Colin MacCabe

Throughout his life Brecht conducted, together with a continually experimenting artistic practice, a sustained theoretical reflection on his own and other's work. In the early thirties drawing up a project for a new critical review Brecht wrote

' Amongst other things the review understands the word
" criticism " in its double sense – transforming *dialectically* the totality of subjects into a *permanent crisis* and thus conceiving the epoch as a critical period in both meanings of the term. And this point of view necessarily entails a rehabilitation of *theory* in its productive rights.' (XVIII, 85-6)[1]

The importance of theory and its productive effects in the aesthetic domain persists as a central concern throughout Brecht's writings. Two areas in which Brecht felt the need for theory to be particularly pressing were the debate on realism in which Lukács' positions achieved dominance in the early thirties and the relatively new cultural area of the cinema. His reflections on these topics were published in 1967 under the titles *Über den Realismus* and *Über Film* and these sections have since been totally translated into French and sections of them have recently been published in English.[2] The aim of this article is to elaborate some of the positions advanced in those two works. It is not an attempt to extract a coherent theory from Brecht's theoretical writings (and still less to offer a coherent account of the relation of this theory to his artistic practice) but rather a set of digressions which take as their starting point some Brechtian theses.

The Classic Realist Text
' Criticism, at least Marxist criticism, must proceed methodically and concretely in each casè, in short scientifically. Loose talk is of no help here, whatever its vocabulary. In no circumstances can the necessary guide-lines for a practical definition of realism be derived from literary works alone. (Be like Tolstoy – but without his weaknesses! Be like Balzac – only up-to-date!) Realism is an issue not only for literature: it is a major political, philosophical and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such – as a matter of general human interest.' (XIX, 307)[3]

One of the difficulties of any discussion about realism is the lack of any really effective vocabulary with which to discuss the topic. Most discussions turn on the problems of the production of dis-

course which will fully adequate the real. This notion of adequacy is accepted both by the realists and indeed by the anti-realists whose main argument is that no discourse can ever be adequate to the multifarious nature of the real. This notion of the real is, however, I wish to suggest, a notion which is tied to a particular type of literary production – the nineteenth century·realist novel. The dominance of this novel form is such that people still tend to confuse the general question of realism with the particular forms of the nineteenth century realist novel. In order to make the discussion clearer I want therefore to attempt to define the structure which typifies the nineteenth century realist novel and to show how that structure can also be used to describe a great number of films. The detour through literature is necessary because, in many ways, the structure is much more obvious there and also because of the historical dominance of the classic realist novel over much film production. What to a large extent will be lacking in this article is the specific nature of the film form but this does not seem to me to invalidate the setting up of certain essential categories from which further discussion must progress. The structure I will attempt to disengage I shall call the classic realist text and I shall apply it to novels and films.

A classic realist text may be defined as one in which there is a hierarchy amongst the discourses which compose the text and this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth. Perhaps the easiest way to understand this is through a reflection on the use of inverted commas within the classic realist novel. While those sections in the text which are contained in inverted commas may cause a certain difficulty for the reader – a certain confusion vis-à-vis what really is the case — this difficulty is abolished by the unspoken (or more accurately the unwritten) prose that surrounds them. In the classical realist novel the narrative prose functions as a metalanguage that can state all the truths in the object language – those words held in inverted commas – and can also explain the relation of this object language to the real. The metalanguage can thereby explain the relation of this object language to the world and the strange methods by which the object languages attempt to express truths which are straight-forwardly conveyed in the metalanguage. What I have called an unwritten prose (or a metalanguage) is exactly that language, which while placing other languages between inverted commas and regard-ing them as certain material expressions which express certain meanings, regards those same meanings as finding transparent expression within the metalanguage itself. Transparent in the sense that the metalanguage is not regarded as material; it is dematerialised to achieve perfect representation – to let the iden-tity of things shine through the window of words. For insofar as the metalanguage is treated itself as material – it, too, can be reinterpreted; new meanings can be found for it in a further

metalanguage. The problem is the problem that has troubled western thought since the pre-Socratics recognised the separation between what was said and the act of saying. This separation must be thought both as time and space – as the space, which in the distance from page to eye or mouth to ear allows the possibility of misunderstanding – as the time taken to traverse the page or listen to an utterance which ensures the deferred interpretation of words which are always only defined by what follows. The problem is that in the moment that we say a sentence the meaning (what is said) seems fixed and evident but what is said does not exist solely for the moment and is open to further interpretations. Even in this formulation of the problem I have presupposed an original moment when there is strict contemporaneity between the saying and what is said, but the difficulty is more radical for there is no such original moment. The separation is always already there as we cannot locate the presence of what is said – distributed as it is through space – nor the present of what is said – distributed as it is through time.

This separation bears witness to the real as articulated. The thing represented does not appear in a moment of pure identity as it tears itself out of the world and presents itself, but rather is caught in an articulation in which each object is defined in a set of differences and oppositions.

It is this separation that the unwritten text attempts to *anneal*, to make whole, through denying its own status as writing – as marks of material difference distributed through time and space. Whereas other discourses within the text are considered as material which are open to re-interpretation, the narrative discourse simply allows reality to appear and denies its own status as articulation. This relationship between discourses can be clearly seen in the work of such a writer as George Eliot. In the scene in *Middlemarch* where Mr Brooke goes to visit the Dagley's farm we read two different languages. One is the educated, well-meaning, but not very intelligent discourse of Mr Brooke and the other is the uneducated, violent and very nearly unintelligible discourse of the drunken Dagley. But the whole dialogue is surrounded by a metalanguage, which being unspoken is also unwritten, and which places these discourses in inverted commas and can thus discuss these discourses' relation to truth – a truth which is illuminatingly revealed in the metalanguage. The metalanguage reduces the object languages into a simple division between form and content and extracts the meaningful content from the useless form. One can see this process at work in the following passage which ends the scene:

' He [Mr Brooke] had never been insulted on his own land before, and had been inclined to regard himself as a general favourite (we are all apt to do so, when we think of our own amiability

10   more than what other people are likely to want of us). When he had quarrelled with Caleb Garth twelve years before he had thought that the tenants would be pleased at the landlord's taking everything into his own hands.

Some who follow the narrative of this experience may wonder at the midnight darkness of Mr Dagley; but nothing was easier in those times than for a hereditary farmer of his grade to be ignorant, in spite somehow of having a rector in the twin parish who was a gentleman to the backbone, a curate nearer at hand who preached more learnedly than the rector, a landlord who had gone into everything, especially fine art and social improvement and all the lights of Middlemarch only three miles off '.[4]

This passage provides the necessary interpretations for the discourses that we have read earlier in the chapter. Both the discourses of Dagley and Mr Brooke are revealed as springing from two types of ignorance which the metalanguage can expose and reveal. So we have Mr Brooke's attitude to what his tenants thought of him contrasted with the reality which is available through the narrative prose. No discourse is allowed to speak for itself but rather it must be placed in a context which will reduce it to a simple explicable content. And in the claim that the narrative prose has direct access to a final reality we can find the claim of the classic realist novel to present us with the truths of human nature. The ability to reveal the truth about Mr Brooke is the ability that guarantees the generalisations of human nature.

Thus then a first definition of the classic realist text – but does this definition carry over into films where it is certainly less evident where to locate the dominant discourse? It seems to me that it does and in the following fashion. The narrative prose achieves its position of dominance because it is in the position of knowledge and this function of knowledge is taken up in the cinema by the narration of events. Through the knowledge we gain from the narrative we can split the discourses of the various characters from their situation and compare what is said in these discourses with what has been revealed to us through narration. The camera shows us what happens – it tells the truth against which we can measure the discourses. A good example of this classical realist structure is to be found in Pakula's film *Klute*. This film is of particular interest because it was widely praised for its realism on its release. Perhaps even more significantly it tended to be praised for its realistic presentation of the leading woman, Bree (played by Jane Fonda).

In *Klute* the relationship of dominance between discourses is peculiarly accentuated by the fact that the film is interspersed with fragments of Bree talking to her psychiatrist. This subjective discourse can be exactly measured against the reality provided by the unfolding of the story. Thus all her talk of independence is por-

trayed as finally an illusion as we discover, to no great surprise but to our immense relief, what she really wants is to settle down in the mid-West with John Klute (the detective played by Donald Sutherland) and have a family. The final sequence of the film is particularly telling in this respect. While Klute and Bree pack their bags to leave, the soundtrack records Bree at her last meeting with her psychiatrist. Her own estimation of the situation is that it most probably won't work but the reality of the image ensures us that this is the way it will really be. Indeed Bree's monologue is even more interesting — for in relation to the reality of the image it marks a definite advance on her previous statements. She has gained insight through the plot development and like many good heroines of classic realist texts her discourse is more nearly adequate to the truth at the end of the film than at the beginning. But if a progression towards knowledge is what marks Bree, it is possession of knowledge which marks the narrative, the reader of the film and John Klute himself. For Klute is privileged by the narrative as the one character whose discourse is also a discourse of knowledge. Not only is Klute a detective and thus can solve the problem of his friend's disappearance — he is also a man, and a man who because he has not come into contact with the city has not had his virility undermined. And it is as a full-blooded man that he can know not only the truth of the mystery of the murders but also the truth of the woman Bree. Far from being a film which goes any way to portraying a woman liberated from male definition (a common critical response), *Klute* exactly guarantees that the real essence of woman can only be discovered and defined by a man.

The analysis sketched here is obviously very schematic but what, hopefully, it does show is that the structure of the classic realist text can be found in film as well. That narrative of events — the knowledge which the film provides of how things really are — is the metalanguage in which we can talk of the various characters in the film. What would still remain to be done in the elaboration of the structure of the classic realist text in cinema is a more detailed account of the actual mechanisms by which the narrative is privileged (and the way in which one or more of the characters within the narrative can be equally privileged) and also a history of the development of this dominant narrative. On the synchronic level it would be necessary to attempt an analysis of the relationship between the various types of shot and their combination into sequences — are there for example certain types of shot which are coded as subjective and therefore subordinate to others which are guaranteed as objective? In addition how does music work as the guarantee or otherwise of truth? On the diachronic level it would be necessary to study how this form was produced — what relationship obtains between the classic realist text and technical advances such as the development of the talkie?

12   What ideological factors were at work in the production and dominance of the classic realist text?

To return, however, to the narrative discourse. It is necessary to attempt to understand the type of relations that this dominant discourse produces. The narrative discourse cannot be mistaken in its identifications because the narrative discourse is not present as discourse – as articulation. The unquestioned nature of the narrative discourse entails that the only problem that reality poses is to go and look and see what *Things* there *are*. The relationship between the reading subject and the real is placed as one of pure specularity. The real is not articulated – it is. These features imply two essential features of the classic realist text:

1 The classic realist text cannot deal with the real as contradictory.
2 In a reciprocal movement the classic realist text ensures the position of the subject in a relation of dominant specularity.

The Classic Realist Text as Progressive art

' In general, do not be content with providing an insight into the literature of the country in question, but follow the details of literary life itself. Consider literary phenomenon as events and as social events.' (Principles for the review *Das Wort*) (XIX, 307).[5]

It may be objected that the account that I have given of the classic literary text is deficient in the following extremely important fashion. It ignores what is the usual criterion for realism, that is to say subject matter. The category of the classic realist text lumps together in book and film *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Sound of Music*, *L'Assommoir* and *Toad of Toad Hall*. In order to find a criterion with which to make distinctions within the area of the classic realist text it is necessary to reflect on contradiction. I have stated that the classic realist text cannot deal with the real in its contradiction because of the unquestioned status of the representation at the level of the dominant discourse. In order to understand how contradiction can be dealt with it is necessary to investigate the workings of an operation that is often opposed to representation, namely montage.

In his essay on ' Word and Image ' in *The Film Sense*, Eisenstein defines montage. Amongst numerous examples of montage he quotes the following from Ambrose Bierce's *Fantastic Fables*:

' A Woman in widow's weeds was weeping upon a grave.
" Console yourself, madam," said a Sympathetic Stranger.
" Heaven's mercies are infinite. There is another man somewhere, beside your husband, with whom you can still be happy."
 " There was," she sobbed – " there was, but this is his grave." '[6]

Eisenstein explains the effect of· this fable in terms of an interaction between the visual representations in the story. The woman

is a representation and so is the mourning dress – they are, in Eisenstein's terms, objectively representable – but the juxtaposition of these representations gives rise to a new image that is not representable – namely that the woman is a widow. It is the expectation created by the juxtaposition which is undercut by the final line uttered by the woman. For the moment we shall only notice the following point:

1. that Eisenstein, concerned very largely with a simple definition of representation, fails to recognise that widow is just as objective a representation as woman or mourning dress and

2. that montage involves both an interaction between representations and a shock.

Eisenstein continues his explanation by expanding his distinction between representation (the raw material of the montage) and image (that which is produced by the montage itself).

' Take a white circular disc of average size and smooth surface, its circumference divided into sixty equal parts. At every fifth division is set a figure in the order of succession of 1 to 12. At the centre of the disc are fixed two metal rods, moving freely on their fixed ends, pointed at their free ends, one being equal to the radius of the disc, the other rather shorter. Let the longer pointed rod have its free end resting at the figure 12 and the shorter in succession pointing towards the figures 1, 2, 3 and so on up to 12. This will comprise a series of geometrical representations of successive relations of the two metal rods to one another expressed in the dimensions 30, 60, 90 degrees, and so on up to 360 degrees.

If, however, this disc is provided with a mechanism that imparts steady movement to the metal rods, the geometrical figure formed on the surface acquires a special meaning: it is now not simply a *representation*, it is an *image* of time.'[7]

The confusion that led Eisenstein to count woman and mourning dress as representable but widow as non-representable can be seen at work again in this passage. Eisenstein thinks of the world as being composed of basic objects available to sight which are then linked together in various ways by the perceiving subject with the aid of his past experiences. That this is his position is made abundantly clear in the passage which follows the passage I have just quoted. He takes the example of Vronsky looking at his watch, after Anna Karenina has told him that she is pregnant, and being so shocked that he sees the position of the hands but not the time. Thus the position of the hands is the primitive object in the world and the time is what the human subject creates through his linking of this object with other items of his experience. Montage is thus, for Eisenstein, in this passage (which must not be confused with Eisenstein's cinematic practice), the manipulation of definite representations to produce images in the mind

14   of the spectator. But now it can be seen that this definition of montage does not contradict representation at all. If we understand by representation the rendering of identities in the world then Eisenstein's account of montage is not opposed to representation but is simply a secondary process which comes after representation. Eisenstein would have montage linking onto representation but not in any sense challenging it. The representation starts from an identity in the world which it re-presents, the montage starts from representations, identities, and combines them to form an image.

Eisenstein's acceptance of representation can be seen in those passages where representation is contrasted with montage. For Eisenstein the opposite to montage is ' Affadavit-exposition ' which he defines as ' *in film terms, representations shot from a single set-up* '.[8] Thus montage is the showing of the same representation from different points of view. And it is from this point that we can begin to challenge Eisenstein's conception of montage. A point of view suggests two things. Firstly a view – something that is seen – and secondly a location from which the view may be had, the sight may be seen. Thus the suggestion is that there are different locations from which we can see. But in all cases the sight remains the same – the activity of representation is not the determining factor in the sight seen but simply the place from where it is seen. The inevitable result of this is that there is something the same which we all see but which appears differently because of our position. But if there is identity; if there is something over and above the views which can be received at different points then this identity must be discernable from some other ' point of view '. And this neutral point of view is exactly the ' representations shot from a single set-up '.

What is at work in Eisenstein's argument is the idea that there is some fixed reality which is available to us from an objective point of view (the single set-up). Montage is simply putting these fixed elements together in such a way that the subject brings forth other elements in his experience – but without any change in the identities, the elements that are being rendered. It is essential to realise that this account leaves both subject and object unchallenged and that montage becomes a kind of super-representation which is more effective at demonstrating the real qualities of the object through the links it can form within the subject. Thus Eisenstein would analyse the Bierce story as the representation of a given set of elements which are first organised in one way then in another. There are, however, no such set of fixed elements in the Bierce story. It is not that there is a set of elements which the reader composes ' in his mind ' but rather that these elements are already determined by the method of representation. What Eisenstein ignores is that the method of representation (the language: verbal or cinematic) determines in its structural activity

(the oppositions which can be articulated) both the places where the object 'appears' and the 'point' from which the object is seen. It is this point which is exactly the place allotted to the reading subject.

A careful analysis of the Bierce story may enable us to discover how montage operates and why that operation is difficult to grasp. We can read three different discourses at work in the Bierce story (a discourse being defined as a set of significant oppositions). The narrative discourse, the discourse of the Sympathetic Stranger and the discourse of the Woman. The question is whether as Eisenstein holds, that the narrative discourse represents simply a woman and a mourning dress. But 'woman' is not some simple identity as Eisenstein would have us believe. Whereas the Sympathetic Stranger identifies woman in terms of religion and state – thus our relationships are determined in heaven and are institutionalised by the state on earth – the Woman determines her own identity as 'woman' in terms of desire and transgression – relationships are formed through the transgressing of the state's institutions and this transgression is linked with a certain sexuality; for relationships between a man and a woman outside the bond of holy matrimony are explicitly sexual. We can now understand that the montage works through a contest between the identities offered by the different discourses. In the Bierce story, the woman's statement jars with what has gone before so that we re-read it – the identifications that we made (that were made for us) are undermined by new ones. What is thrown into doubt is exactly the identity (the nature) of woman and this doubt is achieved through the 'shock' of the woman's statement as the identity already proferred is subverted. It is also clear from this analysis that there is no neutral place from which we can see the view and where all the points are located. There is no possible language of 'affadavit-exposition' that would show the scene 'as it really is'. For how we see the scene will be determined by the way in which we identify 'woman' – and this determination is a feature of the available discourses; the discourses in which 'woman' can figure.

We are still, however, left with the problem of how we can mistake this effect of montage, as I have suggested Eisenstein has done, and the answer to this question can be found in the apparent similarity of the discourses in the Bierce story. For the three discourses are so similar that we can be persuaded to read them as one. All that is missing from the first and second is provided by the third. The third discourse can be read as 'closing' the text. For with the information thus given to us we can read the previous discourses in a 'final' – that is to say *once and for all* – manner. We can fill in the gaps in the first two discourses – see the real identities which are mistaken. But this is to ignore the fact that what is at question in the story are different discourses. Different discourses can be defined as discourses in which different oppo-

sitions are possible. Although at one level – the level of the legal relationship to the body and the grave – both discourses coincide (she *is* or *is not* the wife), at another level there are a set of oppositions of an emotional nature (she *does* or *does not* mourn some man) which the stranger cannot articulate outside the oppositions determined by the legal relationship. Bierce's story, through the coincidences between the discourses on one level, suggests to Eisenstein a set of identities in the world. But the identities rest in the discourses. Thus opposed to Eisenstein's concept of montage resting on the juxtapositions of identities already rendered, we could talk of montage as the effect generated by a conflict of discourse in which the oppositions available in the juxtaposed discourses are contradictory and in conflict.

All this by way of explaining that the classic realist text (a heavily ' closed ' discourse) cannot deal with the real in its contradictions and that in the same movement it fixes the subject in a point of view from which everything becomes obvious. There is, however, a level of contradiction into which the classic realist text can enter. This is the contradiction between the dominant discourse of the text and the dominant ideological discourses of the time. Thus a classic realist text in which a strike is represented as a just struggle in which oppressed workers attempt to gain some of their rightful wealth would be in'contradiction with certain contemporary ideological discourses and as such might be classified as progressive. It is here that subject matter enters into the argument and where we can find the justification for Marx and Engels's praise of Balzac and Lenin's texts on the revolutionary force of Tolstoy's texts which ushered the Russian peasant onto the stage of history. Within contemporary films one could think of the films of Costa-Gavras or such television documentaries as *Cathy Come Home*. What is, however, still impossible for the classic realist text is to offer any perspectives for struggle due to its inability to investigate contradiction. It is thus not surprising that these films tend either to be linked to a social-democratic conception of progress – if we reveal injustices then they will go away – or certain *ouvrieriste* tendencies which tend to see the working class, outside any dialectical movement, as the simple possessors of truth. It is at this point that Brecht's demand that literary and artistic productions be regarded as social events gains its force. The contradictions between the dominant discourse in a classic realist text and the dominant ideological discourses at work in a society are what provide the criteria for discriminating within the classic realist text. And these criteria will often resolve themselves into questions of subject-matter. That this tends to leave open any question about the eternal values of art is not something that should worry us. As Brecht remarks: ·

' To be frank, I do not set such an excessively high value on the

concept of endurance. How can we foresee whether future
generations will wish to preserve the memory of these figures
[*figures created by Balzac or Tolstoy*]? (Balzac and Tolstoy
will scarcely be in a position to oblige them to do so, however
ingenious the methods with which they set their plots in motion.)
I suspect it will depend on whether it will be a socially relevant
statement if someone says: " That " (and " that " will refer to
a contemporary) " is a Père Goriot character ". Perhaps such
characters will not survive? Perhaps they precisely arose in a
cramping web of relations of a type which will no longer exist.'[9]
(XIX, 308-9)

Moments of subversion and strategies of subversion

' The practical methods of the revolution are not revolutionary,
they are dictated by the class struggle. It is for this reason that
great writers find themselves ill at ease in the class struggle,
they behave as though the struggle was already finished, and they
deal with the new situation, conceived as collectivist, which is the
aim of the revolution. The revolution of the great writers is
permanent.'[10] (XVIII, 16)

In the last issue of *Screen* we published Franco Fortini's text on
' The Writer's Mandate ' which took the position that art is that
area which deals with the irreconcilable contradictions of life over
and beyond the particular contradictions of the class struggle and
of their successful resolution in the revolution. It was suggested
in the Editorial that, in order to avoid a fall into romantic and
ultra-left positions, these irreconcilable differences had to be
theorised within the scientific concepts offered to us by psycho-
analysis. Freud's theory is a theory of the construction of the
subject: the entry of the small infant into language and society
and the methods by which it learns what positions, as subject, it
can take up. This entry into the symbolic (the whole cultural space
which is structured, like language through a set of differences and
oppositions) is most easily traced in the analytic situation
through that entry which is finally determining for the infant –
the problem of sexual difference. Freud's insight is that the un-
problematic taking up of the position of the subject entails the
repression of the whole mechanism of the subject's construction.
The subject is seen as the founding source of meanings – unprob-
lematically standing outside an articulation in which it is, in fact,
defined. This view of the subject as founding source is philo-
sophically encapsulated in Descartes' *cogito*: I think, therefore I
am – the I in simple evidence to itself provides a moment of pure
presence which can found the enterprise of analysing the world.
Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, has read Freud as
reformulating the Cartesian *cogito* and destroying the subject as
source and foundation – Lacan rewrites the *cogito*, in the light

of Freud's discoveries as: I think where I am not and I am where I do not think. We can understand this formulation as the indicating of the fundamental misunderstanding (*méconnaissance*) which is involved in the successful use of language (or any other area of the symbolic which is similarly structured) in which the subject is continually ignored as being caught up in a process of articulation to be taken as a fixed place founding the discourse. The unconscious is that effect of language which escapes the conscious subject in the distance between the act of signification in which the subject passes from signifier to signifier and what is signified in which the subject finds himself in place as, for example, the pronoun ' I '. The importance of phenomena like verbal slips is that they testify to the existence of the unconscious through the distance between what was said and what the conscious subject intended to say. They thus testify to the distance between the subject of the act of signification and the conscious subject (the ego). In this distance there is opened a gap which is the area of desire. What is essential to all of those psychic productions which Freud uses in the analytic interpretation is that they bear witness to the lack of control of the conscious subject over his discourses. The mechanisms of the unconscious can indeed be seen as the mechanisms of language. Condensation is the work of metaphor which brings together two signifieds under one signifier and displacement is the constant process along the signifying chain. The ego is constantly caught in this fundamental misunderstanding (*méconnaissance*) about language in which from an illusory present it attempts to read only one signified as present in the metaphor and attempts to bring the signifying chain to an end in a perpetually deferred present.

The relationship between the unconscious and desire, the subject and language is concisely summarised by Lacan in the following passage:

' There is not *an* unconscious because then there would be an
unconscious desire which was obtuse, heavy, caliban like, even
animal like, an unconscious desire lifted up from the depths which
would be primitive and would have to educate itself to the
superior level of consciousness. Completely on the contrary there
is desire because there is unconsciousness (*de l'inconscient*) –
that's to say language which escapes the subject in its structure
and in its effects and there is always at the level of language
something which is beyond consciousness and it is there that one
can situate the function of desire.'[11]

It is clear that the classic realist text, as defined above, guarantees the position of the subject exactly outside any articulation – the whole text works on the concealing of the dominant discourse as articulation – instead the dominant discourse presents itself exactly as the presentation of objects to the reading subject.

But within the classic realist text the dominant discourse can
be subverted, brought into question – the position of the subject
may be rendered problematic. If we return to our original example
of George Eliot we can see this process of subversion at work in
Daniel Deronda. Within the text there is a discourse, the writings
of Mordecai in Hebrew which are unmastered by the dominant
discourse. The text tells us that they are untranslatable and thus
that there is an area outside the text's control. This area is
exactly the area of the mother-tongue (Daniel's mother is Jewish)
and this mother-tongue subverts the assured positions of both the
characters in the text and the reading subject. My business here
is not to give a full analysis of George Eliot's work but rather to
indicate the possibility of *moments* within a classical realist text
which subvert it and its evident status for subject and object. We
are relatively fortunate in already possessing this kind of analysis
within the cinema in the *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s reading of John
Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*.[12] These *moments* are those elements
which escape the control of the dominant discourse in the same
way as a neurotic symptom or a verbal slip attest to the lack of
control of the conscious subject. They open up another area than
that of representation – of subject and object caught in an eternal
paralysed fixity – in order to investigate the very movement of
articulation and difference – the movement of desire. (It is these
moments which have been privileged by Roland Barthes and the
Tel Quel group over the last few years and which have been
theorised through the evaluative concept of text.)[13] Over and above
these *moments* of subversion, however, there are what one
might call *strategies* of subversion. Instead of a dominant dis-
course which is transgressed at various crucial moments we can
find a systematic refusal of any such dominant discourse. One
of the best examples of a cinema which practices certain strategies
of subversion are the films of Roberto Rossellini. In *Germany Year
Zero*, for example, we can locate a multitude of ways in which
the reading subject finds himself without a position from which
the film can be regarded. Firstly, and most importantly, the
fact that the narrative is not priviliged in any way with regard
to the characters' discourses. The narrative does not produce for
us the knowledge with which we can then judge the truth of
those discourses. Rather than the narrative providing us with
knowledge – it provides us with various settings. Just as in
Brecht the ' fable ' serves simply as a procedure to produce the
various *gests*, so in Rossellini the story simply provides a frame-
work for various scenes which then constitute the picture of Ger-
many in year zero. (It might be remarked that this unimportance
of narrative is even more strongly marked in *Francesco Guillare
di Dio*, where the device of introducing the various tableaux with-
out narrative connection is more evident.) Indeed the narrative of
Germany Year Zero can be seen as a device to introduce the final

gest of Edmund's suicide – and in this it closely resembles the first reel of Brecht's own *Kuhle Wampe*. Secondly, Rossellini's narrative introduces many elements which are not in any sense resolved and which deny the possibility of regarding the film as integrated through a dominant discourse. The Allied soldiers, the street kids, the landlord, the Teacher's house – all these provide elements which stretch outside the narrative of the film and deny its dominance.

The result of these two strategies is that the characters themselves cannot be identified in any final way. Instead of their discourses, clothes, mannerisms being the punctual expressions of an identity fixed by the narrative – each element is caught up in a complex set of differences. The whole problematic of inside and outside which preoccupies the classic realist text is transformed into a series of relationships in which word, dress, action and gesture interact to provide a never-finished series of significant differences which is the character.

It may be objected that it is deliberately perverse to tear Rossellini away from realism with which he has been firmly connected both through his own statements and through critical reception. The realist element in Rossellini is not simply located in the subject matter, the traditional criterion of realism, for I have already argued that the subject matter is a secondary condition for realism. What typifies the classic realist text is the way the subject matter is ordered and articulated rather than its origins. To deal with the facts of the world is, in itself, not only a realist but also a materialist viewpoint. The materialist, however, must regard these materials as ordered within a certain mode of production, within which they find their definition. And it is here that one could begin to isolate that element of realist ideology which does figure in Rossellini's films as a certain block. If the reading subject is not offered any certain mode of entry into what is presented on the screen, he is offered a certain mode of entry to the screen itself. For the facts presented by the camera, if they are not ordered in fixed and final fashion amongst themselves, *are* ordered in themselves. The camera, in Rossellini's films is not articulated as part of the productive process of the film. What it shows is in some sense beyond argument and it is here that Rossellini's films show the traditional realist weakness of being unable to deal with contradiction. In *Viva l'Italia* the glaring omission of the film is the absence of Cavour. It is wrong to attack this omission on purely political grounds for it is an inevitable result of a certain lack of questioning of the camera itself. Garibaldi can be contrasted with Francisco II of Naples because their different conceptions of the world are so specifically tied to different historical eras that the camera can cope with their contradictions within an historical perspective. Here is the way the world is now – there is the way the world was then. But to introduce Cavour would

involve a simultaneous contradiction – a class contradiction. At this point the camera itself, as a neutral agent, would become impossible. For it would have to offer two present contradictory articulations of the world and thus reveal its own presence. This cannot happen within a Rossellini film where if we are continually aware of our presence in the cinema (particularly in his historical films) – that presence itself is not questioned in any way. We are not allowed any particular position to read the film but we are allowed the position of a reader – an unproblematic viewer – an eternally human nature working on the material provided by the camera.

A possible way of advancing on Rossellini's practice (there are no obvious films which have marked such an advance although some of Godard's early films might be so considered) would be to develop the possibility of articulating contradiction. Much in the way that James Joyce in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* investigated the contradictory ways of articulating reality through an investigation of the different forms of language, one could imagine a more radical strategy of subversion than that practised by Rossellini in which the possibilities of the camera would be brought more clearly into play. What would mark such a cinema and indeed any cinema of subversion would be that feature quoted by Brecht at the beginning of this section – the fact that it would be ill at ease in the class struggle, always concerned with an area of contradiction beyond the necessity of the present revolution – the ineliminable contradictions of the sexes, the eternal struggle between Desire and Law, between articulation and position.

A possible category: the revolutionary text

' Socialist emulation forms individuals in a different way and produces different individuals. Then there is the further question whether it is anyway as individuating a process as the capitalist competitive struggle ' (XIX, 310).[14]

' It is precisely this sharp opposition between work and leisure, which is peculiar to the capitalist mode of production, that separates all intellectual activity into those activities which serve work and those activities which serve leisure. And those that serve leisure are organised into a system for the reproduction of the labour force. Distractions must not contain anything which is contained in work. Distractions, in the interest of production, are committed to non-production. Naturally, it is not thus that one can create a style of life which forms a unique and coherent whole. And this cannot be put down to the fact that art is dragged into the productive process, but to the fact that it is incompletely involved in the productive process and that it must create an island of " non-production ". The man who buys a ticket transforms himself in front of the screen into an idler and an exploiter (*Ausbeuter*).

Since booty (*Beute*) is placed within him here he is at it were a
victim of im-ploitation (*Einbeutung*) ' (XVIII, 169).[15]

In his article in this issue of *Screen*, Roland Barthes suggests that
revolutionary artists such as Eisenstein and Brecht must, of
necessity, remain within the world of representation. Barthes
throughout his article uses the structure of fetishism as his model
for the structure of representation. Stephen Heath's article in this
issue investigates this comparison at length but it might be useful
to indicate briefly the importance of the concept of fetishism. The
fetish is that object which places the subject in a position of
security outside of that terrifying area of difference opened up
by the perception of the mother's non-possession of the phallus.
Although most popular accounts of fetishism concentrate on the
fetishised objects, it is exemplary for Bathes as a structure which
holds both subject and object in place – it is the fetish above all
that holds the subject in position. What is essential to Barthes'
argument is the idea that the subject must always be the same –
caught in the same position vis-à-vis the world. Within this view a
revolutionary work of art can do no more than provide a correct
representation (provided by the Party) of the world. It may be
helpful to attain this goal to subvert the position of the subject
so that his acceptance of the new representation is facilitated but
finally the revolutionary artist is committed (condemned) to the
world of representation.

Within the framework I have constructed in this article one
could say that the revolutionary artist may practice certain strate-
gies of subversion but must finally content himself with the pro-
duction of a progressive realist text. The question I want to raise
here, and it must be emphasised that it can only be raised, is the
possibility of *another* activity which rather than the simple sub-
version of the subject or the representation of different (and
correct) identities, would consist of the displacement of the sub-
ject within ideology – a different constitution of the subject. It has
been accepted, particularly over the last ten years in France, that
the subject is the crucial concept for a Marxist theory of ideology
– a theory which would attempt to explain the non-coercive ways
in which the capitalist mode of production ensures the repro-
duction of labour power and would also attempt to furnish guide-
lines for the practical tasks in the question of changing ideology –
the whole problem of the cultural revolution. One of the difficulties
of using the subject as such a key term is that it is an ideological
notion which is willy-nilly transformed into a descriptive scientific
concept. The sub-ject – that which under-lies experience – is a
production, very largely, of modern European philosophy from
Descartes to its most sophisticated articulation in the philosophers
of German Idealism.

The main problem facing anyone wishing to articulate a theory

of film within a Marxist theory of ideology is that by and large no such Marxist theory exists. Marx never really returned to the subject after 1846 and none of the other great Marxist theoreticians (with the possible exception of Gramsci) have found the time to devote themselves to the problem. In many ways the starting point of any such investigation must be Louis Althusser's essay on the topic entitled ' Ideology and Ideológical State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation ').[16] In this essay Althusser puts forward and defends the thesis that ideology has no history. By this he does not mean that specific ideologies do not have a history involving both internal and external factors but that the very form of ideology is always the same. Althusser argues that the central and unvarying feature of ideology is that it represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. Ideology is always ' imaginary ' because these representations place the subject in position in his society. In other words ideology always has a place for a founding source outside the real articulations.

Before discussing this thesis directly there are two preliminary points that must be made, which while they do not touch directly on the thesis need to be borne in mind when discussing it. The first, which I have already touched on is that the subject is an ideological notion. Moreover, it is an ideological notion which is tied very closely to the rise of the bourgeoisie. It would be outside the scope of this article and beyond the author's competence to trace the evolution of this notion with any precision. Suffice to say that Cartesian philosophy, Newtonian physics and the grammar of Port-Royal all involve very precisely that notion of a unified subject of experience and that the birth of this notion in the seventeenth century suggests very important links with the growing economic and political domination of the European bourgeoisie — the works of Locke provide perhaps the most obvious example of the need for this category of subject in the justification both of the new science and the new civil order.[17] All this simply by way of a warning of the difficulties of dealing with the notion of the subject.

Secondly it is necessary to realise what an important break Althusser's thesis marks with certain methods of Hegelianising Marx. For Althusser is concerned to attack that view which, seeing ideology as ' merely ' illusory, holds out the promise that the victorious conclusion to the class struggle will result in the arrival of the new and true ideology which will correspond to the real. This view merely incarnates the Hegelian vision that being and consciousness will finally coincide within a simple view of the end of class struggle. It is the proletariat that will realise the beautiful dream of. the real becoming rational and the rational becoming real. Whatever reservations one may have about Althusser's thesis, it is important that they do not involve a slip-

ping back into such a Hegelian model with all the lack of con-
tradiction and struggle that it implies.

To return, however, directly to Althusser's thesis. It seems an
inevitable result of this thesis that art can be allotted no specific
field of action other than its effects on the content of ideology.
As such art remains firmly within the realm of ideology, being
simply one of a number of internal factors within the evolution
of ideologies. This is, of course, quite compatible with classical
Marxist positions on art, but traditional Marxist thought has often
felt itself embarrassed by this simple lumping of art into ideology
– one of the most famous examples of such an embarrassment is
Marx's own attempt to deal with the problem of Greek art. There
is, however, another way in which this problem can be approached
and it is suggested by Brecht's remark on the position of the
spectator in the cinema (quoted at the beginning of this section)
and by much of Brecht's theory and practice. Here one would have
to deny both Althusser's (and Marx's) thesis that ideology has no
history and at the same time delimit a special area of activity
which is neither that of science nor that of ideology. This activity
might be characterised by its ability actually to work on and trans-
form the very form of ideology – to change the position of the
subject within ideology.

What Brecht suggests in his comments on the spectator in the
cinema is that the very position offered to the spectator is one
that guarantees the necessary re-production of labour power. It is
the cinema's ability to place the spectator in the position of a
unified subject that ensures the contradiction between his working
activity which is productive and the leisure activity in which he is
constantly placed as consumer. Althusser makes the very important
point in his essay that ideology is not a question of ideas circulat-
ing in people's heads but is inscribed in certain material practices.
The reactionary practice of the cinema is that which involves this
petrification of the spectator in a position of pseudo-dominance
offered by the metalanguage. This metalanguage, resolving as it
does all contradictions, places the spectator outside the realm of
contradiction and of action – outside of production.

Two films which suggest a way of combating this dominance
of the metalanguage, without falling into an agnostic position
vis-à-vis all discourses (which would be the extreme of a sub-
versive cinema – intent merely on disrupting any position of the
subject) are Kuhle Wampe (the film in which Brecht participated)
and Godard-Gorin's Tout Va Bien. In both films the narrative is
in no way privileged as against the characters. Rather the narra-
tive serves simply as the method by which various situations can
be articulated together. The emphasis is on the particular scenes
and the knowledge that can be gained from them rather than the
providing of a knowledge which requires no further activity –
which just is there on the screen. Indeed the presentation of the

individual's discourses is never stripped away from the character's actions but is involved in them. Whether it is a question of the petit-bourgeois and the workers discussing the waste of coffee in the S-Bahn or the various monologues in *Tout Va Bien* – it is not a question of the discourses being presented as pure truth content which can be measured against the truth provided by the film. Rather the discourses are caught up in certain modes of life which are linked to the place of the agent in the productive process. The unemployed workers know that waste is an inevitable part of the capitalist process because they experience it every day in their search for work. Equally the workers in the meat factory know that the class struggle is not finished for they experience the exploitation of their labour in such concrete details as the time that is allowed them to go to the toilet. The film does not provide this knowledge ready-made in a dominant discourse but in the contradictions offered, the reader has to produce a meaning for the film (it is quite obvious in films of this sort that the meaning produced will depend on the class-positions of the reader). It is this emphasis on the reader as producer (more obvious in *Tout Va Bien* which is in many ways more Brechtian than *Kuhle Wampe*) which suggests that these films do not just offer a different representation for the subject but a different set of relations to both the fictional material and ' reality '.

Very briefly this change could be characterised as the introduction of time (history) into the very area of representation so that it is included within it. It is no accident that both films end with this same emphasis on time and its concomitant change. ' But who will change the world ' (*Kuhle Wampe*) – ' We must learn to live historically ' (*Tout Va Bien*) – this emphasis on time and change embodied both within the film and in the position offered to the reader suggests that a revolutionary socialist ideology might be different in form as well as content. It also throws into doubt Barthes' thesis that revolutionary art is finally caught in the same space of representation that has persisted for 2,000 years in the West. This monolithic conception of representation ignores the fact that post-Einsteinian physics offers a conception of representation in which both subject and object are no longer caught in fixed positions but caught up in time.   ∟

It might be thought that this possibility of change, of transformation – in short, of production – built into the subject-object relation (which could no longer be characterised in this simple fashion) simply reduplicates the Hegelian error of final reconciliation between the orders of being and consciousness. But this is not so in so far as this possibility of change built into the relation does not imply the inevitable unfolding of a specific series of changes but simply the possibility of change – an area of possible transformations contained within the relation.

It seems that some such account must be offered if one wishes

to allow the possibility of a revolutionary art. Otherwise it seems inevitable that art can simply be progressive or subversive and Brecht's whole practice would be a marriage of the two, in which subversive effects were mechanically used simply to aid the acceptance of the progressive content of his work.

A definite category: Reactionary art

' It is our metaphysicians of the press, our partisans of " art "
who would like more emphasis on " fate " in human processes.
For a long time now fate, which was once a sublime notion, has
been nothing more than a mediocre received idea: by reconciling
himself to his condition, man arrives at that such longed for
" transfiguration " and " interiorisation ". It is equally a pure
notion of the class struggle: one class " determines " the fate of
the other ' (XVIII, 169-70).[18]

One fashionable way of receiving and recuperating Brecht, which has been at work since the beginning of the Cold War, is to see him as a satirist ridiculing his contemporary society and the excesses of capitalism and fascism. This approach negates the productive element in Brecht's work and turns the techniques for the production of alienation effects into pure narcissistic signals of an ' intellectual ' work of ' art '. A very typical example of this vulgarisation and de-politicisation of Brecht can be seen in Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man!* An explicitly Brechtian film – the loosely connected scenes are counter-pointed by the Alan Price songs – the film pretends to offer a tableau of England in 1973 much as *Tout Va Bien* attempts to offer a tableau of France in 1972. But whereas in the French film the tableaux are used to reflect the contradictions within the society – the different articulations of reality – in the English film the tableaux are all used to express a stereotyped reality of England which the spectator is invited to enjoy from his superior position. The scenes may seem to be dominant over the reality revealed by the narrative but as the film progresses along its endless development it becomes obvious that the narrative simply confirms the evident truths which are offered to us on the screen. And these truths turn out to be that endless message of the reactionary petit-bourgeois intellectual – that we can do nothing against the relentless and evil progress of society (run as it is by a bunch of omnipotent capitalists with the morality of gangsters) except note our superiority to it. A longer analysis of the film might well be in order were it not for the fact that Walter Benjamin had already written the definitive critique of this particularly impoverished artistic strategy. It is perhaps a testament to the paucity of petit-bourgeois imagination in the era of monopoly capitalism that what Benjamin wrote forty years ago about the satirical poet Erich Kästner can be applied word for word to *O Lucky Man!* It is for this reason that the Benjamin article is included in this issue on Brecht.

Notes

1. SC p 93. For explanation of annotation used for Brecht's works see note 2.
2. If the quotation is from Brecht then I simply give the volume and page number of the German edition in the text and the French page numbers which are taken from the volumes published in 1970 as *Sur le Réalisme* (SR) and *Sur le Cinéma* (SC) in the footnotes. If the piece was included in the recent translations of Brecht in issue 84 of *New Left Review* then I add a third figure after the initials NLR.
3. SR p 98, NLR p 45.
4. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, London 1967, pp 432-433.
5. SR p 77.
6. Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, London 1968, pp 14-15.
7. *ibid* p 20.
8. *ibid* p 37.
9. SR pp 99-100, NLR p 46.
10. SC p 25.
11. Jacques Lacan *Lettres de L'Ecole Freudienne*, vol 1 p 45 (Quoted on p 253 of *Qu'est-ce que le structuralism*, ed F Wahl, Paris 1968).
12. *Screen* v 13 n 3, Autumn 1972.
13. See Roland Barthes 'De l'œuvre au texte' *Revue d'esthétique* 1971 and *Le Plaisir du texte*, Paris 1973.
14. SR p 101, NLR p 47.
15. SC pp 178-179.
16. In *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, NLB, London 1971.
17. This precise locating of the notion of the subject in the seventeenth century can, of course, be contested. Althusser, himself, uses examples from the Christian religion and from the Pentateuch which accords with his view of the category of the subject as eternal within ideology. All I wish to indicate in this passage is that it is not obvious that the subject can be used with the degree of confidence that Althusser assumes.
18. SC p 179.