film seems to force spectators into. Second, they attack the impression which illusionist film seems to convey of a world which one can understand simply by viewing it.

4. Oudart and Baudry are two French critics who argue that the very technology of filmmaking — for example, the lens used — reproduces the ideological perspective of Western civilization. A useful introduction to this argument is Baudry's essay "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Film Quarterly, 28:2 (Winter 1974-1975).

5. In his study of English literature, The Great Tradition, moralist literary critic F.R. Leavis declared that the privilege of being part of the great tradition belonged exclusively to Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. Thus he excluded writers ranging from Dickens whom he felt was too popular in appeal to James Joyce whose experiments he believed represented a "dead end." Many of the literary scholars who have criticized Leavis have done so simply to argue for the writers he leaves out rather than to question the very notion of a great tradition no matter who its members might be.

6. The screenplay for DUCK AMUCK has appeared in Richard Thompson's article on the film in Film Comment, 11, No. 1 (January-February, 1975), pp. 42-3.

7. Brecht's qualification here is an important one. In suggesting the need to awaken people to new life possibilities, so many works of art fail to distinguish adequately between valid and invalid experiences, and so they promote an art which holds valuable aspects of human life in contempt. For example, the cult of cruelty in art often glorifies the violation of the human body. The ostensible suggestion is that this opens up new artistic experiences: violence is a source of heightened aesthetic pleasure. That such art (which ranges from A CLOCKWORK ORANGE to The Story of Oto "punk rock") often singles out women as the target of violence suggests one (and only one) of the dangers of such an approach. For only one example (there are many!) of this defense of violence as a source of higher consciousness, see Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination," Styles of Radical Will (New York: Delta Books, 1969). Sontag calls for an "erotics of art;" given the fascism this can lead to, Brecht would not have favored such an art.
Self-consciousness is a narration's acknowledgement that a story is being presented to the viewer, if the viewer is reminded that they are watching a film then the narration of the film becomes self-conscious. However if the film while making the viewer conscious that they are viewing also comments on its own subject matter then the film's narration is being self-reflexive. An example of self-conscious narration is the use of titles on screen such as in the film *Pulp Fiction* when we see ‘nine minutes and thirty seven seconds later’ on the screen. An example of self-reflexive narration can be seen in the film *Husbands and Wives* when the character Gabe Roth is watching a documentary on TV as the film begins. Brecht's contributions to theatre and the arts have been well documented in the.* One can trace the advent of Brechtian scholarship as a conscious, self-reflexive academic discipline to a seminar held at the 1968 meeting of the Modern Language Association. That year the world's leading Brecht scholars met to discuss the current state of Brecht research. The main focus of that meeting was on the published works of Brecht.
Brecht and Angelopoulos. The question of the Brechtian quality of Angelopoulos’s political period might initially appear outdated and obsolete given that a number of scholars have already acknowledged Brecht’s influence, predominantly in the filmmaker’s historical tetralogy. Contra these semantic discussions of Brecht’s position in Angelopoulos’s early work, David Bordwell has succinctly identified some key Brechtian elements in the Greek auteur’s films without necessarily using Brecht as a point of reference. Recommend this book. Email your librarian or administrator to recommend adding this book to your organisation’s collection. The Cinema of Theo Angelopoulos. Edited by Angelos Koutsourakis, Mark Steven. Online ISBN: 9780748697960. self-consciousness that characterizes contemporary society o A way for authors to Â 24 Bertolt Brecht Meets Buster Keaton: Comic Entrances and Critical Distantiation © Bertolt Brecht, â€œThe Popular and the Realisticâ€ [handout â€œ attached to syllabus] © Robert Stam, â€œReflexivity and Animation,â€ in Reflexivity in Film and Literature, 94-97. © Dana Polan, â€œBrecht and the Politics of Self-Reflexive Cinemaâ€ [http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinesays/ JC17folder/BrechtPolan.html] [RamCT link] Screening: Sherlock Jr. (Buster Keaton, 1924) â€“ portions Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929) â€“ 68 min.Â on Self-Reflexivity and Metafiction Screening: Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story (Michael Winterbottom, 2005) â€“ 94 min. The Politics of Representation. in Breakfast at Tiffany’s. Lulee Aberra Master’s Thesis English Philology Department of Modern Languages University of Helsinki. It is precisely this aspect of the work which made me want to write my thesis on this topic; its controversial story world â€“ and the world of difference between it and that of Edwards’ classic romantic comedy. The changes in Holly’s characterization in the adaptation process were calculated and defined by various factors: namely a shift in genre, commercial reasons, and the film industry’s concern with morality.