

**Film, Politics, and Ideology:
Reflections on Hollywood Film in the Age of Reagan***
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In our book Camera Politica: Politics and Ideology in Contemporary Hollywood Film (1988), Michael Ryan and I argue that Hollywood film from the 1960s to the present was closely connected with the political movements and struggles of the epoch. Our narrative maps the rise and decline of 60s radicalism; the failure of liberalism and rise of the New Right in the 1970s; and the triumph and hegemony of the Right in the 1980s. In our interpretation, many 1960s films transcoded the discourses of the anti-war, New Left student movements, as well as the feminist, black power, sexual liberationist, and countercultural movements, producing a new type of socially critical Hollywood film. Films, on this reading, transcode, that is to say, translate, representations, discourses, and myths of everyday life into specifically cinematic terms, as when Easy Rider translates and organizes the images, practices, and discourses of the 1960s counterculture into a cinematic text. Popular films intervene in the political struggles of the day, as when 1960s films advanced the agenda of the New Left and the counterculture. Films of the "New Hollywood," however, such as Bonnie and Clyde, Medium Cool, Easy Rider, etc., were contested by a resurgence of rightwing films during the same era (e.g. Dirty Harry, The French Connection, and any number of John Wayne films), leading us to conclude that Hollywood film, like U.S. society, should be seen as a contested terrain and that films can be interpreted as a struggle of representation over how to construct a social world and everyday life.

In our readings of 1970s films, we detected intense battles between liberals and conservatives throughout the decade in mainstream Hollywood, with more radical voices -- of the sort that occasionally were heard in the late 1960s and early 1970s -- becoming increasingly marginalized. As the decade progressed, conservative films were becoming more popular (e.g. Rocky, Star Wars, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Superman et al) indicating that conservative sentiments were growing in the public and that Hollywood was nurturing these political currents. Indeed, we argued that even liberal films ultimately helped advance the conservative cause. A cycle of liberal political conspiracy films (e.g. The Parallax View, All the President's Men, The Domino Principle, Winter Kills, and so on) villified the state and thus played into the conservative/Reaganite argument that government was the source of much existing evil. Other films that took a perspective sympathetic to the working class and critical of business (Blue Collar, F.I.S.T., et tutti quanti), blaming corrupt unions for the working class' problems, while liberal films dealing with race (Claudine, A Piece of the Action, and the like) attacked welfare institutions and celebrated individual initiative and self-help -- precisely the Reaganite position. And even the most socially critical films (such as the Jane Fonda films, Network and other Sidney Lumet films, and others) posited individual solutions to social problems, thus also reinforcing the conservative appeal to individualism and attack on statism. Consequently, we argued that reading Hollywood films of the decade politically allowed one to anticipate the coming of Reagan and the New Right to power by demonstrating that conservative yearnings were ever more popular within the culture and that film and popular culture were helping

to form an ideological matrix more hospitable to Reagan and conservatives than to embattled liberals.

Building on this work, I discuss in this paper some theoretical perspectives on ideology and radical cultural criticism which I'll illustrate with some examples drawn from Hollywood film in the Age of Reagan. In these remarks, I'll specify some problems with the classical Marxian conceptions of ideology and ideology critique, and will propose some perspectives that will help contemporary criticism overcome these limitations. Here, I shall draw on critical work done over the last decade and will focus my comments on the need to develop methods to read films politically. I therefore presuppose that Hollywood films are deeply political (the demonstration thereof is Camera Politica which surveys twenty years of Hollywood cinema) and that ideology critique provides a powerful perspective on Hollywood film, though, ultimately, I argue for a multiperspectival cultural theory.

Ideology and Film: Critical Methods

Within the Marxian tradition, Marx and Engels initially characterized ideology as the ideas of the ruling class. The concept of ideology set out by in The German Ideology (Marx-Engels 1975, pp. 59ff.) was primarily denunciatory, and attacked ideas that legitimated ruling class hegemony, which disguised particular interests as general ones, which mystified or covered over class rule, and which thus served the interests of class domination. In this view, ideology critique consisted of the analysis and demystification of ruling class ideas, and the critic of ideology was to ferret out and attack all those ideas which furthered class domination. This tradition of ideology critique -- which has continued within the Marxist-Leninist tradition and other neo-Marxian circles as well -- assumes that there is a dominant ideology which is the ideology of the ruling class. The problems with this concept are, to begin, that it presupposes both a monolithic concept of ideology and of the ruling class which unambiguously and without contradiction articulates its class interests in ideology. Since its class interests are predominantly economic, on this model, ideology refers primarily, and in some cases solely, to those ideas that legitimate the class rule of the capitalist ruling class, and ideology is thus those sets of ideas that promote the capitalist class's economic interests.

In the last decade or so, however, this model has been contested by a variety of individuals and tendencies who have argued that such a concept of ideology is reductionist because it equates ideology merely with those ideas which serve class, or economic interests, and thus leaves out such significant phenomena as gender and race. Reducing ideology to class interests makes it appear that the only significant domination going on in society is class, or economic, domination, whereas many theorists argue that gender and race oppression are also of fundamental importance and indeed, some would argue, are intertwined in fundamental ways with class and economic oppression (see also Cox 1948, Rowbotham 1972, Robinson 1978, Marable 1982, Nicholson 1985; Spivak 1988; and Fraser 1989). Thus many people have proposed that ideology be extended to cover theories, ideas, texts, and representations that legitimate domination of women and people of color, and that thus serve the interests of ruling gender and race as well as class powers.

From this perspective, doing ideology critique involves criticizing sexist and racist ideology as well as bourgeois-capitalist class ideology. Moreover, doing ideology critique involves analyzing images, symbols, myths, and narrative as well as propositions and systems of belief (Kellner 1978, 1979,

1982). While some contemporary theories of ideology explore the complex ways that images, myths, social practices, and narratives are bound together in the production of ideology (Barthes 1956; Kellner 1980; and Jameson 1981), others restrict ideology to propositions stated discursively in texts. Against this restrictive notion, I would argue that ideology contains discourses and figures, concepts and images, theoretical positions and myths. Such an expansion of the concept of ideology obviously opens the way to the exploration of how ideology functions within popular culture and everyday life and how images and figures constitute part of the ideological representations of sex, race, and class in film and popular culture.

To carry out an ideology critique of Rambo, for instance, it wouldn't be enough simply to attack its militarist or imperialist ideology, and the ways that the militarism and imperialism of the film serves capitalist interests by legitimating intervention in such places as Southeast Asia, Central America or wherever. One would also have to criticize its sexism and racism to carry out a full ideology critique, showing how representations of women, men, the Vietnamese, the Russians, and so on are a fundamental part of the ideological text of Rambo. This requires analyzing how the dimensions of class, gender, race, and imperialist ideology intersect in the film, reproducing rightist ideologies of the period. To illustrate the need and desirability of expanding the concept of ideology critique, let us now undertake a reading of Rambo which emphasizes the ways that it transcodes a certain Reaganite ideology.

Rambo and Reagan

Rambo (1985) is but one of a whole series of return-to-Vietnam films that began with the surprising success of Uncommon Valor in 1983 and continued with the three Chuck Norris Missing in Action films of 1984-1986. All follow the same formula of representing the return to Vietnam of a team of former vets, or a superhuman, superhero vet like Rambo, to rescue a group of American soldiers "missing in action" who are still imprisoned by the Vietnamese and their evil Soviet allies.

The film Rambo synthesizes this "return to Vietnam" cycle with another cycle that shows returning vets transforming themselves from wounded and confused misfits to super warriors (i.e. Rolling Thunder, Firefox, First Blood). All of these post post-Vietnam syndrome films show the U.S. and the American warrior hero victorious this time and thus exhibit a symptom of inability to accept defeat. They also provide symbolic compensation for loss, shame, and guilt by depicting the U.S. as "good" and this time victorious, while its communist enemies are represented as the incarnation of "evil" who this time receive a well-deserved defeat. Cumulatively, the return-to-Vietnam films therefore exhibit a defensive and compensatory response to military defeat in Vietnam and, I would argue, an inability to learn the lessons of the limitations of U.S. power and the complex mixture of good and evil involved in almost all historical undertakings.

On the other hand, Rambo and the other Stallone-Norris meathead films can be read as symptoms of the victimization of the working class. Both the Stallone and Norris figures are resentful, remarkably inarticulate, brutal, and thus indicative of the way many American working class youth are educationally deprived and offered the military as the only way of affirming themselves. Rambo's neurotic resentment is less his own fault than that of those who run the social system in such a way

that it denies his class access to the institutions of articulate thought and mental health. Denied self-esteem through creative work they seek surrogate worth in metaphoric substitutes like sports (Rocky) and war (Rambo). It is symptomatic that Stallone plays both Rocky and Rambo during a time when economic recession was driving the Rockys of the world to join the military where they became Rambos for Reagan's interventionist foreign policies.

The Rocky-Rambo syndrome, however, puts on display the raw masculism which is at the bottom of conservative socialization and ideology. The only way that the Rockys and Rambos of the world can gain recognition and self-affirmation is through violent and aggressive self-display. And Rambo's pathetic demand for love at the end of the film is an indication that the society is not providing adequate structures of mutual and communal support to provide healthy structures of interpersonal relationships and ego ideals for men in the culture. Unfortunately, the Stallone films intensify this pathology precisely in their celebration of violent masculism and militarist self-assertion.

What is perhaps most curious, however, is how Rambo appropriates countercultural motifs for the right. Rambo has long hair, a head-band, eats only natural foods (whereas the bureaucrat Murdock swills Coke), is close to nature, and is hostile toward bureaucracy, the state, and technology -- precisely the position of many 60s counterculturalists. But, as Russell Berman (1985: 145) has pointed out, Rambo's real enemy is the "governmental machine, with its massive technology, unlimited regulations, and venal political motivations. Rambo is the anti-bureaucratic non-conformist opposed to the state, the new individualist activist." Thus Rambo is a supply-side hero, a figure of individual entrepreneurship, who shows how Reaganite ideology is able to assimilate earlier countercultural figures, much as fascism was able to provide a "cultural synthesis" of nationalist, primitivist, socialist, and racialist ideologies (Bloch 1933).

This analysis suggests that Reaganism should be seen as revolutionary conservatism with a strong component of radical conservative individualism and activism, and that this fits in with Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Superman, Conan and other films and television series which utilize individualist heroes who are anti-state and who are a repository of conservative values. And, as Berman points out, this constitutes a major shift in the strategies of the culture industries which celebrated conformity and a beneficent state in the 1950s and which has shifted to valorization of non-conformity and individualistic heroism in the new age of entrepreneurial glory.

A more multi-dimensional reading of the film, however, would have to bring in the dimensions of race and sex. In regard to gender, one might note that Rambo instantiates a masculist image which defines masculinity in terms of the male warrior with the features of great strength, effective use of force, and military heroism as the highest expression of life. Symptomatically, the woman characters in the film are either whores, or, in the case of a Vietnamese contra, a handmaiden to Rambo's exploits who functions primarily as a seductive and destructive force (i.e. when she seduces Vietnamese guards -- a figure also central to the image of woman in The Green Berets) -- , or when she becomes a woman warrior, a female version of Rambo. Significantly, the only (brief and chaste) moment of eroticism in Rambo comes when Rambo and his woman agent kiss after great

warrior feats, and seconds after the kiss the woman is herself shot and killed -- the moral being that the male warrior must go it alone and must thus renounce women and sexuality. This theme obviously fits into the militarist and masculist theme of the film as well as the genre of ascetic male heroes who must rise above sexual temptation in order to become maximally effective saviors or warriors.

The representations and thematics of race also contribute fundamentally to the militarist theme. The Vietnamese and Russians are presented as alien Others, as the embodiment of Evil, in a typically Hollywood manichean scenario that presents the Other, the Enemy, "Them," as the embodiment of evil, and "Us," the good guys, as the incarnation of virtue, heroism, goodness, innocence, etc. Rambo appropriates stereotypes of the evil Japanese and Germans from World War II movies in its representations of the Vietnamese and the Russians, thus continuing a manichean Hollywood tradition with past icons of evil standing in for -- from the Right's point of view -- contemporary villains. The Vietnamese are portrayed as duplicitous bandits, ineffectual dupes of the evil Soviets, and cannon fodder for Rambo's exploits while the Soviets are presented as sadistic torturers and inhuman, mechanistic bureaucrats.

And yet reflections on the construction of gender and race in the film make clear that these phenomena are socially constructed, are artificial constructs that are produced in such things as films and popular culture. The stereotypes of race and gender in Rambo are so exaggerated, so crude, that they point to the artificial and socially constructed nature of all ideals of masculinity, femininity, race, ethnicity, and other subject positions. Thus, expanding the concept of ideology to include race and sex helps provide a multidimensional ideology critique, and such expansion adds significant dimensions to radical cultural criticism while enriching the project of ideology critique.

In addition, contemporary film theory insists that to fully explicate filmic ideology and the ways that film advances specific political positions, one must also attend to cinematic form and narrative, to the ways that the cinema apparatus transcodes social discourses and reproduces ideological effects. Film ideology is transmitted through images, scenes, generic codes, and the narrative as a whole. Camera positioning and lighting help frame Sylvester Stallone as a mythic hero in Rambo; an abundance of lower camera angles present Rambo as a mythic warrior, and frequent close-ups present him as a larger-than-life human being. Focus on his glistening biceps, his sculptured body, and powerful physique presents him as a sexual icon, as a figure of virility, which promotes both female admiration for male strength and perhaps homo-erotic fascination with the male warrior.

When, by contrast, Rambo is tortured by villainous communists, the images are framed in the iconography of crucifixion shots with strong lighting on his head producing halo effects, as in medieval paintings, and the redder-than-red blood producing a hyperrealization, if I may borrow a Baudrillardian term (1983), of heroic suffering. Focus in the action shots center on his body as the instrument of mythic heroism, while the cutting creates an impression of dynamism that infuses Rambo with energy and superhuman power and vitality, just as slow motion shots and lengthy takes which center on Rambo for long stretches of action tend to deify the character.

Close-ups on the communist villains, by contrast, focus on their sneering and sadistic pleasure in torturing Rambo while the battle scenes depict the communists predominantly in long shots as insignificant and incompetent pawns in Rambo's redemptive heroism. The generic war film and "return to Vietnam" codes, combined with Rambo's triumph, present the film as a conservative imperialist/militarist fantasy which transcodes Reaganite anti-communist and pro-militarist discourses. In fact, Reagan himself stated during a frustrating period of dealing with so-called terrorists that "I've just seen Rambo and I'll know what to do the next time"; indeed, Reagan constantly employed Ramboesque solutions to the political challenges of the day, fighting secret wars all over the world and engaging in overt military actions. Thus Reagan's response to Rambo disclosed that he really believed that violence was the best way to solve conflicts, and not by accident were Oliver North and other members of Reagan's secret government referred to as "Rambos" when they engaged in their illegal and criminal covert operations.

Furthermore, the "happy ending" closure situates the film as a return to the conservative Hollywood adventure tradition, and the victory over the evil communists codes Rambo as a mythic redemption of U.S. defeat in Vietnam by heroic action -- a trope reproduced in the films of Stallone, Chuck Norris, and countless other films, pulp novels, and television shows and which was instantiated in the political actions of Ronald Reagan and Oliver North (Jewett and Lawrence 1988: 248f) Although the U.S. was denied victory in Vietnam, it has attempted to achieve it in popular culture. This phenomenon shows some of the political functions of popular culture which include providing compensations for irredeemable loss while offering reassurances that all is well in the American body politic -- reassurance denied in less conservative films such as Oliver Stone's Salvador, Platoon, Wall Street and Talk Radio which provide an instructive counter-cycle to the Stallone Rocky/Rambo cycles and which thus testify to the conflictual nature of cinematic ideology in the contemporary period.

Yet the popularity of the film Rambo and other Stallone, Chuck Norris, and other "action-adventure" vehicles suggests that the Hollywood President -- and, unfortunately, large segments of the country -- have assimilated a manichean world-view from Hollywood movies whereby "the enemy" is so evil and "we" are so good that only violence will do to eliminate threats to our well-being. Thus, Reagan's most "popular" acts were his invasion of Grenada and bombing of Libya -- precisely the sort of "action" celebrated in Rambo, Top Gun, Iron Eagle and the other militarist epics of the Reagan era.

And so it is that Hollywood film in the Age of Reagan enacts rites of mythical redemption in narratives which attempt to manage social anxieties, to soothe and alleviate the sense of shame associated with defeat, and to smooth away the rough edges of history (i.e. U.S. atrocities in Vietnam as depicted in Platoon) in a mythical scenario where the Americans incarnate goodness and innocence while the communists represent pure evil -- precisely the fantasy of Ronald Reagan in his pre-detente incarnation and precisely the mind-set of the classical Hollywood cinema in which Reagan dutifully performed. This Hollywood/Reaganite mindset returned with a vengeance during Reagan's reign and requires analysis of the contemporary political context of Hollywood film to fully capture its ideological effects.

Toward Contextual Film Criticism

In the last section, I called for an expansion of ideology criticism to include the intersection of gender, race, and class, and argued that ideology was presented in popular culture in the forms of images, figures, generic codes, myth, and the cinematic apparatus as well as in ideas or theoretical positions. Another limitation with the classical Marxian theory of ideology, sometimes referred to as the Dominant Ideology thesis (Abercrombie, et. al. 1980), is the presupposition of a rather monolithic concept of ideology as class domination. This model, however, fails to take account of competing sectors and groups within contemporary capitalist societies, and thus fails to account for conflicts and contradictions within and between these groups and thus within ideology itself. Here one needs to see how dominant class sectors advance different ideologies to serve their own interests. Such an expansion of the concept of ideology requires paying more attention to traditional liberal and conservative ideologies, as well as to the various neo-liberal, neo-conservative, and New Right variants that have been appearing in recent years.

From this perspective, film and the other domains of popular culture should be conceptualized as a contested terrain reproducing on the cultural level the fundamental conflicts within society rather than just seeing popular culture as an instrument of domination. Examination of Hollywood film from 1967 to the present (Kellner and Ryan 1988) reveals that U.S. society and culture were riven by a series of debates over the heritage of the 1960s, over gender and sexuality, over war, militarism, and interventionism, and over a great variety of other issues that have confronted American society in the last decade. On one hand, Rambo, Red Dawn, Missing in Action, Top Gun, and the like represent aggressively rightwing positions on war, militarism, and communism that serve as soft and hard core propaganda for Reaganism and a distinctly rightwing interventionist and militarist agenda. On the other hand, Missing, Under Fire, Salvador, Latino and other left or liberal films sharply contest the rightist vision of Central America and U.S. interventionism in that area by representing the U.S. and ruling bourgeois cliques as "bad guys" in generic scenarios that are primarily sympathetic to rebels and those struggling against U.S. imperialism. Against Rambo and other "return to Vietnam" films, Platoon and Full Metal Jacket subvert the rightwing version of Vietnam, as films like M.A.S.H., Catch-22, Soldier Blue and others previously attacked rightwing versions of militarism and U.S. foreign policy in earlier debates over Vietnam. And in the domain of sexual politics, anti-feminist films like Ordinary People, Kramer versus Kramer, An Officer and A Gentleman and Terms of Endearment can be contrasted with more feminist films like Girlfriends, Desperately Seeking Susan, and Desert Hearts. It should be noted, however, that mainstream Hollywood is severely limited in the extent to which it will advance socially critical and radical positions; thus it is the independent film movement to which one must look for the most significant political interventions within the terrain of American film culture (Kellner and Ryan 1988).

In any case, Hollywood films should be analyzed as ideological texts contextually and relationally, seeing some films as more progressive radical or liberal responses to rightist films and ideological positions, rather than, say, just dismissing all popular culture as reactionary and merely ideological as certain monolithic theories of the "dominant ideology" are wont to do, such as the classical critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), many Althusserians, Baudrillard and some

postmodernists, or some feminists. A contextualist film criticism reads cinematic texts in terms of actual struggles within contemporary U.S. culture and situates ideological analysis within existing socio-political debates and conflicts rather than just in relation to some supposedly monolithic dominant ideology, or some model of popular culture simply as ideological manipulation or domination. Reading films relationally involves situating films within their genres or cycles and seeing how they relate to other films within the set, and how the genres transcode ideological positions. This would involve reading Rambo in terms of the "return to Vietnam" cycle which can be situated within the whole genre of Vietnam films and debates over the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and its aftermath.

In this way, rightwing films can be read, for instance, as responses to actual threats to conservative hegemony, and thus as testimonies to actual social conflicts and contradictions. Or liberal films can be read as contestations of conservative hegemony, rather than as just wimpish variations of the same dominant ideology. From this contextualist perspective, ideology critique thus involves doing ideological analysis within the context of social theory and social history. Reading films politically, therefore, can provide insight not only into the ways that film reproduces existing social struggles within contemporary U.S. society but can also provide insight into social and political dynamics (see Kellner and Ryan 1988). Even highly ideological films like Rambo point to social conflicts and to forces that threaten conservative hegemony, such as the liberal anti-war, anti-military position which Rambo so violently opposes. Thus ideology can be analyzed in terms of the forces and tensions to which it responds while projects of ideological domination can be conceptualized in terms of reactionary resistance to popular struggles against traditional conservative or liberal values and institutions.

That is, rather than just conceptualizing ideology as a force of domination in the hands of an all-powerful ruling class, ideology can be analyzed contextually and relationally as a response to resistance and thus as a sign of threats to the hegemony of dominant group, sex, and race powers. Consequently, 60s films can be read as a resistance to the social conformity and conventional cinema of the earlier era, while Dirty Harry can be interpreted as a response to the radicalism of the 60s and the recent triumphs of liberalism within criminal law. Sexist and reactionary films like Straw Dogs or The Exorcist can be read as responses to feminism and the resistance of women to male domination. Blaxploitation films like Shaft or Superfly can be read as signs of resistance to black subservience to whites and as a reaction against black stereotypes in Hollywood films. And the racism of films like Rocky can be read as articulations of white working class fears of blacks and as testimonies to increased cultural and political power of blacks in U.S. society, while the relative absence of dramatic Hollywood narrative films about blacks in the Reagan era can be interpreted as the resistance of conservatives to black demands for racial equality and increased power. Or, Rambo and the return to Vietnam films can be read as responses to U.S. defeat in Vietnam, to challenges to imperialism, and to those who would curtail the military and limit U.S. military power.

Thus, ideologies should be analyzed within the context of social struggle and political debate rather than simply as purveyors of false consciousness whose falsity is exposed and denounced by ideology critique. Although demystification is part of ideology critique, simply exposing

mystification and domination isn't enough; we need to look behind ideology to see the social and historical forces and struggles which require it and to examine the cinematic apparatus and strategies which make ideologies attractive. Furthermore, on this model, ideology criticism is not solely denunciatory and should seek socially critical and oppositional moments within all ideological texts -- including conservative ones. As feminists and others have argued, one should learn to read texts "against the grain," yielding progressive insights even from reactionary texts. One can also attend to the possibility of using more liberal or progressive moments or aspects of a film against less progressive moments as when Jameson (1976 and 1979) extracts the socially critical elements from films like Dog Day Afternoon or Jaws which are contrasted with more conservative elements and used to criticize aspects of the existing society.

Furthermore, radical cultural criticism should seek out those utopian moments, those projections of a better world, that are found in a wide range of texts (Bloch 1986). Extending this argument a bit, one could claim that since ideologies are rhetorical constructs that attempt to persuade and to convince, they must have a relatively rational and attractive core and thus often contain emancipatory promises or moments. Specification of utopian moments within the most seemingly ideological artifacts was the project of Ernst Bloch whose great work The Principle of Hope was translated into English in 1986. Bloch provides a systematic examination of the ways that daydreams, popular culture, great literature, political and social utopias, philosophy and religion -- often dismissed tout court as ideology by some Marxist ideological critique -- contain emancipatory moments which project visions of a better life that put in question the organization and structure of life under capitalism (or state socialism).

Throughout his life, Bloch argued that Marxism was vitiated by a one-sided, inadequate, and merely negative approach to ideology. For Bloch, ideology is "Janus-faced," two-sided: it contains errors, mystifications, and techniques of manipulation and domination, but it also contains a utopian residue or surplus that can be used for social critique and to advance political emancipation. Bloch believed that even ideological artifacts contain expressions of desire and articulations of needs that socialist theory and politics should heed to provide programs and discourses which appeal to the deep-seated desires for a better life within everyone. Ideologies thus provide clues to possibilities for future development and contain a "surplus" or "excess" that is not exhausted in mystification or legitimation. And ideologies may contain normative ideals whereby the existing society can be criticized, as well as models of an alternative society.

Drawing on Bloch, Marcuse, and other neo-Marxian theories, Jameson has suggested that mass cultural texts often have utopian moments and proposes that radical cultural criticism should analyze both the social hopes and fantasies in the film as well as the ideological ways in which fantasies are presented, conflicts are resolved, and potentially disruptive hopes and anxieties are managed (Jameson 1979, 1981). In his reading of Jaws, for instance, the shark stands in for a variety of fears (uncontrolled organic nature threatening the artificial society, big business corrupting and endangering community, disruptive sexuality threatening the disintegration of the family and traditional values, and so on) which the film tries to contain through the reassuring defeat of evil by representatives of the current class structure. Yet the film also contains utopian images of family,

male-bonding, and adventure, as well as socially critical visions of capitalism which articulate fears that unrestrained big business would inexorably destroy the environment and community.

In Jameson's view, mass culture thus articulates social conflicts, contemporary fears and utopian hopes, and attempts at ideological containment and reassurance. In his view, "works of mass culture cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well: they cannot manipulate unless they offer some genuine shred of content as a fantasy bribe to the public about to be so manipulated. Even the 'false consciousness' of so monstrous a phenomenon of Nazism was nourished by collective fantasies of a Utopian type, in 'socialist' as well as in nationalist guises. Our proposition about the drawing power of the works of mass culture has implied that such works cannot manage anxieties about the social order unless they have first revived them and given them some rudimentary expression; we will now suggest that anxiety and hope are two faces of the same collective consciousness, so that the works of mass culture, even if their function lies in the legitimation of the existing order -- or some worse one -- cannot do their job without deflecting in the latter's service the deepest and most fundamental hopes and fantasies of the collectivity, to which they can therefore, no matter in how distorted a fashion, be found to have given voice" (Jameson 1979, p. 144).

In a 1979 article on "TV, Ideology, and Emancipatory Popular Culture" I too argued for a more differentiated critique of popular culture, and even television, suggesting that radical cultural criticism should specify critical, subversive, or, oppositional moments as well as ideological elements. In mid-to-late 1970s television, I found significant criticisms of racism in the mini-series Roots and King as well as in the popular TV sitcoms featuring blacks, and significant criticisms of big business in the mini-series Rich Man, Poor Man, Wheels, The Moneychangers and the like. Mary Hartman and other Norman Lear sitcoms contained strong criticism of sexism and conservatism, and generally offered more liberal views of sexuality, the family, and social life than had previously been found in TV world. To be sure, in the Reagan era more conservative television predominated but here too interesting ideological contradictions and occasional progressive moments appeared (see Kellner 1987).

Thus, even in ideological productions of popular culture, there are sharp critiques of capitalism, sexism, or racism, or visions of freedom and happiness which can provide critical perspectives on the unhappiness and unfreedom in the existing society. The Deer Hunter, for instance, though an arguably reactionary text (Kellner and Ryan 1988), contains utopian images of community, working class and ethnic solidarity, and personal friendship which provides critical perspectives on the atomism, alienation, and loss of community in everyday life under late capitalism. The utopian images of getting high and horsing around in the drug hootch in Platoon provide visions of racial harmony and individual and social happiness which provide a critical perspective on the harrowing war scenes and which code war as a disgusting and destructive human activity. The images of racial solidarity and transcendence in the dance numbers of Zoot Suit provide a utopian and critical contrast to the oppression of people of color found in the scenes of everyday and prison life in the film. And the transformation of life in the musical numbers of Pennies From Heaven provide critical perspectives on the degradation of everyday life due to the constraints of an unjust and irrational

economic system which informs the realist sections of the film.

From this perspective, radical cultural (and political) criticism should not only critique dominant ideologies but should also specify any utopian, oppositional, counter-ideological, subversive, and even, if possible, emancipatory moments within ideological constructs which are then turned against existing forms of domination. This procedure draws on the sort of immanent critique practiced by the Frankfurt school in the 1930s when they turned earlier forms of democratic bourgeois ideology against current, more reactionary, forms in fascist society. An immanent critique of bourgeois society thus turns its own values against contemporary social forms and practices that deny or contradict widely recognized values such as freedom or individualism (see Kellner 1984 and 1989a). Thus while bourgeois ideologies of freedom, individualism, rights, and so on are to some extent ideologies which cover over class rule and domination, they also contain critical and emancipatory moments which can be used to criticize the suppression or curtailment of rights and freedom under capitalist society. The practice of what the Frankfurt school called "immanent critique" thus turns ideology against ideology, using more rational and progressive ideologies against more repressive and reactionary ones (i.e. turning liberalism against fascism or new right conservatism). The Critical Theorists, however, never engaged in such an immanent critique of popular culture and I am proposing here that such a project could be of use to radical cultural criticism today.

The contextualist view of film, politics, and ideology also draws on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony (1971) which presents culture, society, and politics as terrains of contestation between various groups and class blocs. From this perspective, cultural critique should specify which contests are going on, between which groups, and which positions, with the cultural analyst intervening on what is determined to be the more progressive side (see Boggs 1984 and Kellner 1990).

Expanding on Gramsci, a variety of individuals have attempted to develop a more differentiated concept of ideology which pays more attention to emergent, residual, and hegemonic ideologies within contemporary neo-capitalist (or state socialist) societies (see Williams 1977; Hall 1987; Kellner 1978 and 1979). This expansion of the concept of ideology anchors ideology critique more securely in concrete and historically specific socio-political analysis and thus grounds ideology-critique in the context within which ideological conflict actually occurs.

Hegemony, Counterhegemony, and Deconstruction

Developments of new ways of reading and criticizing texts by so-called New French Theory also has some important implications for the project of ideology critique. Various French poststructuralists have contested the somewhat simplistic Marxian belief that ideology resides in and constitutes the center of texts, and that ideology critique simply involves refutation and demolition of the central ideological proposition of the text. Against this procedure, theorists like Roland Barthes, Pierre Machery, Jacques Derrida, and other post-structuralists propose new ways of reading texts and engaging in ideology critique. Texts, in the post-structuralist view, should be read as the expression of a multiplicity of voices rather than as the enunciation of one single ideological voice which is then to be specified and attacked. Texts thus require multivalent readings,

and a set of critical or textual strategies that will unfold the contradictions, contestatory marginal elements, and structured silences of the texts. These strategies include analyzing how, for example, the margins of texts might be as significant as the center in conveying certain ideological positions, or how the margins of a text might undercut or deconstruct other ideological positions affirmed in the text by contradicting or undercutting them.

Such a strategy involves paying attention to the margins, to seemingly insignificant elements of a text, as well as to the specific ideological positions affirmed. An Unmarried Woman, for example, presents the ideology of liberal feminism whereby Erika (Jill Clayburgh) is able to develop herself more fully both in terms of relations and career after her husband leaves her for a younger woman. At the end of the film, she prances merrily down a Manhattan street with a giant painting just given to her by her lover (Alan Bates), whose offer to go with him immediately to New Hampshire she rejected so that she could also pursue a career. As Erika crosses the street, three black and Latino working women stop to look at her and the frame freezes on their faces, undercutting the film's ideological affirmation of liberal feminism by showing that most women cannot afford the luxury or have the privilege of making choices available to upper class women like Erika.

Marginal elements might be important in other ways, however. In the opening title sequence of Beverly Hills Cop we get rather realistic pictures of the black Detroit ghetto -- precisely the world that the ideological project of the film attempts to erase as the action shifts to the upper-class world of Beverly Hills. Other texts are, as Robin Wood argues, inherently incoherent and contradictory (Wood 1986). In these cases, ideology critique would put on display the central ideological contradictions, or would attempt to show how what appears to be the central ideological position or argument is itself put into question and undermined by contradictory or marginal elements within the text. This procedure would thus show how ideologies may come into contradiction with themselves or fail, and thus demonstrates the cracks and fissures, vulnerabilities and weak points, and gaps within hegemonic ideology itself.

One should also pay attention to what is left out of ideological texts, for it is often the exclusions and silences that reveal the ideological project of the text. For instance, the "return to Vietnam" films leave out U.S. atrocities against the Vietnamese (portrayed in films like Platoon and Causalities of War) and present U.S. soldiers as innocent victims of evil Vietnamese and communists. Hegemony thus works by exclusion and marginalization, as much as by affirming specific ideological positions.

Such methods of ideology critique therefore encourage the critic to be as much interested in how ideology fails as in how it succeeds, in how ideological texts are sites of tensions and dissonance even when they seem most harmonious and ideologically successful. Although the first Dirty Harry film, for example, is obviously a rightwing call to law and order, it displays a conflict between liberal and conservative views of law enforcement and while it attempts to privilege the conservative version, it depicts a society so ridden with crime, corruption, and hopeless inertia that a critical reading could demonstrate that both liberal and conservative solutions to crime are inadequate and that only radical social restructuring can address the problems that the film presents. Inadvertently

no doubt, the conclusion of the first Dirty Harry film, where Harry throws his badge away, points to a society so corrupt that even the rightwing solution to crime must inevitably fail. The conservative individualist hero walks away alone into (pure) nature in the film but conservative commercial and economic forces are themselves destroying the nature yearned for by conservative fantasists, thus showing the classical conservative solution to be increasingly untenable in the modern world.

One could argue on these lines that the ideological projects of even aggressively rightwing films like Red Dawn and Rambo self-de(con)struct and are inherently unstable. Red Dawn (1984) is directed by self-proclaimed "Zen Fascist" John Milius who is also infamous for his celebrations of an Arab bandit warrior in The Wind and the Lion and for Conan the Barbarian, which opens with Nietzsche's slogan that "whatever does not kill me will make me stronger." The film appeared during a period of intense debate over Reagan's support of the Nicaruguan contras and other anti-communist, counterrevolutionary groups all over the world, accompanied by his military build-up and hostile posture toward the Soviet Union. Red Dawn thus advances an anti-communist, counterrevolutionary position which plays on and reproduces specific political fears that Reagan constantly played on.

The film opens with titles on the screen narrating a rightwing nightmare of the Left taking over the world with the United States completely isolated. Ponderous Germanic music then accompanies images of clouds and sky, and the camera zooms down to a mountain vista, zeroing in on a monument -- all aggressively fascist images culled from the work of Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl: the opening homage to her film The Triumph of the Will clearly signals the rightwing nature of Milius' vision. The monument contains an ideological text by ultra-imperialist Theodore Roosevelt whose warrior values the film obviously wants to advance: "Far better is it to dare mighty things than to take rank with those poor timid spirits who know neither victory nor defeat."

Red Dawn wants to advance a specifically anti-communist agenda by showing Soviet, Cuban, and Nicaruguan troops invading and occupying the United States after their seizure of a highly strategic high school in the countryside of Colorado. This scenario, however, forces Milius to present a full-scale communist invasion -- surely the sort of "mighty" daring that Roosevelt/Milius praise. Moreover, the opening images show small town America as the locus of "poor timid spirits" where football and a Saturday night date are the most highly valued activities. In other words, the patriotic film is really anti-American, highly contemptuous of contemporary American society, while the anti-communist film is secretly sympathetic to communist revolution, to the daring and audacity of communist revolutionaries.

Red Dawn enacts its militarist scenario through scenes which transform a small group of teenagers into partisan resistance fighters, and attempts the daring feat of recuperating for the Right the figure of the heroic revolutionary freedom fighter -- a figure that played a central role in 60s leftist mythology in the form of Che Guevera, the Viet Cong and others, which the Reagan administration was trying to seize for the Right in its attempt to present U.S.-funded Nicaruguan terrorists as "freedom-fighters." In making a Cuban communist, Col. Bella (Ron O'Neil), the emblem of such a

figure, Milius, however, undercuts his rightwing comic book anti-communism. Furthermore, the supposedly "democratic" freedom fighters are highly authoritarian. In a key early scene, the teen leader Jed refuses to allow democratic voting and beats up the liberal high school President who opposes him. We are supposed to sympathize with Jed's "strength" and to see democracy as the ploy of weak, self-interested politicians.

Red Dawn, in fact, displays the extreme contempt that the Right feels for democracy in the United States -- a contempt then being acted out in the political adventures of the time directed by William Casey, George Bush, and their stooge Oliver North. In Red Dawn, anyone associated with democracy is presented as corrupt: the high school President betrays the "resistance fighters" and is assassinated by one of the members in the group and his father, the mayor, is also shown as a spineless collaborator. In addition, the film (inadvertently?) puts on display the masculinist socialization in patriarchal society. When Jed and Matt visit their father incarcerated in a prison camp, he tells them that he was "tough" with them as children to prepare them for the hard knocks of life -- a conservative view of the world confirmed in the film's ideological scenario. His final advice to them is an order not to cry and a pathetic plea to "avenge me!" One then sees Jed being equally authoritarian and "tough" as his father as the film creeps along, signalling the way that patriarchal authority is handed down from father to son, in which the sons replay the authoritarian and aggressive roles of their father (though one might note that this conservative socialization scenario being touted in the film is under attack by more liberal socialization practices in the United States today).

The film also attempts to incorporate women and feminism into its rightwing warrior ideology. Two teenage girls join the "resistance fighters" and become warriors, every bit as effective as the men. The message seems to be that real women are most like real men and thus incorporates feminism into its militarist agenda at a time when the U.S. was becoming dependent upon women recruits for its volunteer army. Indeed, the film suppresses sexuality altogether, with one of the young women, Erika (played by Lea Thompson), developing a crush on an older pilot who joins the warrior band but later is conveniently killed. The other woman warrior, Toni, only expresses her feelings for the band's fuhrer Jed when she is dying, as he cautiously plants a chaste kiss on her forehead. @+{5}

Marginal elements, however, undercut in subtle ways the film's rightist ideology. Cracks in the dominant American ideology show through in a scene in the Arapaho National Battlefield where one of "the great battles of the American West" took place. Milius tries to cover over the theft of Indian land and butchery of Native American resistance fighters by having a Russian Communist translate the plaque into Marxist terminology: "There was a great peasant uprising in 1908 of wild Indians. They were crushed by President Theodore Roosevelt, leading armies of imperialist cossacks and cowboys. The Battle lasted all winter. More than 35,000 were killed." While Milius may be trying to occlude the colonial history here by utilizing off-putting Soviet communist jargon, the "marginal" statistic of "35,000 killed" uncovers and points to the violent destructiveness of American imperialist adventures. The episode also (unwittingly?) equates the communist invaders with the American pioneers who had earlier invaded Indian territory, thus showing Communist and American aggressors to be brothers under their imperialist skins, one no better or worse than the other.

It is also unclear what the teen warriors are supposed to be fighting and dying for. At the point where they confront the need to kill the traitor in their midst, one of the teens asks: "what's the difference between us and them," and the teen fascist Jed offers the rather feeble response: "we live here!" Indeed, I would suggest that both Red Dawn and the TV mini-series Amerika represent the ideological bankruptcy of rightist ideology. As symbols of patriotism worth fighting and dying for about all they can come up with is the flag the national anthem, and masculist self-assertion.

Furthermore, while Red Dawn attempts to advance an entire agenda of rightwing values, I would argue that the ideological project ultimately is incoherent and falls apart (one could make similar arguments concerning Milius' earlier Conan film). Far from glorifying war and the warrior, Red Dawn ultimately shows the futility, emptiness, and destructiveness of military violence (much as does Platoon from an explicitly critical-liberal position). For after glorifying the teen resistance fighters' heroics, during the last third of the film one by one they are progressively brutalized and eventually killed off. Thus, Red Dawn, arguably, undercuts the warrior ethic as the teen warriors become more and more brutalized and pay with their lives for their heroism. In one poignant scene near the end, Jed and his brother Matt return to the park where they used to play football as children and one takes out a childhood picture of two smiling happy young faces. Mentally comparing this childhood idyll with what they have become, Jed tears up the picture and begins crying. In the violent finale, some of the remaining teen warriors are killed and the fate of the two brothers, Jed and Matt, is left up in the air in the final narration as Ericka (Lea Thompson) describes her escape to the "free zone" and indicates that she never saw the two brothers again.

These final war scenes thus, inadvertently perhaps, portray warrior heroism as an ode of death and destruction opposed to the pleasures and joys of life. The most interesting moment, however, occurs when the Cuban revolutionary, Col. Bella, whose love of life had led him to decide to resign his position when he saw that he was becoming more of a police official than a revolutionary emancipator -- playing once again on the Che Guevara myth -- decides not to shoot Jed who is carrying the mutilated body of his brother Matt. Bella throws down his rifle in disgust and walks away. What is happening here? Is the self-proclaimed Zen fascist warrior John Milius really a closet liberal and pacifist? Or is even the rightwing becoming aware of the human costs of military adventures?

In fact, Red Dawn is an incoherent text torn by contradictions. While the cinematography of Rambo, as I argued earlier, directly supports its comic book ideology, the cinematic elements of Red Dawn produce more incoherent effects. Milius sets up the communist invaders as barbaric hordes by introducing them after a black high school teacher is lecturing on Ghenghis Khan and is then shot and killed by the communist invaders. He also employs the aesthetic of realism to use details of the visual screen to depict the ways that the communists have set up a police state, drawing on the earlier codes of the anti-communist genre which was a staple of Hollywood film during the late 1940s and early 1950s. As in the Jack Webb film Red Nightmare, there are images of individuals torn from their houses, marched through the streets, and interned in concentration camps; another image portrays the local movie theater playing classical Russian films. Yet the triumphant entrance

into the town of Colonel Bella to the martial music of the International codes him as a powerful and heroic figure and his sympathetic portrayal throughout the film wins some sympathy for the communist revolutionary -- a trope repeated with the later entrance of the Russian leader of a special forces group, Strelnikov, who is also presented sympathetically.

So a contradiction emerges between Milius' anti-communist scenario and his pro-warrior ethos with his cinematography investing both the communist and "resistance" warriors with the most positive resonance. And, as noted, during the last scenes, the graphic portrayal of death and dying puts in question the warrior ethos. In fact, the narrative falls into a complete muddle after an energetic and engaging opening and the text becomes more and more incoherent and confusing as it proceeds, thus depriving Milius of the honor of becoming the foremost cinematic auteur and ideologue of Reaganite anti-communist (a prize that Stallone wins hands down).

Consequently, whereas Milius may have intended to make a rightist, militarist, and anti-communist film -- and it certainly contains ample examples of these themes and was read in this way when it came out -- the film is ultimately incoherent and undercuts in various ways its militarist and anti-communist project. Likewise, while Rambo presents a fantasy of rightwing heroism and ideological compensation for loss in Vietnam, it depicts a fundamentally corrupt political establishment, and Rambo's final assault against the computer system inadvertently depicts the obsolescence of the primitive warrior in a high tech weapons system where chumps like Rambo are at best cannon fodder who will be increasingly irrelevant to high-tech warfare. Read against the grain, Rambo can be seen as testimony to working class victimization and as a demonstration of the cynical uses and manipulation of uneducated working class youth like Rambo -- an explicit theme of Platoon which early on establishes that it is poor white working class and third world ethnics who are being used as fodder in the Vietnam war games.

Such readings therefore require attention to seemingly marginal phenomena of texts and suggest that reading ideological texts against the grain may yield socially critical and progressive insights. Deconstructive readings also demonstrate the contradictions and incoherence of many popular films, and show how certain ideological texts fail to resolve the social inequalities or conflicts that they attempt to cover or to resolve, in cases where parts of the text may put into question what the text declares to be a resolution to a conflict or solution to a problem. For instance, the singing of "God Bless America" at the end of The Deer Hunter attempts to reconcile all the conflicts and to alleviate all the suffering in a gesture of ideological unity and harmony, but closer examination of the characters and settings reveals a devastated group of people whose sufferings and problems resist facile solutions and redemption; close scrutiny of the framing of the characters shows them to be isolated and alienated from each other and the dreary bar scene looks more than a desolated battlefield after the war than a cheery site to affirm god's love for America.

Many classical Hollywood films, in fact, undercut their ideological frames and resolutions. Fritz Lang's film Fury (1936), for example, portrays mob violence in a scenario where the corruption, hypocrisy, and violence of the small town portrayed in the text spill over the ideological frame at the end. In Mildred Pierce (1945), the "happy ending" whereby Mildred is released from prison and

accompanied by her first husband fails to resolve the contradictions in the position of women in American society that they film so strongly puts on display, or the rupture between Mildred and her husband. And similar points could be made about Douglas Sirk's melodramas, many of Hitchcock's films, or the musicals and melodramas of Vince Minnelli.

Such deconstructive approaches also stress the ways that "aberrant" audience readings can also subvert the overt ideological message of the text, as when stoned hippies laugh at the anti-drug tirades of rightwing cop shows like Dragnet, or blacks hoot at liberal solutions to racial problems in Sidney Poitier films, or radicals boo Rambo, John Wayne, or Chuck Norris when they engage in reactionary heroism. Or, to move the argument in the other direction, one might recall how reactionaries tended to identify with Archie Bunker in All in the Family and to reject the often privileged more liberal positions. Thus ideology criticism should be aware of the possibility of contradictory readings of ideological texts and should not be afraid to propose its own progressive readings of conservative texts, attempting to ferret out progressive insights even from rightwing films like Rambo.

Toward Multiperspectival Cultural Theory

Cinematic texts are thus not intrinsically "conservative" or "liberal." Rather, many cinematic texts advance specific ideological positions, but they are often undercut by other aspects of the text. The texts of popular culture, like literary texts, are polysemic and require multivalent readings. They incorporate a variety of discourses, ideological positions, narrative strategies, image construction, and cinematic effects which rarely coalesce into a pure and harmonious ideological position. Yet, as I have argued, certain films advance specific ideological positions which can be ascertained by relating the films to the political discourses and debates of its era, to other films concerned with similar themes or sharing certain generic codes, and to other elements in the culture that are active in the film.

Such an approach to film requires a multiperspectival optic that reads film in relation to the constitutive elements of its era. Nietzsche argued that all interpretation was constituted by the interpreter's perspectives and was thus inevitably laden with presuppositions, values, biases, and limitations. To avoid one-sidedness and partial vision one should learn "how to employ a variety of perspectives and interpretations in the service of knowledge" (Nietzsche 1969: 119). For Nietzsche: "There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective 'knowing'; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be" (ibid). Expanding this call for multiperspectival interpretation in later aphorisms collected in The Will to Power, Nietzsche argues: "every elevation of man brings with it the overcoming of narrower interpretations; that every strengthening and increase of power opens up new perspectives and means believing in new horizons" (1968: 330).

Applying these notions to cultural interpretation, one could argue that the more interpretive perspectives one can bring to a cultural artifact, the more comprehensive and stronger one's reading may be. I argued earlier that to capture the full political and ideological dimensions of a text, one needed to view it from the perspectives of gender, race, and class, and am now suggesting that

combining Marxist, feminist, structuralist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic and other critical perspectives will provide fuller, more complete, and potentially stronger readings. Combining, for instance, ideology critique and genre criticism with semiotic analysis allows one to discern how the forms of genres, or semiotic codes, are permeated with ideology. The conflict/resolution code of most television entertainment, for example, provides an ideological notion that all problems can be resolved within the existing society by following conventional behavior and norms; the "return-to-Vietnam" film genre analyzed earlier in this paper provides ideological legitimation for anti-communism and military build-up and intervention (as well as compensation for U.S. defeat in Vietnam).

A perspective, in this analysis, is thus an optic, a way of seeing, and critical methods can be interpreted as perspectives. Each critical method focuses on specific features of an object from a specific perspective: the perspective spotlights, or illuminates, some features of a text while ignoring others. The more perspectives one focuses on a text to do ideological analysis and critique -- generic, structural, formal, psychoanalytic, and so on -- the better one can grasp the full range of ideological dimensions and ramifications of a text. It therefore follows that a multiperspectival method will provide an arsenal of weapons of critique, a full range of perspectives to focus on cultural artifacts.

Some qualifications to this position should be made, however. Obviously, a single reading -- Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, or whatever -- may yield more brilliant insights than combining various perspectival readings; more is not necessarily better. Yet more critical perspectives utilized in a proficient and hermeneutically revelatory fashion provides the potential for stronger (i.e. more many-sided, illuminating, and critical) readings. Secondly, a multiperspectival approach may not be particularly illuminating unless it adequately situates its text in its historical context. A text is constituted by its internal relations and its relations to its socio-historical context and the more relations articulated in a critical reading, the better grasp of a text one may have. A multiperspectival method must necessarily be historical and should read its text in terms of its history and may also choose to read history in the light of the text.

Certain methodological strategies are, of course, incompatible and a multiperspectival approach must choose between competing perspectives in terms of what specific task is at hand and what specific goals one has. For some purposes it may be useful to engage in a focused feminist reading, while for other purposes one might carry through multivalent readings, getting at a text from a variety of perspectives. A multiperspectival position, however, that is not a mere liberal eclecticism, that is not merely a hodge-podge of different points of view, must allow its various perspectives to inform and modify each other. For instance, Marxism that is informed by feminism will be different from a one-dimensional Marxism innocent of feminism (and vice-versa). A Marxist-feminist position that is informed by poststructuralism will be different from a dogmatic Marxist-feminist perspective that believes it has the supermethod to attack cultural texts. Poststructuralism, as noted, eschews methodological dogmatism, champions a multiplicity of perspectives, and focuses attention on features ignored by some Marxist or feminist perspectives. Yet a poststructuralist perspective like deconstruction can itself become predictable and one-sided if

it does not utilize other perspectives such as Marxism and feminism (see Ryan 1982 and Spivak 1988).

Each critical method has its own strengths and limitations, its optics and blindspots. Marxian ideology critiques have traditionally been strong on class and historical contextualization and weak on formal analysis; feminism excels in gender analysis; structuralism is useful for narrative analysis; poststructuralism calls attention to elements ignored by other methods and undermines naive beliefs that one specific interpretation is certain and true; psychoanalysis calls for depth hermeneutics and the articulation of unconscious contents and meaning. The more of these critical methods one has at one's disposal, the better chance one has of producing reflexive and many-sided critical readings.

Of course, a reading of a text is only a reading from a critic's subject position, no matter how multiperspectival. Any critic's specific reading is only their own reading and may or may not be the reading preferred by audiences (which themselves will be significantly different according to class, race, gender, ethnicity, ideologies, and so on). There is also a split between textual encoding and audience decoding and always the possibility of a multiplicity of readings. The only way to discover how audiences read texts is to engage in ethnographic surveys (see the Appendix to Kellner/Ryan 1988) and even then one is not sure how texts effect audiences and shape their beliefs and behavior. All texts are polysemic and subject to multivalent readings depending on the perspectives of the reader.

Nonetheless, one way to read texts is to situate them into their historical context, to see how they fit into specific genres and promote certain ideological positions. This form of contextualization, carried out in this article, reads texts historically and politically, as ideological arguments produced in specific contexts. The more perspectives one brings to bear in this reading, the more complete one's reading will be and the better grasp one will have on the text's ideological problematics. This contextual approach uses history to read texts and texts to read history. Such a dual optic allows insight into the multiple relations between texts and contexts, between films and history.

Finally, and to conclude, the theoretical perspectives on film, politics, and ideology proposed in this paper suggest that ideological hegemony in contemporary U.S. society is complex, contested, and constantly being put into question. Hegemony is negotiated and renegotiated, and is vulnerable to attack and subversion. These proposals thus contain certain political implications in the present situation where the New Right political hegemony of the Reagan years has passed over to a more centrist conservatism of the Bush regime, that is in turn vulnerable, shaky, and subject to overthrow and reversal. Reading film and popular culture diagnostically presents insights into the current political situation, into the strengths and vulnerabilities of the contending political forces, into the hopes and fears of the population. Film thus provides important insights into the psychological, socio-political, and ideological make-up of a specific society at a given point in history.

Reading film diagnostically also allows one to detect what ideological solutions to various problems are being offered, and thus to anticipate certain trends, to gain insights into social problems and conflicts, and to appraise the dominant ideologies and emergent oppositional forces. Consequently,

diagnostic political critique enables one to perceive the limitations of mainstream conservative and liberal political ideologies, as well as helping to decipher their continuing appeal. It enables one to grasp the utopian yearnings in a given society and challenges progressives to develop cultural representations, political alternatives, and practices and movements which address these predispositions. Such diagnostic reading thus helps with the formulation of progressive political practices which address salient hopes, fears, and desires, and the construction of social alternatives that are grounded in existing psychological, social, and cultural matrixes. Consequently, diagnostic film critique does not merely offer another clever method of reading films but provides weapons of critique for those interested in producing a better society.

Notes

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@+{1} In Studies in the Theories of Ideology, John Thompson examines many recent theories of ideology and finds that many of them sever the link between ideology and domination, and therefore rob ideology of the critical edge that it had in Marx and other neo-Marxists. I would therefore agree with Thompson on the need to link the concept of ideology with theories of hegemony and domination, and thus to delimit its application to ideas and positions which serve functions of legitimation, mystification, and class domination that assure the domination of the ruling class over other classes and groups within society, rather than equating all ideas or political positions with ideology (see Kellner 1978 for an earlier presentation of this position).

@+{2} Against Thompson who wants to fundamentally define ideology in terms of language and a discourse theory, I would want to include image, symbol, myth, and narrative in the repertoire of ideological instruments, and would thus want to combine ideological analysis with myth-symbol criticism and narrative analysis and thus to note the ways that images, scenes, and narratives attempt to convey ideology.

@+{3} I sometimes give a very short lecture on the mind of Ronald Reagan which I point to the ways that he assimilated the generic codes and worldview of the Hollywood western, war film, melodrama, and other genres which dichotomized the universe into the forces of Good vs. Evil, which presented "us" as Good and "them" as Evil, and which thus repressed any negative, aggressive, and evil inclinations in one's own country and psyche. On this theme, see Rogin 1987.

@+{4} Application and critique of some of the new forms of textual analysis and their application to ideology critique, mostly imported from France and England, are found in Coward and Ellis, 1977, Sumner 1979, and Thompson 1984.

@+{5} Lea Thompson played in a series of rightwing teenage women roles during the 1980s, while Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey were to return together in the liberalish Dirty Dancing, where they are allowed to explore a wide range of contemporary issues in sexual politics.

@+{6} For more on the metatheory of a multiperspectival theory, see Best and Kellner 1991 and on the concept of a political reading, posed against a variant of postmodern theory, see Best/Kellner 1987.

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