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The Aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema

Simon John Lewis

PhD

2012

The Aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema

Simon John Lewis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the University
of Northumbria at Newcastle for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema

This thesis seeks to develop an aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema. Whilst a significant amount of critical work has been undertaken on spectacle within the context of narrative theory, little attention has been paid to defining and analysing spectacle in itself and its place in the cinematic experience. Not only does this mean that a pervasive concept in film studies is left poorly defined and unconsidered, it also hampers an understanding of the nature of the cinematic experience itself.

The central question addressed by the thesis is ‘What is the role of spectacle in the cinematic experience, with particular reference to mainstream cinema?’ This involves a consideration of the ways in which spectacle has been treated in theoretical terms to date. In particular, the contribution of cognitive approaches is critically assessed with a view to establishing a more inclusive framework that recognises the experiential nature of cinematic spectacle. In the light of this, the thesis proposes a new critical model for understanding spectacle, one based on a notion of transmission which presents narrative and spectacle as coexistent within the cinematic experience rather than as antithetical qualities. As another aspect of this, the thesis considers the historical development of spectacle in the context of spectatorship at the time of early cinema at the end of the nineteenth century.

The latter part of the thesis applies its definition of spectacle to specific elements of the cinematic experience, namely the use of technology and *mise-en-scene*. It thereby engages with the aesthetics of spectacle within particular contexts and conditions. This exercise makes it clear that far from being a marginalised element, as suggested by current narrative-centred film theory, spectacle is central to the cinematic experience.

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Acknowledgements

The origins of this thesis lie in the dissertation I undertook as part of a Master's degree in Film Studies at the University of Northumbria between 2002 and 2004. That dissertation, on the position of Computer Generated Imagery in the context of the development of film theory, provided the spark for the larger study of spectacle undertaken in this thesis. As such, I am indebted to Professor Peter Hutchings, the course leader for the MA and my principal supervisor since, for his patience, generosity and encouragement during the preparation of this thesis, for our many enlightening (to me at least) discussions, for his encyclopaedic knowledge of film which has on many occasions set me on the right track and for his exacting and rigorous approach from which this thesis has benefited beyond measure.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Name: Simon John Lewis

Signature:

Date: 6 January 2012

Introduction: The aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema

In his essay on the historical dimensions of Hollywood blockbusters, Steve Neale notes that spectacle “has proved notoriously resistant to analysis”. He goes on to advance a definition himself, suggesting tentatively that spectacle might be defined as “presentational prowess”, a definition which, whilst it has the merit of being short and to the point, may beg more questions than it answers (Neale, 2003, p.54). Lavik reflects that spectacle “has probably been one of the key terms within film studies over the last couple of years. Sadly, it is also highly confusing” (Lavik, 2008, p.169). Brown notes that spectacle “has become a term often cited but rarely probed, and even more rarely defined” (Brown, 2008, p.157). Why is this the case?

As Neale’s observation above suggests, attempts have been made to advance fairly generalised definitions of spectacle, but there has been little analysis of what the concept means and how spectacle affects the cinematic experience. Laura Mulvey famously defined spectacle as “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 2004, p.841) and Neale suggests “a system which is especially concerned...to *display* the visibility of the visible” (emphasis in original) (Neale, 1979, p.66). Geoff King, in his book-length analysis of narrative and spectacle in Hollywood cinema, proposes “the production of images at which we might wish to stop and stare” (King, 2000, p.4). All of these definitions suggest the conscious construction of a display by the film, a moment or sequence in which the film shows something to the spectator which is, at least implicitly, of a different order or nature to the rest of the film. Precisely what that difference is or how spectacle achieves its effect remains unexplored. It is often at this point that commentators will refer to the difficulties of analysis, or suggest that spectacle “encompasses too many elements to be usefully discussed in overarching terms” (Brown, 2008, p.157) or that “it denotes a wealth of phenomena whose common features are hard to make out” (Lavik, 2008, p.170). Neale and Brown in their respective essays tackle spectacle in quite specific contexts – *Triumph of the Will* in Neale’s case and *Gone with the Wind* in Brown’s – but so far there has been no systematic attempt to define and analyse spectacle in the context of mainstream cinema as a whole

and to consider what this analysis can tell us about the spectator's cinematic experience.

Spectacle is a concept which often features in discussions of aspects of mainstream cinema, particularly narrative issues, but which is never fully defined or analysed and in some cases is simply referred to without any further explanation at all. Implicit in many of these discussions is the assumption that spectacle is somehow the opposite of narrative, that these are concepts which are almost mutually exclusive. Neale refers to the point at which "the narrative starts to freeze and spectacle takes over" (Neale, 1983, p.12) and Wood, in reviewing discussions of the effect of digitally-enhanced spectacular sequences, notes that: "Instead of providing coherence and unity in the narrative, the exaggerated spaces of spectacle make no obvious contribution to the progression of the narrative, as they seem only to draw attention to themselves as surface, an excess that distracts from temporal flow" (Wood, 2002, p.372). These assumptions are so ingrained that they permeate the vocabulary used to debate the issue of spectacle and narrative itself, primarily by insisting that spectacle and narrative are entirely separate concepts.

Spectacle is an important component of mainstream cinema. However one seeks to define it, clearly it appears in many films. Some commentators suggest, as discussed in Chapter One, that it has in fact become the central component of most Hollywood blockbuster productions. Narrative and psychological complexity of characterisation has declined, it is argued, and in its place we see a series of empty spectacles strung together by a largely vestigial narrative whose only purpose is to move the film from one spectacle to the next. If that really is the case then it would seem even more important to understand the precise nature of spectacle, how it affects the spectator's cinematic experience and what this tells us about the nature of that experience itself. Is spectacle just the car crash, the explosion, the high speed chase, or is it also something else? What, in short, is its purpose?

As I will demonstrate in Chapter One, in fact spectacle has been approached by film studies on a number of occasions, but never fully or properly debated. Early theorists such as Munsterberg, Eisenstein (in his theoretical writings) and Bazin were aware that spectacle existed but chose not to concentrate upon it, almost taking for granted the intrinsic power of the cinematic image. Spectacle and its emotional impact were assumed to be an integral part of the cinematic image but its precise operation in this context was never explored. Later theorists such as Mulvey saw spectacle (which she called visual pleasure) as a positively disruptive element escaping the unifying force of the narrative, which sought to contain it and, to a large degree, usually succeeded. This idea of spectacle as a dangerous threat to narrative dominance persisted into the Neoformalist-based approach and indeed any model of the cinematic experience which takes narrative as its central aspect must in the end confront the issue of spectacle which remains a vague and ill-defined concept and, for that very reason, hard to accommodate.

Investigating the nature and effect of spectacle is therefore more than idle curiosity: as this thesis will show, spectacle is a fundamental part of the cinematic experience, perhaps more fundamental than has been appreciated up to now. As Rushton has observed in the context of a discussion of absorption and theatricality in the cinema: “narrative and spectacle are intertwined in complex ways, so that dividing them as polar opposites is ultimately a reductive and unproductive project for film studies” (Rushton, 2007, p.109). Grindon goes further and suggests that the assumptions underlying the term “spectacle” “have created obstacles to the study of the film image” (Grindon, 1994, p.35). Given the prominence that has been afforded to spectacle in film studies, particularly in recent years, it must be of benefit to ongoing considerations of the cinematic experience to attempt a proper definition of spectacle capable of critical analysis.

Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to provide a model for understanding spectacle in aesthetic terms. A way to achieve this is, first, to define precisely what is meant by “spectacle” in the context of mainstream cinema. It is, however, necessary to go further in order to provide a context for this

definition and to test it against specific elements of the cinematic experience. In order to understand how spectacle contributes to the spectator's cinematic experience, we need to look at the various ways in which it actually manifests itself on the screen. If we can arrive at a workable definition of spectacle, what happens when we apply that definition to the cinematic experience? This thesis therefore seeks to address what is currently a significant gap in film theory: to provide a working definition of spectacle that is capable of proper critical analysis and then to apply that definition to aspects of the cinematic experience so as to begin to sketch out an aesthetics of spectacle in the mainstream cinema.

Setting the scene: spectatorship and cognitivism (and beyond)

In order to undertake the exercise proposed in this thesis it is in fact necessary first to take several steps back, to strip away the accumulated layers of theory and start afresh. It is immediately apparent when commencing this exercise that the very terms used to describe the concepts that are being considered rest upon a number of assumptions about the separate and apparently opposed notions of spectacle and narrative, as described above. Consequently, it is necessary to approach this issue from a fresh perspective, adopting a model which does not incorporate pre-existing assumptions about narrative and spectacle and revisiting early film theories which do not carry historical baggage about narrative and spectacle and their relationship.

Spectacle as a concept clearly cannot be studied in isolation from its historical context. Any term used over a significant period of time is likely to find its precise definition being altered to suit the prevailing theoretical and ideological conditions. Added to this, as will be discussed in more detail in the main body of the thesis, what is considered to be spectacular alters regularly over the years, affected by both technological change and one of the basic drivers for the development of spectacle: the need to find something novel which the spectator has not experienced before. It is therefore necessary to examine spectacle in its historical context as well as its theoretical development. Historicizing spectacle will point not only to development in

terms of novelty driving change but also to continuity in terms of the basic characteristics of spectacle. The precise delineation of what constitutes a spectacular sequence may alter from one period to the next, but the basic nature of spectacle itself and the function that it performs does not.

Considering the historical development of spectacle also assists in understanding issues of spectatorship and in proposing a model of spectatorship that accommodates spectacle. What spectacle is and how it communicates with the spectator reveals much about the nature of spectatorship and the developing characteristics of the spectator, from the passive observer predicated by more traditional concepts of spectatorship in the arts and the ideologically focussed model proposed by Apparatus theory to the emotionally engaged and active participant suggested by Crary's reformulation in *Techniques of the Observer* (Crary, 1990) and an examination of the social and cultural changes that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. Early cinema allows us to examine a model of spectatorship where narrative was not considered to be necessarily paramount, and to set this example against the theoretical propositions advanced in Chapter One so as to construct a definition of spectacle that does not assume that film is narrative-centred and which can be accommodated into a model of spectatorship that allows for the actively engaged spectator. Consequently, a detailed consideration of spectacle allows us also to reconsider issues of spectatorship and to propose a revised model of spectatorship which can cater for spectacle and which, I suggest, more accurately reflects the affective, involved and emotionally-centred experience of cinema.

This approach highlights the methodology adopted in the thesis: to establish a theoretical contextualisation of spectacle and an historical model which supplies the specific conditions giving rise to spectacle and to review these consecutively, showing how one interacts with the other. This draws out not only the essential characteristics of spectacle but also the nature of the interaction of spectacle with the spectator, emphasising the emotional engagement and response which spectacle seeks to elicit.

It is inevitable in considering the issue of spectacle from a theoretical perspective that it is necessary to engage with what is currently the most influential work in the field of narrative study, David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985). This work advanced a narrative-centred model based upon what has been termed Neoformalism, adopting a cognitively-based approach and utilising principles adapted by Bordwell from Russian Formalism. As such, any attempt to define spectacle must address the cogent arguments that Bordwell has advanced in *Narration in the Fiction Film* and elsewhere, not only in terms of the narrative-centred model that he has proposed, but also the extent to which cognitive theory is adequate to accommodate the revised definition of spectacle which is proposed in the thesis. Consequently, in terms of the methodology adopted, the third aspect arising from the definition of spectacle that needs to be considered, after the theoretical and historical contextualisation, is the extent to which Bordwell's model and cognitive film theory can deal adequately with the issues raised by the revised definition of spectacle or whether it is necessary to move beyond these and seek a more radical approach. I will seek to argue that whilst cognitive film theory has done much valuable work in analysing the mental processes involved in the spectator's cinematic experience, it has reached something of a dead end in the context of the issues I am considering in that the increasingly detailed models of mental activity now being proposed run the risk of erecting barriers between the spectator's experience and the model which obscures the visceral impact of that experience. Again, a fresh approach is needed and in fact that involves taking a step back and re-examining those early film theories that were not hampered by pre-existing concepts of narrative and spectacle and filtering these through an approach which straddles critical analysis and film theory. Frampton's *Filmosophy* is proposed as the basis for this new approach.

Having arrived at a working definition of spectacle, it is then necessary to apply that definition to certain aspects of the cinematic experience since, in Brown's terms, having defined spectacle we then need to probe it. There are any number of elements of the cinematic experience that could be examined,

and I have suggested a number in the Conclusions to this thesis, but the two that I have concentrated upon are technology and mise-en-scene. The first was chosen because technology is so often equated with spectacle and a study of the relationship between technology and spectacle provides a tightly-focussed and historically specific area to examine. In contrast the issue of mise-en-scene and how it relates to spectacle offers the opportunity to look at how spectacle operates in a far wider context, relating to the organisation of all elements of the cinematic image. In both cases a number of conclusions can be drawn about the way in which spectacle manifests itself in film and the particular forms it adopts in certain circumstances which shed light on the larger issue of the spectator's relationship with the film itself.

Consequently, I will argue that the formulation of a robust definition of spectacle and the beginnings of an aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema will not only finally clarify this important concept, it will also shed light on the nature of narrative and its place in the cinematic experience and it will transform our understanding of the nature of the cinematic experience itself by highlighting how the central element of that experience is the spectator's visceral, affective engagement with the film.

The subjective approach and mainstream cinema

In Chapters Four and Five of this thesis, which deal with the application of the definition of spectacle so as to sketch out the beginnings of an aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema, I am aware that I am seeking to suggest how a spectator might emotionally or otherwise respond to a spectacular sequence. I do not in such cases pretend to know how any particular spectator would actually respond (other than myself of course) and I have not sought to suggest that I have reviewed studies of audience responses to films. Given that any consideration of spectacle must, however, delve into the area of the experiential and that the response to a spectacular sequence must to a degree be subjective, it is inevitable that on occasion I have to suggest that certain other approaches to the spectator's experience of watching a film may not adequately cater for the full complexity and diversity of that experience. In

doing so I can only rely on what I feel to be the case, acknowledging that the spectator to which I refer throughout this thesis is an abstract. Having said this, spectacle is experiential in nature and it is legitimate to consider that previous approaches such as the psychoanalytically-based models of the 1970s have themselves been largely abstract rather than experiential when it comes to the question of how the spectator interacts with the film. Even cognitive film theory has a tendency towards the abstract, as explored in Chapter Three. A proper understanding of spectacle will, I argue, assist in allowing for a greater acceptance of the experiential and subjective nature of the spectator's experience than perhaps has been the case since the early days of film theory.

I have confined my study of spectacle for the purposes of this thesis to mainstream cinema. I have chosen mainstream cinema as opposed to any other form for a number of reasons. First, this is to avoid the area of study from becoming too amorphous and extensive and to permit a degree of focus. Secondly, it is within the context of mainstream cinema that most of the debates about narrative and spectacle have taken place and consequently where it is easiest to contextualise these debates and to give them proper consideration. Finally, mainstream cinema, as its name suggests, accounts for the majority of films actually produced, and the purpose of this thesis is to construct an aesthetics of spectacle that has the widest possible application. This is not, of course, to suggest that it cannot be applied elsewhere.

I define mainstream cinema as commercially produced mass entertainment cinema as opposed to, for example, avant garde cinema. It is not necessarily limited to fiction film; indeed, as mentioned above, one of the few considered studies of spectacle available is Neale's review of *Triumph of the Will*. It may well be fruitful to extend the working definition of spectacle beyond mainstream cinema in any event, and this is suggested as an area of further study in the Conclusions. Mainstream cinema is often equated with the films made in Hollywood, or by companies inevitably associated with Hollywood. This is not necessarily the case, of course, and the rise of films from across the world that could reasonably be classed as mainstream cinema

demonstrates that the hegemony previously enjoyed by Hollywood in that regard is now probably at an end. To take one example out of many, the vast number of films produced by the Indian film industry can clearly be described as mainstream cinema in India. In order to maintain a degree of focus in this thesis I have tended to concentrate on those films which have been made by the film industry based in Hollywood or adopting the characteristics of mainstream film most often associated with Hollywood film production. Again, a fruitful area of enquiry would be to consider the extent to which cultural differences affect what is considered to be spectacle in other parts of the world. Is spectacle the same in Bollywood as it is in Hollywood?

Structure of thesis

As indicated above, this thesis is structured around the creation of a working definition of spectacle and the application of that definition to certain elements of the cinematic experience. Consequently, the thesis is divided up into five chapters, as set out below.

Chapter One: The Other – Spectacle and Film Theory

This chapter provides a literature review, considering the extent to which film theory has either engaged or failed to engage with the concept of spectacle. The present position of spectacle in theoretical terms as a marginalised and dangerous concept is examined, arising from its difficult position in relation to Neoformalist film theory. Consideration is also given to the Neoformalist concept of excess and its relationship to spectacle is reviewed. It is proposed that in order to allow a proper consideration of spectacle the existing approach to the fundamental process that film undertakes should be revised so as to avoid current preconceptions about spectacle and narrative and their relationship to each other. The transmission model is suggested and its implications explored, providing a basis for an approach to defining spectacle that does not see narrative and spectacle as opposing concepts but simply balances between narrational and non-narrational transmission.

Chapter Two: The act of looking – Spectacle and Spectatorship

Chapter Two reviews spectacle in its historical context to assist in developing a model of spectatorship capable of accommodating the idea of transmission and spectacle understood as being far more central to the cinematic experience than existing film theory suggests. Notions of spectatorship are considered with particular emphasis on Apparatus theory and Crary's approach in *Techniques of the Observer*. Early cinema is reviewed as a period when narrative was not seen as central to the cinematic experience. The social and cultural changes that affected conditions of spectatorship at the time and the nature of early cinema are considered to propose a revised model of spectatorship. Gunning's Cinema of Attractions is reviewed in this context to reinforce the characteristics of spectatorship now being defined and to link to the model of spectatorship being proposed. This exercise reveals the direct, exhibitionistic and visceral nature of the communication between film and spectator and the strong emotional content inherent in spectacular sequences.

Chapter Three: Emotional intelligence – Spectacle and cognitivism

This chapter considers the extent to which cognitive film theory is able to accommodate spectacle and the transmission model. The development of cognitive film theory is outlined and particular consideration is given to a number of works which deal with film and emotion in a cognitive context. Tan's and Grodal's work is examined in some detail. It is concluded that although cognitivism marks a step closer to the actual experience of spectacle in the cinema than previous theoretical models, it has reached something of a dead end in this regard in that it tends to over-analyse the experiential aspects of film, losing the immediacy of affect which spectacle represents. Frampton's *Filmosophy* is proposed as an alternative. This is considered in detail and it is suggested that the inclusive approach based upon the recognition of the direct emotional communication between film and spectator that Frampton recommends is to be preferred. Spectacle is seen to play a central role in the cinematic experience, being the generation of an emotional response through its direct, exhibitionistic communication with the spectator.

Chapter Four: Formation, Assimilation and Formalism – Spectacle and Technology

Having arrived at a working definition of spectacle in the first three chapters, Chapter Four applies that definition to the relationship between spectacle and three particular facets of technological development in the cinema: colour, widescreen and computer generated imagery (CGI). This allows a historicising of spectacle through an examination of the way that it has manifested itself in the context of these three technologies as each emerged at different points in the history of the cinema. Spectacle is seen to be associated with the presentation of technology at various points in its development, giving rise to what I have called formative spectacle, when the film in which the technology first appears is at least partly structured so as to advertise the technology itself, and formalist spectacle, when the technology becomes visible once more and advertised by the film, but this time in an almost abstract, formalist manner.

Chapter Five: Events and Objects – Spectacle and mise-en-scene

This chapter reviews the relationship between spectacle and mise-en-scene, exploring the differences between the two concepts and how an understanding of the way in which spectacle operates in the context of the mise-en-scene assists in further understanding both spectacle and mise-en-scene itself. It is concluded that mise-en-scene can be seen as the organisation of the transmission communicated by the film and that spectacle is a particular manipulation of that transmission which has the characteristics previously identified. This manifests itself as two primary forms of spectacle which I have called event spectacle and object spectacle. The characteristics of these forms of spectacle are reviewed and the chapter concludes with a detailed case study which demonstrates the simultaneous use of both event and object spectacle.

The Conclusions draw together these various strands, showing how the concept of spectacle in mainstream cinema has journeyed from the marginalised Other of narrative-driven and Neoformalist film theory to a concept that is central to the idea of film as an emotion machine (in Tan's

phrase), directly engaged with the spectator as an active participant in the process. In defining spectacle, a central aspect of the cinematic experience has also been clarified. Spectacle, like narrative, can now be seen as one of a number of resources available to the film to communicate with the spectator. Further areas of study are proposed, both in terms of the application of the definition of spectacle to other elements of the cinematic experience and in widening the enquiry to areas outside the definition of mainstream cinema that I have used in this thesis.

Chapter One

The Other: Spectacle and film theory

1.1 Introduction

When discussing the making of *Tomb Raider* (2001) Simon West, the film's director, is reported to have described the approach that he took as "post-narrative": constructing a film composed entirely of a series of action sequences which dispenses with a plot. Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the film's many scriptwriters, Stephen de Souza, poured scorn on this notion in a subsequent interview (De Souza, 2005). Judging by the many reviews of the film that pointed to the flimsy or nearly incomprehensible storyline, West's ambition seems to have been at least partially realised (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0146316/externalreviews>, no date).

Tomb Raider is one of many films of a similar type turned out by the mainstream cinema, particularly in Hollywood, which Gross has described as the Big Loud Action Movie (appropriately, BLAM for short), perhaps best exemplified by the action films which developed in the 1980s and 1990s and which were criticised for apparently abandoning storyline and psychological character development in favour of increasingly expensive and vacuous action sequences (Gross, 2000, p.3). Arroyo observes that reviewers referred with dismay to the decline in narrative and the increase in "astonishingly witless" films made purely for entertainment (2000, pp. xi, citing Susan Sontag writing in the *Guardian* on 2 March 1996).

West's comments bear closer scrutiny, however, for embedded within them is a series of widely held if tacit assumptions which raise a number of issues about narrative and spectacle in mainstream cinema. What precisely do these terms mean? What is their relationship to each other and has this relationship changed as cinema has developed over the course of its existence? Was there once a cinema which was based upon narrative and which has now been replaced by an action cinema based upon spectacle instead? Is spectacle

solely about action sequences and nothing else? Do action sequences themselves in fact have no narrative content? Underpinning these questions is a much broader and fundamental issue which goes to the nature of cinema itself: what is the function of spectacle in mainstream cinema?

What of those sequences whose primary aim appears to be not the communication of the narrative but an action sequence of some sort or, to put it another way, communication of information not primarily concerned with the narrative element of the film? Describing such sequences as spectacle simply to distinguish them from other sequences where it is clear that the primary aim is to convey narrative information is unsatisfactory since it begs the obvious question: what is spectacle? These are issues that apply equally to films of any era. To take one example out of many, are the establishing shots of Lara Croft's palatial mansion in *Tomb Raider* to be treated in the same way as the fight between Croft and the robot which forms the opening sequence of the film?

Such issues demonstrate the practical difficulty of assigning terms such as narrative and spectacle to elements of any particular film even, or indeed particularly, Hollywood films. Notwithstanding this, a considerable amount of film theory work has been devoted to the study of narration and the narrative process itself. This concentration upon narrative has resulted in many cases in spectacle being marginalized or simply ignored.

In addressing the nature and function of spectacle, it is important to look at what film theory has and has not said about spectacle. This will involve an engagement not only with current thinking on this issue but also with earlier work which sheds light on the historical development of this subject.

The logical starting point for this review is to examine what is currently the most influential theory of the use and function of narrative, formulated by David Bordwell in his book *Narration in the Fiction Film* and which has come to be known as Neoformalism (Bordwell, 1985). It is, however, necessary to look at Neoformalism in the context of the theories that preceded

it and against which it was reacting. As Tredell has pointed out, film theory does not proceed like scientific theory, with each new development wiping out the previous approach (2002, p.10). Earlier theories remain valid and indeed often the source for reflection upon theoretical issues many years after they have apparently been superseded. This review will therefore go on to consider both certain elements of classical film theory which engage directly with the characteristics of the cinematic image, particularly those of Munsterberg, Arnheim, Eisenstein (in his theoretical writings) and Bazin and those psychoanalytical theories that have sought to tackle the issue of spectacle. As will be demonstrated, even those classical theories that focussed on the nature of the cinematic image rather than narrative are haunted by the idea of spectacle whilst avoiding the need to address directly the issues raised by its presence. In contrast, narrative-centred theories such as Laura Mulvey's, as described in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", and Bordwell's Neoformalism turn spectacle into a threatening Other by virtue of their concentration upon narrative as the driving force of the film leading them to attempt to contain or control spectacle, which now appears to become opposed to narrative because it cannot be reconciled with the narrative-centred model (Mulvey, 2004, pp. 837 to 848).

This investigation of previous cultural and theoretical work will form the bulk of Chapter One. It will demonstrate the gap in knowledge that currently exists in relation to a properly articulated definition of spectacle in mainstream cinema and the impasse that theory has reached in this regard. It will show that addressing this gap will enable a more complete understanding of the nature of spectatorial engagement with mainstream cinema. I will conclude with a discussion of the questions that arise from the literature review undertaken in this Chapter and I will establish a methodology that will permit the analysis of these issues and their implications in subsequent chapters.

1.2 The Neoformalist model and the concept of excess

In this section I review the narrative model known as Neoformalism which Bordwell explicated in *Narration in the Fiction Film*. I will show that

Neoformalism attempts to account for the cognitive processes that occur when the spectator watches a film. It chooses to do so by concentrating upon narration as the central plank of the cinematic experience. The attempt to bring the entirety of that experience within the Neoformalist embrace is not entirely successful, at least insofar as spectacle is concerned. Something is missing, namely a detailed treatment of spectacle. I will argue that the experience of spectacle in the cinema is therefore relegated to artistic motivation or excess material which escapes the unifying force of the narrative. I will demonstrate that excess is itself a troubling concept for Neoformalism and that there have been several attempts to clarify its function and relationship to spectacle, none of which have been entirely successful. Excess appears to end up occupying much the same marginal ground as spectacle.

The concept of spectacle therefore raises difficult issues and it remains a problematic Other within the Neoformalist model. This section thus clarifies the issues that are raised when a narrative-centred model attempts to deal with non-narrative elements of the cinematic experience.

In *Narration in the Fiction Film* Bordwell set out a theory of how narration functions in the context of the mainstream fiction film. He describes narration as the process of “selecting, arranging, and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on a perceiver” (1985, p xi). This is a wide definition which could, as Bordwell points out (1985, p.12) encompass any and all film techniques insofar as they construct the story world for specific effects: “any device can function narrationally” (1985, p. 146). This is an important point to remember in the context of what constitutes narrative. It is by no means the case that the narrative element in a film is confined to its verbal or even visual elements. It is perfectly possible for editing or music, for example, to play a part in the narrative thrust of a film. As Grodal points out, this preconception has arisen because until the advent of audiovisual media, language was the prime intersubjective medium for narrative structures (1997, p.10). As the Russian Formalists had observed, however, a narrative can be represented in many different ways, not all of

them verbalised (such as a ballet or silent film). As will be discussed further below in the context of the reformulation of terms necessary to take this analysis of the aesthetics of spectacle forward, what is of more importance is what any particular element in the film is doing. What is its purpose? Is it providing information which directly drives the plot or story forward or not?

This point is further emphasised by Bordwell's consideration of mimetic and diegetic models of narration (1985, pp. 3 to 15 and 16 to 26). A diegetic model sees narration as consisting either literally or by analogy of verbal activity: in other words, telling a story. This telling may be either oral or written. A mimetic model, on the other hand, conceives of narration in terms of presentation: showing rather than telling. The obvious historical analogies between these two modes of narration are the poet reciting his or her epic poem and the dramatic presentation of the events recounted in the poem on the stage. Both processes are concerned with providing narrative information, although one process involves a direct address to the audience and the other does not. As Bordwell points out, there are further subtleties to consider in relation to the precise distinction between the two, such as what occurs when the poet stops speaking in his or her own voice and instead adopts one of the characters' voices in the poem. Bordwell suggests that either model may be applied to any medium so that it would be possible to hold a mimetic model of the novel if you believe the narrational methods of fiction resemble those of drama, or a diegetic model of painting if you argue that visual presentation is analogous to linguistic transmission (1985, p.3).

Notwithstanding the fact that Bordwell refers to mimetic narration as "a spectacle", it is clear that his approach to this term is focussed through the function of mimesis as a means to tell a story (1985, p.4). In other words, the distinction between mimetic and diegetic narration lies in the mode of storytelling, not in a distinction between narrative and spectacle itself. Spectacle in this context simply means presenting the narrative rather than recounting it. The act of mimetic presentation is for Bordwell driven by the narrative function and seems to serve no other purpose. Spectacle is therefore narrativised to the extent that it has a narrative content. This seems a rather

circular argument and leaves Bordwell with the issue of what he should do with spectacle that does not have, or appears not to have, any narrative content.

Bordwell bases his distinction between mimetic and diegetic narration on the principles of mimesis described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. As Bordwell points out, the concept of mimesis applies primarily to theatrical performance (1985, p.4). It has also been noted that Aristotle disliked staged spectacle, which in his view supplied effects that were unnecessary to effective drama (Bukatman, 2006, p. 75). In fact, Bordwell's use of the term "spectacle" to denote mimetic narration and the assumption about Aristotle's apparent dislike of spectacle confuses what Aristotle actually discusses in the *Poetics*. This is worth clarifying because it demonstrates that the historical assumptions about the role of spectacle insofar as they are apparently derived from Aristotle are more complex than may at first appear. Aristotle is careful to draw a distinction between epic poetry (as recited by the poet either using his own voice or speaking in the voices of others) and Tragedy, where the action is staged by actors. Tragedy is composed of six elements, being plot, character, language, thought, spectacle and melody. Poetry is composed of four of those six (1982, pp.50 to 54). The two elements that do not contribute to Poetry are melody (music) and spectacle because these are attributes of the staged or theatrical nature of Tragedy. Aristotle does not say that spectacle is unnecessary or inferior to the performance of staged Tragedy; he simply maintains that it is not necessary to the art of Poetry. Spectacle is, however, far from inessential to Tragedy:

Since the imitation is carried out in the dramatic mode by the personages themselves, it necessarily follows, first, that the arrangement of Spectacle will be part of tragedy, and next, that Melody and Language will be parts, since these are the media in which they effect the imitation (1982, p.50).

Given that Aristotle was concerned with the art of poetry, he concentrates primarily on plot, which is in his view entirely separate from spectacle. Spectacle as understood by Aristotle was the manner in which the mimetic art

of Tragedy was carried out; in essence the visual aspect. In fact he says very little about spectacle in the *Poetics* since he was concentrating on poetry (1982, p.51). As a result the precise ambit of what he considered to be spectacle remains unclear, but there is little doubt that Aristotle considered spectacle to be an essential element of staged action (1982, p.90, footnote 5).

Bordwell seeks to narrativise spectacle by including it within the definition of mimetic narration, but Aristotle keeps the two separate:

...Spectacle, though fascinating in itself, is of all the parts the least technical in the sense of being least germane to the art of poetry. For tragedy [as recited in the epic poem] fulfils its function even without a public performance and actors, and, besides, in the realisation of the spectacular effects the art of the property man counts for more than the art of the poets (1982, p.52).

Perhaps we can see his last observation as an early acknowledgement of the importance of technology in the effective delivery of spectacle.

To summarise, in fact Aristotle is not responsible for the view that spectacle is somehow inferior to cinematic narrative. There are other reasons for this view, as will be discussed below. Aristotle carefully distinguished between a staged production, in which spectacle plays an obvious part, and the recitation of epic poetry. Spectacle was the visual dimension of the staged production, the outward appearance (or *opsis*) which necessarily followed from the nature of the event. This does not, however, mean that spectacle does nothing more than show the plot to the audience. Since he was concentrating on other things, however, Aristotle does not say a great deal about spectacle or its boundaries, commencing a practice which has continued in the discussion of narrative and spectacle ever since.

Having established his distinction between diegetic and mimetic models of narration, Bordwell goes on to review the characteristics of both models. Ultimately Bordwell dismisses the mimetic and diegetic approaches as being inadequate in themselves to offer a comprehensive account of how narration functions (1985, p.29). Bordwell instead turns back to the theories originally

advanced by the Russian Formalists in the earlier part of the twentieth century and melds their approach with cognitive analysis to produce a new model that explicitly turned its back on the semiological basis of film theory that had dominated thinking since the late 1960s.

Bordwell seeks to explain how spectators make sense of films. Narration is seen as the process through which films furnish cues to spectators who then use interpretative schemata to construct intelligible stories (1985, p.30). “The story action is not in the film but in the spectator’s mind; it becomes a construction which the viewer puts upon a configuration of stimuli” (1985, p.14). The schemata used by the spectator to construct the story will need to be adjusted to cater for the information presented to the spectator by the film, particularly if the film does not correspond to well known or canonic forms of story, in which event the “template schemata” will have to be adjusted.

Bordwell notes that the method of making sense out of the assembly of devices presented to the spectator by the film, be they visual or aural, was called by the Russian Formalists “motivation”. Four types of motivation were identified: compositional motivation, which explains the presence of a device or element in terms of its necessity for story comprehension; realistic motivation, which justifies the presence of the device because it enhances the film’s surface verisimilitude or plausibility; intertextual (or transtextual) motivation, which links directly to the spectator’s familiarity with the conventions inherent in the film they are watching (most obviously with a genre film such as a Western or horror film); and finally, and most rarely, artistic motivation, where an element is present simply for its own sake, as part of the “showmanship” of the film itself (1985, p. 36 and Maltby, (1995) pp. 336 and 337). Bordwell notes that Formalists thought highly of this latter category because it directly focussed the spectator’s attention on the forms and materials of the film itself, drawing attention to the fact that the film existed as a work of art in its own right, not just as a transparent device for transmitting the story to the spectator (1985, p.36).

In his account of Hollywood cinema Maltby suggests that the use of spectacle would fall into the category of artistic motivation, but does not explain why he thinks this should be the case (or what he means by “spectacle”) although he does indicate that in fact usually these various types of motivation operate collaboratively at any one time (1995, p.337). Implicit in Maltby’s characterisation of spectacle as being an artistic motivation is the idea that spectacle serves no purpose other than pure “showmanship” (as he puts it), in other words a sequence or image that exists merely for itself, isolated from the other elements of the film. Having said this, the fact that he believes these motivations work collaboratively points towards an important element of the relationship between narrative and spectacle, namely that it is artificial to see these two concepts as operating in isolation to each other. Whether seen as elements of motivation or otherwise, they operate together.

Bordwell, on the other hand, takes a more restrictive view of the function of artistic motivation. In his view the first three of these procedural rationales (as he calls them) often cooperate with one another but artistic motivation is “a residual category and remains distinct from the others; the spectator has recourse to it only when the other sorts do not apply” (1985, p.36). He does not go on to explain why he believes this to be the case, but it is an instructive comment. Bordwell’s focus on narration leads him to marginalize any element that does not fit in with his scheme.

Notwithstanding these observations, the concept of the assignment of spectacle to the category of artistic motivation raises some interesting points. Both Russian Formalism (as Bordwell understands it) and Neoformalism are posited on an active cognitive engagement between film and spectator, requiring the spectator to be far more than a passive observer or recipient of the information being transmitted to him or her. If as Maltby suggests spectacle is an artistic motivation this implies an active participation in the understanding and decoding of the images themselves, a far remove from the so-called dumb spectacle of the action movie beloved of the critics, which implies the uncritical absorption of a sequence devoid of meaningful content.

Bordwell identifies a difference between the events as the spectator sees them unfold in the film and the story represented by those events. The film may show the events out of sequence, may withhold certain parts of the story from the spectator until a later point in the film (or may not show those parts at all) and so on. Utilising terms coined by Russian Formalists, Bordwell therefore distinguishes between the plot (or “syuzhet”), which is the order in which events are presented in the film, and the story (or “fabula”), which is the reconstruction of events carried out by the spectator in their chronological order through which the spectator establishes the chain of causality linking them (1985, pp.49 and 50). Consequently, narration could be seen as the process by which the plot is arranged to permit the telling of the story. One part of this process is constructed by filmmakers through their choice of the sequence of events and actions in the plot, the editing, music and mise-en-scene and other elements in the film production process, but the whole process is completed by the spectator in the cinema using his or her knowledge of convention and plot information to construct the story mentally.

Neoformalism has exerted a considerable influence on film studies. It has been followed by Kristin Thompson’s *Breaking the Glass Armor*, (Thompson, 1988) a series of essays on Neoformalist film analysis, and has been used by Bordwell and Thompson together with Janet Staiger in their seminal study of classical Hollywood cinema, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985). Whilst efforts have been made to show that the narrative structures of the films discussed by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson did not in fact always conform to the paradigm advanced in this book (Cowie, 1998), there remains a deeper issue regarding the approach taken by Neoformalism in the context of this study of spectacle. This issue is rooted in the very terms used by Bordwell in the first place. At the most basic level, it can be argued that the use of terms such as “narration”, “plot” and “story” inevitably focus upon those elements of the film that deal with the narrative itself and therefore exclude any other elements which do not. By concentrating on narrative, spectacle is left behind or assigned to the margins of the filmmaking process in terms of any clear definition or understanding of the part it plays. The assumption is that it plays

no part in the process which communicates the narrative to the spectator. This also assumes, of course, that the communication of the narrative is a film's primary purpose.

Neoformalism is of course by no means the only approach to the study of narration in mainstream cinema, albeit the most influential recently. Tom Gunning has, for example, proposed a system based upon the theories of literary critic Gerard Genette (Gunning, 2004b) and both Edward Branigan and Torben Grodal have undertaken a thorough review of the function and organisation of cinematic narrative as a mode of thought requiring distinctive forms and processes (Branigan, 1992 and Grodal, 1997). In addition, the rise of the action movie in the 1980s and 1990s with its emphasis on spectacle has led many to review the nature of such films, the apparent demise of the traditional narrative and its replacement with a more episodic and schematic approach to the story (King, 2000; Shone, 2004; Neale and Smith, 1998). The consequence of this focus upon narration is that those elements of a film that do not bear directly upon the narrative (however that may be described) are sometimes seen as in some way disruptive. This additional material is classified by Neoformalism as excess to the requirements of the well-constructed narrative film (Thompson, 2004).

Occasionally, style claims attention independently of its narrative function, although it is usually largely invisible in the classical Hollywood film. Bordwell defines those films where style is more visible as employing "parametric narration", where the stylistic system "creates patterns *distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system*. Film style may be organised and emphasized to a degree that makes it at least equal in importance to syuzhet patterns" (emphasis in original) (1985, p.53). In such circumstances the apparently non-narrative function of style claims at least equal attention to its narrative function. In identifying this type of narrative model, Bordwell admits that he is concentrating at least to some extent on what he calls "isolated filmmakers and fugitive films" (1985, p.274). Although he is careful to point out that this does not mean that such films are the same as art-house movies, the work of the directors upon which he concentrates, such as

Dreyer, Ozu, Mizoguchi and Bresson, would, at least today, be seen only in art-house cinemas (1985, p.282). Interestingly, the art-house film is the same area in which Thompson ends up locating the concept of excess, as discussed below. The implication is that such non-narrative stylistic devices are rare in mainstream cinema. Given the arguments advanced in this thesis, this seems doubtful.

It can therefore be argued that anything falling outside the parameters of the Neoformalist narrative model is unnecessary to an understanding of the film's meaning since a film's meaning is contained within the narration as that concept is defined by Neoformalism. This material is excess, as Thompson explains:

...a steady and exclusive diet of classical narrative cinema seems to accustom people to ignoring the material aspects of the artwork, since these are usually so thoroughly motivated as to be unobtrusive. But the minute a viewer begins to notice style for its own sake or watch works which do not provide such thorough motivation, excess comes forward and must affect narrative meaning. Style is the use of repeated techniques which become characteristic of the work; these techniques are foregrounded so that the spectator will notice them and create connections between their individual uses. Excess does not equal style, but the two are closely linked because they both involve the material aspects of the film. Excess forms no specific patterns which we could say are characteristic of the work. But the formal organisation provided by style does not exhaust the material of the filmic techniques, and a spectator's attention to style might well lead to a noticing of excess as well (Thompson, 2004, p. 515).

Thus, it can be argued that if non-narrative stylistic gestures create a pattern which is repeated often enough to become characteristic of the film in which they appear, they may be classed as part of a parametric narration, whereas if they do not, or are less patterned, they may be excess. The difference would appear to be one of degree rather than substance. How many times does a moment of excess have to be repeated before it becomes a pattern characteristic of the work? Given that parametric narration remains within the Neoformalist model whereas excess is consigned to the margins, this does seem to be rather arbitrary.

Thompson goes on to describe such excess flourishes as “non-diegetic aspects of the image”, suggesting that they may be exhibitionistic elements (2004, p.515). The notion of excess is the inevitable corollary of the narrative model proposed by Neoformalism. If an element is not part of the narration (or accepted within the parametric narrative model) then it becomes problematic, a threat to the unity of the narrative model itself. It is excess, “not only counternarrative” but also “counterunity”: “To discuss [excess] may be to invite the partial disintegration of a coherent reading” (2004, p.517). Excess is a dangerous Other haunting the margins of Neoformalism. As I shall argue below, spectacle is in the same position.

It therefore appears that both spectacle and excess are casualties of the Neoformalist model, both treated as a threat to the unity of the model which needs to be marginalised in order to curb its dangerous potential. Both, however, require further consideration and clarification, not only in terms of their relationship to each other, but how they operate within the context of the cinematic image. What were the historical and ideological drivers for their development, and what can a consideration of these drivers tell us about these concepts now? To what extent should excess in fact be equated with spectacle? They share a common relationship to Neoformalism but should they in fact be seen as essentially the same thing? If not, how do they interact with each other, if at all? To what extent can the transmission model and the definition of spectacle proposed in this thesis assist in dealing with the concept of excess?

Spectacle and excess remain problematic in the context of Neoformalism and an adequate explanation of their relationship and function has proven to be difficult to articulate adequately. Thompson’s definition of excess is examined by Grindon in an article which seeks to contextualise the concepts of spectacle and excess within a broad history of the use of cinematic illusion. Grindon contends that spectacle and excess are terms in need of clarification and in fact that the absence of any precise definitions has hindered the development of the study of the cinematic image (Grindon, 1994, p.35). In fact, whilst he then reviews the various definitions of excess, particularly

those adopted by Heath and Barthes, Grindon does not attempt to define spectacle precisely. His investigation begins with Debord's Situationist approach as explicated in *Society of the Spectacle* (1973) that spectacle is essentially "a social relation among people mediated by images" and that spectacle "embodies a power relationship in which the ruling hierarchy produces and manipulates visual communication for ideological domination of its subjects, who lack the ability to evaluate or resist the spectacle" (Grindon, 1994, p.36). This approach became influential in film theory of the 1970s allied with Lacanian psychoanalysis and further developed by Baudry and Mulvey as discussed in Chapter Two.

In order to challenge the pervasive power of the cinematic illusion, critics therefore looked to self-reflexive elements in the cinema, moments that reminded the viewer that they were witnessing a material artefact, a film, rather than being dragged into believing that what they were witnessing was in some way real. This gave rise to the concept of excess, which might at its most basic mean simply "something which surpasses the boundaries of typical films" as Hoberman suggested (Cited by Grindon, 1994, p.39). Grindon rightly observes that "excess" is a term of quantitative relation, as Hoberman's definition makes all too clear, so one has to ask: in excess of what?

Grindon points out that Thompson bases her concept on Barthes' idea of the "third meaning" and Heath's analysis of *Touch of Evil* (1958) (Barthes, 1977b). Barthes' definition of the third meaning is rather vague: he points to a meaning which exceeds the obvious meaning and "seems to open the field of meaning totally". Heath sees excess as the filmic material outside narrative unity. Thus Thompson's approach is to look at the way that style and excess interact:

Style embodies the film's materiality and excess becomes an aspect of style that cannot be accounted for by a comprehensive analysis of the text; it exceeds the unifying systems of meaning (Grindon, 1994, p.39).

Excess therefore appears to be an overstatement in the style of the film. Grindon observes that Thompson “appears indifferent” to the political dynamics of spectacle in the context of the cinematic illusion and that the idea of excess as a subverter of illusion derives largely from aspects of Barthes’ thought which she does not develop. Barthes’ third meaning in fact goes beyond Thompson’s notion of excess to encompass any element in the image that is extraneous to its obvious or symbolic content. This concept is however not a manifestation of style, like Thompson’s idea of excess, but something more elusive and beyond the bounds of critical analysis altogether. It is perhaps difficult to see how this concept can therefore be taken much further in any meaningful way if we apparently lack the means to subject it to any critical review. The absence of a precise definition of either spectacle or excess and their positioning in an historical and ideological context is too restrictive to permit an appreciation of the wider issues these concepts raise.

The approaches which Grindon identifies in Heath and Barthes as well as their development by Thompson all proceed on the basis that narrative is actually separable from spectacle. Grindon’s review of the concept of spectacle proceeds from the ideological approach based upon Debord, who never explicitly applied his theory of spectacle to the cinema. The ideological approach therefore seems to treat spectacle as simply representative of the cinematic image in total, arriving at the position that any proper critical analysis of spectacle seeks to avoid: the idea that everything on the screen *is* spectacle. In fact Grindon arrives at much the same conclusion:

The claims for excess as a vehicle to smash the spectacle and bring the critique of illusion onto the screen are inflated – but then so are the claims made for spectacle as an agent of deception (1994, p.42).

Grindon identifies the paradox of excess as a critical mechanism somehow existing outside the confines of a narrative-driven cinema, the position which, as mentioned above, Thompson has to reach as a result of the Neoformalist insistence on the centrality of narration in the fiction film:

The critique of illusion portrayed a shackled, insensitive spectator. This school could only grudgingly recommend an ascetic cinema destined to forego pleasure in a perpetual unmasking of the spectacle. Arising from the same discourse, excess allowed one to look again. Paradoxically the concept of excess allowed critics to anoint extravagant style as reflexive and to sanction pleasure as long as these stylistic elements did not participate in the construction of narrative or the creation of meaning. Under the rubric of excess the audience was liberated, observant and capable of extracting delight from all the flourishes and mannerisms that animate the movies (1994, p.42).

Put this way, excess appears to be a device to allow critics to have their cake and eat it: a rigorous dislike of the ideological basis of film or strict adherence to the Neoformalist canon whilst at the same time acknowledging that there is in fact more to film than just an intellectual exercise and that in reality people go to the cinema to enjoy themselves. What is missing from both the ideological and Neoformalist approaches is a recognition of the emotional effect of the cinematic experience.

Grindon therefore provides a useful critique of Thompson's approach as well as identifying, although not fully addressing, the historical and ideological issues that have hindered a proper understanding of the role of spectacle, but he does not go far enough in defining what spectacle actually means or in suggesting how the issue of excess can be resolved. Lavik also discusses the role played by spectacle and excess in the context of what he describes as a "kind of struggle for the cultural status of the blockbuster" (Lavik, 2008, p.169). Lavik reviews the history of the term "spectacle" but concludes that it is a "fuzzy" term which "denotes a wealth of phenomena whose common features are hard to make out" (Lavik, 2008, p.170). This is unfortunate since it means that, like Grindon, the absence of any attempt at a precise formulation of what the term means makes it difficult to set it in context against excess or narrative, the other terms that he considers in detail. He refers to King's formulation of spectacle as being "sequences that employ a heightened degree of spectacle or spectacular action", which is, as he points out, a rather tautological definition (King, 2000, p.184). He does however usefully distinguish between the concept of spectacle based upon Debord and analysed by Grindon, which he considers to be far too generalised and

abstract to be of much use, and the more specific, concrete definition of spectacle as “something that is on display, that is eye-catching, out of the ordinary” (Lavik, 2008, p.170).

The major difficulty that Lavik sees in defining spectacle is its subjectivity and historicity. Tastes change and what one person finds spectacular another may not. Given the development of spectacle over the course of cinematic history and particularly the ease with which anyone could identify event spectacle in a generic context (the gunfight, the car chase, the musical number, the space battle) the extent of this subjectivity is perhaps a little overstated. What is more pertinent perhaps is his observation that spectacle is tied to novelty: “Since what is *extraordinary* depends on what is *ordinary* at any given moment in time, any definition of spectacle should be thought of as very much approximate, provisional, and tentative” (emphasis in original) (2008, p.172). This may be the case if we are trying to say whether any one particular sequence at any particular time is or is not spectacular but, as has been demonstrated above, this is not the case if we are attempting to arrive at a more generalised definition of spectacle and its aesthetic in mainstream cinema. It is also the case, as Gunning has pointed out, that even when a spectacle has lost its novelty value it may still be a source of wonder through a defamiliarisation with the techniques employed, such as when they are presented in a new or unusual way:

...new technologies invoke not only a short-lived wonder based on unfamiliarity which greater and constant exposure will overcome, but also a possibly less dramatic but more enduring sense of the uncanny, a feeling that they involve magical operations which greater familiarity or habituation might cover over, but not totally destroy. It crouches there beneath a rational cover, ready to spring out again (Gunning, 2003, p.47).

As Gunning suggests, the most obvious example of this sort of effect can be found in the spectacle arising from the use of technology, an issue that will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Lavik suggests that spectacles hold “some kind of autonomous attraction, independent of their narrative function” but that whether or not they serve “some story purpose” is irrelevant to the definition of the term (2008, p.172). He notes that spectacle is presentational in the way it displays itself to the spectator whereas narrative is representational in the way that it allows a voyeuristic observation by the spectator of the characters in the film, an indication of the essentially exhibitionistic nature of spectacle and the voyeuristic nature of narrative. He is correct to point out that nevertheless “There is no *necessary* opposition between narrative and spectacle” (emphasis in original) (2008, p.173). I will demonstrate in this chapter that in fact there is no opposition at all.

Whilst it is clearly not the case that modern blockbuster films have dispensed with narrative altogether, it may be that the importance of narrative, at least in the sense that term is used in the context of classical Hollywood cinema, has diminished. Even this requires further clarification in that whilst spectacle is ill-defined it is also the case that, as Lavik suggests, what counts as advancement of the plot “is equally mystical” (2008, p.174). In other words, part of the formulation of the aesthetics of spectacle may include a reconsideration of what narrative actually means. This may tie back to King’s suggestion of thematic narration, the way that spectacle may also seek not only to bring narrative closure in certain cases but also to advance the story in a more generalised thematic way tied into a high level narrative framework often dictated by generic considerations (King, 2000, p.29).

Lavik suggests that whilst spectacle has been seen as “a form of visual display that overwhelms viewers” (based upon Debord’s ideologically motivated definition of spectacle), excess is seen as “a kind of direct address” which the trained spectator can spot and which tends to occur, at least in Thompson’s examples, only in art house films. Consequently, “whereas the use of spectacle in Hollywood cinema tends to be conceived of as an appeal to the lowest common denominator, excess suggests a kind of connoisseurship” (2008, p.176). This observation highlights the difficulty with seeing any relationship between excess and spectacle based upon their

ideological and historical development. If spectacle is considered purely in ideological terms, excess is almost its opposite, the vehicle through which the illusion of the cinematic experience can be revealed. For the reasons discussed in Chapter Two, however, this historically-limited view of spectacle is not adequate to deal with spectacle as it should now be understood in the light of developments after the 1970s and particularly given the rise of cognitivism and Neoformalism. Consequently, whilst historically spectacle and excess may be seen as entirely separate concepts they now find themselves in very similar positions in relation to the Neoformalist model.

It is worth noting that excess has a particular meaning in the context of cult cinema, or what Sconce has called “paracinema”, an elastic category of films which covers “just about every...historical manifestation of exploitation cinema” (Sconce, 1995, p.372). Sconce points out that whereas Bordwell’s parametric narration celebrates the systematic application of style “as the elite techniques of a cinematic artist”, paracinema celebrates the systematic failure of conventional style as a result of material poverty and technical ineptitude (1995, p.385). As a result excess acquires a new meaning, going beyond the occasional artistic flourish noted by Thompson and becomes instead in Sconce’s terms a non-diegetic aspect of the cinematic image, “a gateway to exploring profilmic and extratextual aspects of the filmic object itself” (1995, p.387).

Sconce’s argument is that this concept of excess takes the spectator outside the closed text of the film which arises as a result of the application of models such as Neoformalism. As such, excess moves beyond the diegetic and the film becomes a cultural and sociological document in itself. Using excess in this way to create an alternative aesthetic position for paracinema, it is suggested, thus highlights the true extent of non-narrative transmission that may exist in a film: not just those incidental details that may have been included by the filmmakers but also those accidents of production over which the filmmakers had little or no control. Excess in this context demonstrates the porous nature of the boundary between the diegetic and non-diegetic elements of a film. Spectacle serves a similar purpose in this regard, showing

that films may communicate directly with the spectator outside the film's diegesis. This happens deliberately in moments of spectacle but may happen accidentally in paracinema.

Maltby suggests that the concept of excess material is in reality an admission that narrative theory cannot really account for everything that goes on in a film, choosing instead to categorise the material that escapes the unifying process of the narrative structure as material that reveals the hidden psychic or ideological processes at work in the text (1995, p.335). This would appear to be an attempt to evade a proper definition of that which is not primarily narration by lumping all of it together as somehow being extraneous to the true purpose of the film itself. As Maltby suggests, the Neoformalist approach may also leave out of account the possibility of other incidental pleasures available to the spectator that have nothing to do with the narrative content of the film (1995, p.335). In the consumerist view of Hollywood, narrative may be only one of a number of things which the spectator wants to experience when he or she goes to the movies, and by no means always top of the list. Audiences may be just as interested in the action, the stars in the film or the sheer technical wizardry on display (Maltby, 1995, pp.324 and 334). These considerations demonstrate the rather artificial approach represented by Neoformalism: it does not really take into account the more complex and messy motivations and irrationalities of the spectator, whose desire to see a film and experience of the film itself may have little to do with the calculating cognitive process that Neoformalism proposes. As Robert Stam succinctly suggests "the cognitive approach downsizes, as it were, the ambitions of theory" (2000, p.242).

In conclusion, the strength of the Neoformalist model is that it seeks to define the important function of narrative in the cinematic experience. By definition, however, to the extent that this theory seeks to present a model which caters for the entirety of the cinematic experience, it runs into difficulties with what are plainly the non-narrative elements of that experience. Neoformalism attempts to confine these non-narrative elements to the realms of excess material or artistic motivation, but this does not mean that these elements

simply go away. Spectacle haunts the margins of Neoformalism, an untidy aspect of the spectator's experience which, inconveniently, resists efforts to bring it entirely within the narrative envelope.

1.3 Spectacle and the cinematic image

It is useful at this stage to review earlier theoretical models that have referred to the cinematic image so as to set the Neoformalist approach into its historical context. This review will identify where these earlier models have considered the issue of spectacle, if they have considered it at all, and the shortcomings in the approaches taken by these models. This will assist in identifying the research questions and issues that will inform the rest of this thesis. In this section I will argue that the first step in appreciating and understanding the experience of spectacle in the cinema is to reconsider the nature of the cinematic image. Neoformalism contemplates a cinematic image dedicated to advancing the narrative. For the reasons that I have discussed in the previous section, this narrative-centred model does not deal adequately with the concept of what it sees as a non-narrative element such as spectacle. What is required is a new formulation of the cinematic image that will accommodate the presence of spectacle and its concomitant emotional response.

The material considered will fall broadly into two sections: the first classical film theorists, particularly Munsterberg, Arnheim, Eisenstein and Bazin, and, following the significant change of direction in the 1960s, the structuralist approach, in particular Mulvey's consideration of spectacle in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". As will be discussed below some classical film theorists did consider the nature of the cinematic image and, whilst never fully wrestling with the concept of spectacle that would follow from such considerations, they did acknowledge the visceral, emotional impact of the cinematic image outside its function as simply a communicator of the narrative. Eisenstein contemplated the development of a sensual cinema based upon the generation of an emotional effect upon the spectator, as will be discussed further in Chapter Three, so it would be apt to describe

this new approach to the cinematic image as the “sensual image” (Eisenstein, 1988 cited in Frampton, 2006, p.199).

1.3.1 *The classical film theorists - formalism*

The first sustained work of film theory was *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, by Hugo Munsterberg, published in 1916. In this book, Munsterberg aimed to establish the distinctiveness of film as a separate art form and in particular to disassociate it from the stage play. Essentially, Munsterberg offered a legitimation of and apology for film and a plea for it to be taken seriously at a time when many thought it crude and limited, based upon an application of the neo-Kantian aesthetics that Munsterberg had been practising for many years. Munsterberg argues that the spectator reacts to the powerful emotional stimulus of the film’s images. A work of art (such as a film) was therefore not primarily mimetic but rather a creation which instigates an aesthetic experience (2002, pp.21 and 138). Film moves beyond mimesis and the attempt to present reality and becomes a work of art in itself. As such, Munsterberg anticipates the need to consider the spectator’s emotional response to the cinematic image, a crucial element of the cinematic experience via the sensual image which structuralism and Neoformalism appeared to overlook or discount (Andrew, 1976, pp.14 to 26).

The notion that film as an art form should therefore necessarily be limited in its attempts to represent reality (by not, for example, embracing the use of sound or colour) was followed by Rudolf Arnheim in his book *Film as Art* (1958). Whereas Munsterberg and Balazs after him were primarily concerned with differentiating film from theatre, Arnheim aimed to distinguish it from mechanical reproduction in general (1958, pp.17 to 18). Arnheim defended film against the criticism that it was nothing more than the feeble reproduction of real life by asserting that the deficiencies in the film process such as lack of sound or colour or its two-dimensional aspect were in fact the very things that identified it as a legitimate art form in itself and that these so-called deficiencies should be used to create a new art form, the seventh art. Film should resist the temptation to move towards an ever-more realistic

representation of reality (the “fallacy of the complete film” as he called it (1958, pp. 129 to 134)) and instead seek to attain the status of true art by manipulating that reality through the devices available to film such as lighting, editing and motion effects.

What is notable about these theories is that they are not addressing issues of narrative or spectacle but instead concentrate upon the place that film as a whole occupies in the pantheon of the arts, whether it can be called an art form at all and whether it should resist the inevitable tendency towards an ever-more realistic representation of reality. It is interesting to note, in this context, that for Arnheim, sound destroyed much of film’s artistic potential by taking another step towards realism and by forcing every element of the film to serve plot and dialogue at the expense of everything else, an imbalance which only highlighted film’s inadequate depiction of reality and moved it away from the well-developed art form that the silent pictures of the 1920s had become (1958, pp.187 to 189). Clearly, the films of the 1920s had sophisticated narrative strands, communicated not through speech but visually through action, intertitles and aurally via the accompanying music. Arnheim considered that the balance reached in these films between their various elements was upset by privileging one element over all of the others.

Eisenstein in his theoretical writing suggested that the primary vehicle for transcending reality by manipulating the materials available to the filmmaker was montage, the editing together of shots and sequences for a particular effect (Eisenstein, 1949a). Whereas Pudovkin, for example, used this technique to create a largely realistic effect, Eisenstein saw it as a way of producing a kind of collision or shock, intended to produce an effect on the spectator. The conflict produced by successive shots could manifest itself in any number of ways via movement, lighting, emotional content, rhythm and so on. Eisenstein referred to this as a “montage of attractions”, an attraction being a demonstrable fact that exercises a definite effect on the attention and emotions of the audience and that, combined with others, acts to direct the audience’s attention in the direction desired by the filmmakers. As such, Eisenstein was aiming to produce a film which had a visceral, measurable

impact on the spectator through the use of the sensual image (Tredell, 2002, p.46; Bordwell, 1985, pp.116 to 123). Eisenstein's attraction was, as Bukatman puts it: "an attention-grabber, something that could not be naturalized through the terms of a psychologized narrative" and as such this returned the spectator to the role an observer of an event, almost a witness. As Bukatman notes: "This is after all, the definition of spectacle itself: an impressive, unusual, or disturbing phenomenon or event that is seen or witnessed" (2006, p.81). Consequently, although not addressed in terms as such, Eisenstein's attractions contemplated the presence of spectacle arising out of the use of the sensual image, operating within the cinematic framework together with narrative to produce an emotional effect upon the spectator.

Eisenstein believed that the spectator passed through a three-stage process when watching a film. Perception of an event triggers some motor activity, which in turn gives rise to an emotion and the emotion then launches a process of thought. Thus, the act of watching a film gives rise to a particular train of thought and an emotional response, a process which the director could shape. Eisenstein then went further and suggested that cognition would give rise to expressive movement: a primitive motor activity can form the basis of more refined effects. Movement can help with or form part of the visualisation process. In its fullest manifestation, as Bordwell observes, cognition becomes kinaesthetic (2005, p.125). Given the essentially mimetic nature of Eisenstein's approach to film, which relied upon the presentation of narrative via largely visual effects, it is evident that an element of the spectator's response to the sensual image is revealed by this kinaesthetic reaction to visual stimulus, an effect exploited by Eisenstein and many filmmakers since.

This manipulation of the kinaesthetic response represents the recognition of the presence of the sensual image and its use in cinema. In particular it is an acknowledgement of the physical impact of the image and its use for purposes other than the purely narrational. As mentioned above, the narrative element in film as constructed by Eisenstein resided largely in the master narrative revealed by the director's control of his materials, shaping these for

artistic effect, rather than a well-developed narrative strand within the diegesis of the film itself. Like Arnheim, Eisenstein took for granted the notion that his film had a plot that style would articulate (Bordwell, 2005, p.190). As Bordwell points out, whereas the narrative montage employed by others via analytical editing or cross cutting would yield a depictive effect, Eisenstein's imagistic montage is kinetic and expressive, tending to generalize the narrative (2005, p.179) and that for Eisenstein montage did not necessarily have to be linked to the story, but was there for expressive effect (2005, p.123).

1.3.2 The classical film theorists - realism

Notwithstanding the development of the cogent formalist theories of the cinematic image outlined above, film has arguably always been seen as tending towards the depiction of the real world, hence towards realism and away from the manipulation of the raw material of realism into a distinct art form. Whilst there is no doubt that the dominant theoretical trend during the first decades of the twentieth century was formalism, there remained a counter-current representing the photographic or realist tradition. As early as 1913 films were advertising themselves as showing "life as it is" (Andrew, 1976, p.103). Early filmmakers such as Vigo and Vertov, for example, were keen to establish their realist credentials. Whilst much of the call for realism from such quarters was based upon a political agenda which saw fictional cinema as the new opiate of the masses, the theoretical developments in this area came from a different direction, lead primarily by Andre Bazin.

As will be discussed below, Bazin's emphasis on the importance of the long take and the increased ambiguity or "mystery" of the cinematic image which results is important in the context of spectacle in that it acknowledges the existence of aspects of the cinematic image that are not strictly focussed on the narrative. Having taken this step, however, Bazin does not go on to consider what else might be contained within in the cinematic image apart from the narrative itself. Bazin acknowledges the existence of the concept of

spectacle but does not go on to examine that concept in any detail or to consider how it might fit into his realist aesthetic.

Bazin's approach to the relationship between the object being photographed and its cinematic image should be set in the context of the theory developed by the philosopher CS Peirce in relation to signs, a theory which is important not only in the context of the realist aesthetic discussed below but also, through Peirce's development of what he called "semiotics", an important element together with Saussure's "semiology" that contributed to the shift towards the study of film upon a linguistic basis in the 1950s and 1960s.

Peirce defined a sign as something that stands for something else, and proposed three kinds of relation that may exist between a sign and the object it represents: iconic, indexical and symbolic. An iconic relationship exists where the sign looks like its object (such as the wiring diagram for a household plug). An indexical relationship refers to a sign that has a causal relationship to its object (such as smoke being the sign of a fire). A symbol denotes a sign that has a purely arbitrary relationship with its object. Language is an example of a symbolic relationship: the word "tree", for example, has no natural connection to the object growing in my garden (Short, 2007, pp.207 to 234). As Peirce observed, a photograph has both an indexical and an iconic relationship to its object since it both resembles its object and it was caused or created by its object via a mechanical and chemical process involving light rays reflected from the object striking light-sensitive film (Cited in Easthope, 1993, p.1). Consequently, since film bears an obvious relationship to still photography (though this relationship is being eroded steadily by the use of Computer Generated Imagery, which requires no original object to exist in order to reproduce it on the screen) it can be argued that film too bears both an indexical and iconic relation to reality.

Bazin relied upon the camera's apparently inextricable link to intrinsic realism, its indexical and iconic status, as the cornerstone of his work. The mechanical means of photographic reproduction assured the essential objectivity of film and for the first time, as Bazin suggested, "an image of the

world is framed automatically, without the creative intervention of man” (1967a, p.13). Since the photochemical process entails a concrete link between what Stam describes as the “photographic analogon and its referent” the resulting indexicality of photography was presumed to show unquestionably things as they actually are (2000, p.74).

Bazin approaches the quest for realism on a mythical basis. Realism was the realisation of what he called “the myth of total cinema” (the opposite in many ways of Arnheim’s “fallacy of the complete film”). In “The Myth of Total Cinema”, an essay written in 1946, he suggested that this was a guiding myth which inspired the invention of the cinema, an invention which itself was the culmination of the search in the nineteenth century for “an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time” (1967b, p.21).

Bazin is not, however, a naïve realist: he was not suggesting that cinema should only film what was actually present in a documentary fashion. He was well aware, for example, that the Italian neorealist films were every bit as carefully constructed as any other film (Bazin, 1971). He was, rather, seeking a realist aesthetic based upon a more subtle formulation which related not to the presentation of reality, but its re-presentation on the screen in such a way that the spectator could view the image in the same way that he or she could view reality; that is, by making a choice about what to treat as important or significant. The introduction of deep focus photography, long takes and multiplanar activity within the shot as pioneered by Renoir and Welles was important for Bazin because it allowed the spectator an uninterrupted gaze over a continuous space rather than fragmenting that gaze through editing. Importantly, composition of deep focus sequences allowed the spectator to watch activity on several planes within the shot and to choose which one to concentrate upon (Bazin, 1967d, p.92; Bazin 1971, p.28; Andrew 1976, p.147).

Bazin's objection to narrative editing was that it presupposed that a piece of reality or an event has only one sense at any given moment and that by specifying the meaning of the raw material editing conflicts with our usual ambiguous relationship with reality. He maintained that there exists a deeper psychological relationship with reality which must be preserved in realistic cinema, namely the spectator's freedom to choose his or her own interpretation of events (1967c, p.36). The idea of the ambiguity of reality is central to Bazin's aesthetic and in fact Andrew suggests that this is almost a moral argument: the spectator should be forced to wrestle with the meanings of a filmed event because he or she should wrestle with the meanings of events in empirical reality (1976, p.163).

Bazin's consideration of narrative is primarily focused on how in technical terms that narrative is expressed to the spectator, whether this be through the unrealistic medium of montage and the invisible editing practiced by Hollywood in the 1930s, both of which sought to impose a meaning on the information being presented to the viewer, or via the more realistic approach adopted by directors such as Welles, Wyler and Renoir, who used long takes and deep focus to allow the spectator's gaze to move over what Bazin called the undifferentiated homogeneity of space (Andrew, 1976, p.157; Bazin 1967c, pp. 27 and 28). Bazin suggests that montage was the language of the silent cinema, being the manipulation of images to provide a narrative. He does not consider the image as an element of the cinematic experience in itself free of its narrative content (1967c, pp. 24 to 26). Interestingly, Bazin mentions spectacle in the context of a discussion of filmed theatre as being something entirely separate from the narrative, but does not seek to define what that distinction might be (1967d, p.82).

Bazin's realist aesthetic is therefore in fact primarily an approach to the presentation and structuring of narrative in films through an examination of the way in which the image is presented in that there is no explicit differentiation between the narrative content in any given sequence and anything else that might also be happening in that sequence at the same time.

There was no need to consider directly the implications of spectacle. Implicitly, the realist aesthetic concerned itself solely with narrative:

We would define as ‘realist’ then, all *narrative* means tending to bring an added measure of reality to the screen (emphasis added) (1971, p.27).

Consequently anything (undefined) which was not concerned with the advancement of the narrative was implicitly non-narrative and does not therefore contribute to the realist aesthetic.

Indirectly, however, the issue does raise its head. It can be suggested that the shift from an approach to film which relies on some form of editing practice and fairly narrow fields of focus to a style which allows for long takes and deep focus in fact represents a significant extension of the visual information potentially available to the spectator. In constructing a narrative montage, for example, the spectator is being guided by the director to draw particular conclusions. Presented, however, with a long take and deep focus sequence, the spectator has more choice about what to watch. Of course, the director will in any event seek to ensure that there is sufficient information on the screen or the soundtrack to enable the spectator to follow the narrative, but there is an increased ambiguity or “mystery” to the image because that image is more realistic in the Bazinian sense (1967c, pp. 37 and 38). Bazin therefore acknowledges that his realist aesthetic allows for the intrusion of aspects of the image that are not strictly focussed on the communication of the narrative, but does not follow this through to its conclusion: that the ambiguity or mystery inherent in the image will allow for multiple meanings not all of which will be strictly narrative-driven. Whilst, as discussed above, Bazin acknowledges that the narrative is there to be wrestled from the image, he does not go on to consider what else might be there as well, lurking in the mystery that his realist aesthetic reveals.

Whereas Bordwell sees all elements of a film (other than those which he classes as residual or excess) as being focused upon the narrative drive, Bazin’s requirement that the spectator wrestle with the meaning of events

admits of the possibility that a significant element of the information transmitted to the spectator by the film will not be directly concerned with the narrative. Not only does this not undermine or lessen the film, and not only is it not excess or residual material, it is in fact central to the realist aesthetic because it presents (or represents) the experience of life as it actually is rather than the neatly organized process envisaged by Neoformalism.

To summarise therefore at this stage, Munsterberg recognised the emotional impact that the cinematic image might have and the transformative effect of the image from a mimetic process to a work of art, but he did not see the need to differentiate between the narrative content of any such image and its other elements, possibly because at the time he was writing cinema was in the process of the narrativisation that will be discussed further in the following chapter and the industrialised Hollywood studio system was yet to emerge fully. Eisenstein's multifarious writings reveal a belief in the power of the sensual image and that the narrative would emerge as part of the creative master narrative exerted by the director over his materials. As a result, whilst Eisenstein again acknowledges the emotional power of the image and the possibility that the cinematic experience need not be narrative-centred, he does not dwell upon the nature and purpose of spectacle as an element of the cinematic experience distinct from any other.

In contrast, as discussed above Bazin refers in passing to spectacle, which he sees as lurking outside the narrative fold, and is prepared to admit that a consequence of his realist aesthetic is the freeing of multiple meanings in the image, at least some of which may not be concerned with narrative. He does not however follow this train of thought through to its conclusion and consider what those other elements might be and how they would function alongside the narrative content of the image.

1.3.3 *The structuralist approach*

The possibilities offered by the mysterious image conjured by the Bazinian realist aesthetic were not developed but instead, following a significant shift

in direction in film theory in the 1960s, they were overtaken by the study of cinema as a language, propelled by Pierce's semiotics and Saussure's semiology, a trend which was to occupy a central place in film theory throughout much of the 1950s and 1960s (Bukatman, 2006, pp. 72 and 73). This led to a concentration on narrative theory and the film as text and therefore away from any non-narrative aspect of the cinematic experience (Easthope, 1993, p.1). Although the study of narrative was a central part of the new structuralist approach and the subject of considerable study from Metz on, there seems little attempt to set it in the context of the balance with spectacle or to define spectacle itself (Andrew, 1984, pp. 78 to 88). The structuralist approach, which sought to analyze the various codes into which the cinematic experience could be reduced, dwelt upon the details of the way that narrative was structured so as to suggest verisimilitude and other narrative effects but did not seek to examine the operation of spectacle as a concept, coded or not. This does not mean, however, that notions of spectacle were not present. Rather, the difficult issue of the threat that spectacle offered to structuralist and psychoanalytical film theory was considered by Laura Mulvey in her famous essay on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". As Bukatman points out, if the gender issues in Mulvey's essay are temporarily ignored, what emerges is "an intriguing theory of spectacle, produced at a moment when film studies still operated in the shadow of narrative theory" (2006, p.71). In fact, "visual pleasure" in Mulvey's essay *is* spectacle, and it is clear that spectacle causes structuralist and psychoanalytical film theories some difficulty.

Mulvey's approach was to look at the apparently gendered nature of the spectator's gaze in the context of "classic" Hollywood cinema. In her view the films of the classical period were organised around an active and central male presence given a position of mastery by the film. The woman interrupted the smooth coherence of the film's structure by serving as the spectacular object of the male gaze, a gaze that the spectator was invited to identify with and participate in so that the implicit ideological viewpoint of such films was that of the male voyeur gazing at the female object of desire.

The presence of the woman as spectacle in this narrative context had a significant effect:

The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation (2004, p.841).

Here is the notion that in some way narrative is separate from spectacle and that narrative comes to a halt while a spectacular event occurs. Mulvey treats spectacle as an aberration within a primarily narrative system, but spectacle cannot simply be ignored or marginalised: it has to be contained. Mulvey's agenda, of course, must be seen in the light of the period in which it was written (1975) and in the context of structuralism and the academic study of film that focussed almost exclusively on narrative and narrative theory. Mulvey's was also a radical agenda, seeking to break entirely from the pleasures offered by the mainstream cinema: "It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article" (2004, p.839).

Bukatman has analysed Mulvey's essay in the context of theories of spectacle and narrative. He suggests that in fact Mulvey's approach to visual pleasure reflects the pervasive suspicion of excess which has haunted critiques of spectacle since the time of Aristotle, although as discussed above this may be a misreading on Bukatman's part of Aristotle's distinction between the epic poem and the staged tragedy. As Bukatman observes, Mulvey, however, goes further:

Spectacle, by *actively* disrupting narrative coherence, *threatens* the stability of the narrative system. Mulvey's essay emphasises the way that narrative contains spectacle by the film's end, re-asserting the status quo. One consequence of Mulvey's emphasis on narrative closure is that the priority of narrative over spectacle remains an unchallenged assumption (emphasis in original) (Bukatman, 2006, p.75).

In Bukatman's view this leads to an over-investment in the power of narrative, and particularly closure: "It is possible that narrative, with its concomitant gesture towards closure, represents only one system competing for the viewer's attention, and thus the ending may not be as deterministic as Mulvey would have it" (2006, p.76). In fact, Mulvey's essay could therefore, in Bukatman's view, mark the beginning of the recognition of the limits of narrative theory in explaining cinematic form through the presence of "*something else* that exists in cinematic form" (emphasis in original) (2006, p.77). That something else is spectacle.

Mulvey sought to demonstrate the disruptive power of spectacle (at least in the context of a narrative-based theory of cinema) whilst at the same time refusing to dismiss it as extraneous because of its apparently non-narrative aspect. "Mulvey posited that spectacle was fundamental to the construction of cinematic meaning, so fundamental that within the particular system of Classical Hollywood Cinema, its dangerous potential needed to be tamed and contained" (Bukatman, 2006, p.80). In contrast Bordwell, as discussed above, is also aware of the potentially disruptive power of spectacle but seeks to contain it instead by pulling it within the definition of mimetic narration as far as possible and dismissing the remaining more problematic elements of spectacle as excess material.

Mulvey is forced to confront spectacle because she is considering issues of spectatorship, a topic that will be reviewed in more detail in Chapter Two. She is forced to acknowledge the presence of spectacle, which is seen as disruptive because her model of spectatorship, like Bordwell's from a very different perspective, is narrative-centred. As Bukatman suggests, her attempt to confine spectacle within the terms of narrative closure is unconvincing, not least because the spectator may not actually be solely interested in narrative closure, even in the context of the narrative progression of the classical Hollywood cinema that Mulvey was considering. Consequently, in its historical context we can place the development of Bordwell's Neoformalism as a response to structuralism and psychoanalysis, returning to the narrative theories of the Russian Formalists and adopting a cognitive approach, both

elements expressly absent from the psychoanalytical and structuralist models then prevalent.

In conclusion, as the review undertaken in this section shows, those theoretical approaches that have concerned themselves with the cinematic image have struggled with the idea of spectacle. Eisenstein's concept of the montage of attractions and Bazin's mysterious image hint at the presence of spectacle in the background, but the implications of their proposals are never developed into a fully-articulated definition of spectacle. This may be because there was simply no need to do so at the time given that the theoretical basis for critical thinking about film was the image itself rather than its constituent elements. The development of narrative theory in the wake of the rise of the structuralist/psychoanalytical model in the 1950s and 1960s permitted theorists to ignore the notion of spectacle when considering the film as text but also simultaneously allowed spectacle to change from being a concept that haunted classical film theory from a convenient distance to a far more obvious and threatening presence capable of destabilising the tidy narrative progression of classical Hollywood cinema. As such, Mulvey sought to contain the disruptive notion of visual pleasure, but with limited success. The attempt in itself highlights the limitations of the narrative theory model upon which it is based. Spectacle is either the ghostly presence haunting film theory, distant but always there, or the Other of narrative-based theoretical paradigms, conjured into a more tangible and threatening existence by virtue of the fact that it is somehow seen as opposed to narrative.

1.4 Research questions and methods

On the basis of the review undertaken above, there is clearly a gap in existing film theory in relation to the understanding of the nature and function of spectacle and an appreciation of the fundamental role that it plays in the cinematic experience. In order to address this gap, it will first be necessary to acknowledge the existence of the sensual image, a more fully-developed concept of the cinematic image which recognises its emotional and physiological impact. Secondly, a definition of spectacle must be formulated

which can then be applied to the cinematic experience to begin the process of outlining an aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema. The absence of any sustained attempt to define spectacle in the past may be explained by the widely-held view that it is a difficult concept to pin down and indeed has proven to be “notoriously resistant to analysis” (Neale, 2003, p.54). Spectacle has been considered in the contexts of the propaganda and the historical film by Neale and Brown respectively (Neale, 1979; Brown, 2008). In addition, Brown has noted a number of pithy but ultimately limited definitions of the term, many of them derived from Mulvey’s phrase “to-be-looked-at-ness” and emphasising the element of display inherent in spectacle (2008, p. 158). Neale has suggested that a workable definition is “presentational prowess” (Neale, 2003, p.54). This is an interesting approach to defining spectacle in terms of its impact on the cinematic image, but its very pithiness leaves a number of questions unanswered in relation to the characteristics and function of spectacle. Given its importance to the cinematic experience, an importance which will be demonstrated in this thesis, spectacle deserves a fully-considered definition.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to answer the following fundamental questions:

- How can spectacle in mainstream cinema be defined rigorously?
- How does spectacle operate in and contribute to the cinematic experience such that it is possible to sketch an outline of the aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema?

In answering these two fundamental questions, a number of subsidiary issues arise:

- Is it possible to construct a model of spectatorship which will accommodate the presence of both spectacle and narrative?
- To what extent can existing cognitive theories accommodate the presence of spectacle and is it necessary to go beyond these theories in order to do so?

- What is the relationship between spectacle and technology, using technological developments as a way of historicising spectacle, and what does this relationship tell us about spectacle and about the use of technology in mainstream cinema?
- What is the relationship between spectacle and mise-en-scene and how can we characterise spectacle in the context of the manipulation of the cinematic image that mise-en-scene represents?

In answering these questions this thesis aims to change our understanding of the cinematic experience arising out of an appreciation of the central role that spectacle plays in film.

The methodology used to undertake this exercise will be to establish a theoretical contextualisation of spectacle and an historical model which supplies the specific conditions giving rise to spectacle and to review these consecutively, showing how one interacts with the other. As explained in more detail in the Introduction, the historical review undertaken in Chapter Two will therefore be framed against the theoretical approach established in Chapter One. This will be followed in Chapter Three by a consideration of the cognitive basis of current narrative-driven film theory and whether this is adequate to cater for the revised concept of spectacle now being proposed. This exercise will draw out not only the essential characteristics of spectacle but also the nature of the interaction of spectacle with the spectator, emphasising the emotional engagement and response which spectacle seeks to elicit. Chapters Four and Five will then apply this revised definition of spectacle to certain elements of the cinematic experience, being technology and mise-en-scene, to develop the beginnings of an aesthetics of spectacle in the mainstream cinema.

It is, however, first necessary to consider the fundamental basis upon which this investigation will be undertaken. The very language of critical writing in this area is imbricated with the historical concepts of narrative and spectacle, which themselves imply judgements about what these concepts mean and

their relationship to each other, the most fundamental assumption being that they are somehow separate. The basic methodological approach to adopt must be to start afresh with a new model which is free of these preconceptions and which can accommodate the co-existence of spectacle and narrative rather than the antagonistic relationship which is implied in existing narrative-centred models. The preliminary exercise which I have undertaken prior to commencing the investigations described in Chapters Two and Three is therefore to consider how such a model might be constructed.

As indicated above, existing discussions of narrative and spectacle take place in the context of terminology that implies a number of assumptions about these concepts: first that they are capable of being seen as distinct concepts in their own right; secondly that they are therefore only capable of operating in isolation to each other and, thirdly, that they are in fact in some way the opposite of each other. The concentration upon narrative as, at least in theory, a concept capable of systematic and orderly categorisation and understanding conjures up the opposite in the case of spectacle: a messy, unquantifiable element that does not fit within the narrative-centred paradigm with its concomitant suggestion that the narrative acts to unify the spectator's understanding of the film. As Bukatman suggests above, this presupposes that film is or should be subject to a neat narrational closure. This is not always the case and arguably it does not necessarily reflect what the spectator might actually want from a trip to the cinema.

The other element missing from narrative theory, and from Neoformalism, is the equally messy concept of emotion. As discussed above, early theorists such as Munsterberg and Eisenstein had no problem with the idea of the sensual image: that the image itself generated an emotional response. Given, however, that a characteristic of narrative theory is its dispassionate approach, emotion is shunted off with spectacle and often identified as being a characteristic element of spectacle itself (which is quite correct).

Consequently, in order to construct a model capable of allowing narrative and spectacle to co-exist it is necessary to ask a fundamental question about the

cinematic experience: what happens when a spectator goes to the cinema and watches a film? In short, I suggest, the film *transmits information* to the spectator. Prior to categorising the nature of this information, it is necessary to recognise that, at the most fundamental level, this is what happens when a spectator goes to the cinema. I have called this model of the cinematic experience the transmission model.

To a certain extent, the transmission model proposed here is a more simplistic version of an earlier concept developed within the field of mass communication. Although I am not taking the transmission model used in this thesis from mass communication theory, it is nevertheless useful to understand how the transmission model of mass communication theory operates since this throws further light on the characteristics of the model proposed here.

In the field of mass communication theory the transmission model was an early and dominant paradigm. Early descriptions of the media receiver conceived a passive spectator, possibly because the opportunity to participate in the communication process prior to the advent of the internet and interactive computer games was relatively small or entirely absent other than in the form of feedback (Westley and Maclean, 1957). The receiver of the communication was seen as part of a large aggregate audience but with little or no contact with fellow members of the audience and little direct knowledge of who they were. The early dominant paradigm known as the transmission model developed against this background out of information theory, concerned with the technical efficiency of communication channels for carrying information (McQuail, 2005, p.69). Research carried out in this field by Shannon and Weaver posited a model for analyzing information transmission which saw communication as a process beginning with a source which selects a message, which message is then transmitted in the form of a signal over a communication channel to a receiver, who transforms the signal back into a message for a destination (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). This model was not in fact directly concerned with mass communication but was

popularized as a versatile model for articulating many communication processes.

Subsequent research, particularly by Westley and MacLean, developed and refined this initial model so that its linearity was questioned. It was recognized that the model in fact often required the interpolation of a “communicator” between “society” and “audience” and that this communicator relayed information rather than creating the information itself. The model was more self-regulating and interactive than at first appeared to be the case. Westley and MacLean’s model therefore had three important features: first, mass communicators select the information they relay to the audience rather than just passing it on in an undifferentiated fashion; secondly, this selection is made according to an assessment of what the audience will find interesting, and thirdly that the communication is not purposive beyond the goal of making it interesting to the audience: the media does not typically aim to persuade, educate or even inform. This model recognises that the feedback from the audience (whether direct feedback from a questionnaire or such as can be derived from subsequent viewing figures, for example) is therefore important in shaping the subsequent selection of information made by the communicators.

This model was further questioned by the theories of Stuart Hall, who developed a reception model of communication via a process known as encoding and decoding (Hall, 1980, pp.128 to 138). Hall portrays a media text (originally a television programme) as a meaningful discourse which is encoded according to the meaning structure of the mass media production organization and its main supports but then decoded according to the different meaning structures and frameworks of knowledge of differently situated audiences. This encoding often takes place through the use of established genres such as “news”, “detective stories” or “sports reports”. In addition to Hall’s work, other models of mass communication arose to challenge the dominance of the transmission paradigm.

Clearly, Westley and MacLean's model shares some similarities with the process of making and showing a film, particularly as regards the recognition that the information transmitted is selected by the filmmakers (in the present case) largely on the basis of what the feedback shows the audience wants. This is a fairly accurate summation of the process involved in planning an average big-budget Hollywood blockbuster. It may well be the case also that the intention behind this communication is not to persuade, educate or inform, but it is clearly intended to entertain. As such this is a limitation on the transmission model, recognised by McQuail, who suggests that the transmission model is largely now equated with older institutional contexts such as education, government or propaganda (2005, p.74). This is on the basis that the receiver of the communication essentially enters into a cognitive process when receiving the information which does not necessarily involve any emotional response on the part of the receiver. From that perspective a more helpful paradigm would be the ritual or expressive model suggested by Carey (1975) which emphasises the intrinsic satisfaction of the receiver (and sender) as its goal (McQuail, 2005, p.70).

Seen in such terms, neither the transmission nor the ritual/expressive model is entirely appropriate and indeed McQuail recognises that it is not in reality possible simply to pick one model to the exclusion of others (2005, p.75). In summary, however, as the review above shows, there is a precedent of establishing the transmission model as the basis for the enquiry to be undertaken in this thesis. In fact, the adoption of such a model for the purposes of analyzing the spectator's experience when watching a film is not new: it was used by Barthes in developing his theory of structural narratology. In an essay entitled "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", published in 1966, Barthes considers narrative as a transmission from sender to receiver (Barthes, 1977a). This resulted in a change from a static, tabular approach to a more flexible concept emphasizing the process of linguistic activity. It is also interesting to note the use of a paradigm mass communication model in this context, although not acknowledged expressly by Barthes as such. There is perhaps a certain poetic symmetry to utilising the

same basic transmission paradigm that Barthes used for his theory of narratology to help in defining spectacle.

At their most basic, therefore, films transmit information to the spectator. Seen as a process, this can be characterized as “transmission”. The information transmitted constitutes the entirety of the film. This information is of course subject to and adjusted through the spectator’s cognitive processes, as recognized by Hall and others, so that it may not be perceived entirely as the filmmakers intended. The information may be directly relevant to the plot or it may be incidental to it (a particularly interesting wallpaper pattern in a living room, for example, which has no bearing on the rest of the film at all) or it may derive from entirely extra-diegetic considerations on the spectator’s part (such as the fact that the two lead actors have just commenced an affair in real life which mirrors their relationship on the screen). Information can of course be visual or aural.

For the purposes of this thesis, the transmission of information which takes place can broadly be divided into two categories: narrational transmission and non-narrational transmission. This division and terminology is chosen in recognition of the fact that mainstream cinema is seen as essentially a narrative medium, though it is by no means certain that narrative is always the primary purpose. Narrational transmission is that element of transmission which is aimed solely at providing the spectator with information about the plot or story, directing the spectator’s attention to the elements of the film that advance the narration. Non-narrational transmission is everything else: the sum total of the rest of the information transmitted, whether intentionally or otherwise, to the spectator.

Mainstream cinema, by virtue of its apparent narrative emphasis, tends to favour narrational transmission but given that the process of transmission continues throughout the film (indeed it *is* the film) narrational and non-narrational transmission are happening simultaneously all the time. Consequently, we should not attempt to identify whether any particular sequence is narrational or non-narrational transmission but recognize instead

that in any given sequence there will be a balance between the two. It is a question of recognizing where this balance lies at any given point in the film. It would be fair to say at this stage that, very broadly, spectacle represents a balance that favours non-narrational over narrational transmission and narrative will lie somewhere towards the other end of the spectrum.

Within this model, narrative and spectacle are not, therefore, distinct concepts which identify particular sequences in isolation to others: they are terms used to describe particular balances between narrational and non-narrational transmission. This is a helpful approach because it emphasizes that it is misleading to suggest that a narrative sequence contains no spectacular elements and vice versa. Spectacle is not something which lies outside or interferes with the narrative drive and a narrative sequence will contain many elements which contribute towards the spectator's enjoyment of the film but which are unrelated to the narrative itself. Furthermore, this approach seeks to put narrative and spectacle on an equal footing and to contradict the notion that narrative is somehow superior to spectacle, a notion that is in any event belied by the consumerist account of mainstream cinema (Maltby, 1995, pp.323 and 324). Finally, of course, this approach emphasises that far from being in some way the opposite of narrative, spectacle is part of the same process as narrative. They have been seen as opposites because the bundling of certain characteristics into narrative has implied the concentration of other characteristics into spectacle.

The adoption of the concept of transmission also resolves the problem posed by excess as discussed above. A consideration of the historical and ideological bases of spectacle and excess emphasises their differences but, as is apparent from the review undertaken above, they are treated in a very similar fashion in the Neoformalist model. It is also clear that they both remain problematic and resistant to precise definition. This difficulty arises, however, as long as the Neoformalist approach is maintained, since that inevitably gives rise to problems with concepts that escape the unifying force of the narration. If the transmission model is adopted these difficulties disappear. Spectacle should properly been seen as a shifting point in the

balance between narrational and non-narrational transmission and excess can be seen in the same way. It is only excess material if it is seen in the context of a restrictive framework which classifies elements of the cinematic experience strictly within certain boundaries rather than advocating the more fluid, inclusive approach suggested by the transmission model. When seen in that light, excess ceases to be a rhetorical flourish executed only in art-house movies. In fact the concept of excess disappears altogether since it cannot be excess to anything in particular. Instead the material previously characterised as excessive joins spectacle as one of the resources available to a film to communicate with the spectator.

It is not of course possible to say precisely on a scale of one to ten where the balance between narrational and non-narrational transmission will result in a narrative sequence or a spectacular sequence and indeed this is to miss the point. The process envisaged by the transmission model proposed here is a far more dynamic and flexible exchange between the elements that comprise transmission. The purpose of this reformulation has been to move away from previously fixed concepts and to recognize this greater flexibility. The transmission model therefore offers a methodology to start the enquiry proposed in this Chapter without adopting existing preconceptions about what narrative and spectacle mean. It will be convenient shorthand to use these terms, but these terms can now be applied on the understanding that they do not imply the historical distinctions usually implicit in their more traditional usage.

The establishment of the transmission model is the first of two preliminary steps that need to be undertaken to allow the formulation of a workable definition of spectacle in mainstream cinema. The second step that needs to be taken to clear the ground for the exercise proposed in this thesis is to consider how film theory moved out of the impasse reached after Neoformalism. Caught between the psychoanalytical gaze and the clinical processes of Neoformalism, what was required was a fresh approach that appreciated not only the narrative elements in the cinematic experience but also the affective elements which had long been associated with spectacle but

which narrative theory had overlooked. The way forward for film theory and the consequent implications for the development of a model of spectatorship that accommodates the transmission model and the presence of spectacle as well as narrative will be examined in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

The act of looking; Spectacle and spectatorship

2.1 Introduction

The review of film theory undertaken in Chapter One arrived at the conclusion that in order to account properly for the presence of spectacle in film, and to attempt a definition of that term it is first necessary to acknowledge the presence of the sensual image as an important element of the cinematic experience and to abandon the notion that there are such things as spectacle and narrative elements of a film which exist in isolation to each other. Instead we need to see these terms as part of a larger process, called “transmission” for our purposes, which accounts for the sum total of all the information transmitted by a film to the spectator. Transmission can be subdivided into narrational and non-narrational transmission, emphasising that these processes are occurring simultaneously throughout the film and are intimately linked to each other. The transmission model, however, cannot exist in isolation as an adequate explanation of the concept of spectacle. It is also necessary to set this formulation in its context by proposing a model of spectatorship which accounts for the presence of spectacle.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to propose a model of spectatorship for mainstream cinema that accommodates the presence of spectacle. This model will cater for the direct, emotional and visceral response which spectacle generates in the spectator, emphasising the embodied, active experience which occurs when spectacle is included within the spectatorial model. The starting point in this exercise is to define spectatorship in more detail so as to understand its purpose and function. This will inform a review of competing models of spectatorship relevant to the issue of spectacle in its historical and social context.

The act of looking which is central to spectatorship embraces not just the conditions in which the spectator watches a film in the cinema but also the

wider historical, social and cultural conditions in which that act of looking takes place. As Mayne suggests:

Spectatorship is not only the act of watching a film, but also the ways one takes pleasure in the experience, or not; the means by which watching movies becomes a passion, or a leisure time activity like any other. Spectatorship refers to how film going and the consumption of movies and their myths are symbolic activities, culturally significant events (1993, p.1).

Whilst spectatorship encompasses the act of looking not only in the cinema itself, but also outside the cinema before and after the film occurs, it is also specific to each film since it will depend upon what the spectator takes or wants from the film they are watching (Mayne, 1993, pp.2 and 3). As Mayne suggests, when drawing a distinction between what she calls “critical” spectatorship and one based on a purely non-critical enjoyment of the experience: “One kind of spectatorship makes me think and reflect, while the other makes me act out and forget” (1993, p. 3).

It is interesting to note here that the example given by Mayne of the second, non-critical kind of spectatorship which she is considering is the films of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the archetypal action movies of the 1980s and 1990s. Mayne’s reference to “acting out” and “forgetting” when watching these films perhaps reveals something of the direct physical and emotional response to such films which is typical of the spectator’s response to spectacle and which may be less prevalent when watching films that invite a more cerebral or critical response.

This response also emphasises the importance of the way that spectators imagine themselves as much as the way in which films construct themselves (Mayne, 1993, p.32). Thus the act of looking is not one way: the spectator engages in a relationship with the film which involves not just the observation by the spectator of the diegetic world created by the film, but the direct communication by the film to the spectator. The spectator’s willing involvement and investment in the experience offered by the film is central to

the act of looking and, as will be discussed below, this is primarily an emotional experience.

Having considered the definition of spectatorship, this chapter then examines the model of spectatorship which existed when cinema was in a form in which it is clear that the narrative drive was not predominant. This is generally regarded to be the era of early cinema from approximately 1895 to 1907. Examining this era in more detail establishes the social and cultural context which gave rise to a particular form of spectatorship in which early cinema developed. This will facilitate an understanding of a model of spectatorship which takes non-narrational transmission into account. The next step will then be to consider the corporealised or embodied spectator, a concept which is central to the construction of this model of spectatorship. This exercise will require a review of apparatus theory, a model of spectatorship which exerted considerable influence in the 1970s when it was first proposed and which still represents a significant contribution to the study of spectatorship. The apparatus model will then be compared to the development of the embodied spectator proposed by Crary. The embodied spectator is actively involved in a direct and physical way in the viewing experience which runs contrary to previously-held theories regarding the detached, disembodied observer of classical Renaissance art. Whilst this theory was originally proposed in the context of the changes that took place in relation to the arts generally during the nineteenth century, it is equally applicable to the birth of cinema as a manifestation of the advent of modernism at the end of the nineteenth century. The principle of the embodied spectator also forms the basis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, which will also be considered in the context of its contribution to this issue.

The model of spectatorship proposed in this chapter also needs to be developed through a consideration of early cinema itself, the stage in the history of cinema when the narrative drive was less prominent than it subsequently became in the era of classical Hollywood cinema. This chapter will review the manner in which early films dealt with the treatment of

spectacle and narrative to show how the social and cultural contexts already established fed into the model of spectatorship now proposed which caters for the presence of spectacle. In this context Tom Gunning's formulation of the Cinema of Attractions offers not only a way of recognising the historical context of spectacle, acknowledging the effect of the sensual image in early cinema, but also a way to move film theory forward from the impasse it had reached between the clinical processes of Neoformalism and the psychoanalytical gaze discussed in Chapter One. Gunning's reference to the act of looking as an aspect of the Cinema of Attractions is a helpful starting point when considering the act of looking undertaken by the spectator in the cinema. As this term suggests, the cinematic spectator is not a passive receptacle of the sounds and images that appear in front of him or her: there is a more complex process involved, a transmission of information by the film which is received and then interpreted by the spectator.

It will be shown that the model of spectatorship established in the context of early cinema can be extrapolated to encompass a model sufficient to account fully for the presence of spectacle as well as narrative or, in our terms, the full spectrum of transmission. In establishing this model, the division of cinematic history into early, classical and late (or post-classical) is thrown into question given that this categorisation is based upon the premise of a narrative-driven cinema, a premise not supported by a consideration of the presence of spectacle throughout. Periodising in terms of spectacle affords a different perspective on the historical development of the cinema from that usually derived from a narrative-centred approach. A consideration of spectacle in this way emphasises the continuity of the concept as much as any differences of detail.

What is therefore revealed by this approach is a number of fundamental features of spectacle that will aid in its definition allied with the periodisation of spectacle, the way that the detailed characteristics of spectacle alter as cinema develops. Crucially it is also clear that not only should spectacle and narrative be seen as elements of transmission in a fluctuating relationship with each other, but further that the presence of one actively promotes the

impact and effect of the other. Thus spectacle serves to amplify and increase the narrative impact and the narrative allows empathy and character identification to increase the direct, emotional impact of spectacle.

This approach repudiates the narrative-driven classical cinema model proposed by Bordwell, not only in terms of the idea that there is a clearly definable era of narrative cinema at all but also on the basis that Bordwell is dealing with only one aspect of the cinematic experience whilst marginalising the equally important presence and function of spectacle. Narrative-centred models such as Neoformalism are voyeuristic in that they concentrate upon that element of the film which is directed at establishing the diegesis whereas spectacle, which is directed out towards the spectator, thus acknowledging the spectator's presence, is by definition exhibitionistic. A model of spectatorship must therefore encompass both the voyeuristic and exhibitionistic elements of the spectator's experience.

2.2 The emergence of modern spectatorship

In this section I will demonstrate that inherent in the model of spectatorship which emerged concurrently with the development of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century is an element of mobilised physicality, a spectator emotionally and physically involved in and being part of the event which he or she is watching. This new model of spectatorship is central to an understanding of the part that spectacle plays in the development of the cinema at this time. It arose out of the cultural changes that were taking place at the end of the nineteenth century as well as the changes in the methods of perception of the spectator which had in fact been taking place since the early part of the nineteenth century. These changes gave rise to the concept of the embodied spectator, a concept that I shall examine in more detail in the next section.

As is well-known, early cinema developed principally in France and in Britain, the best-known early cinematic practitioners being the Lumiere brothers and Georges Melies. Technological innovations such as cinema do

not, however, instantly create their own audience as they appear: instead the acceptance of a new technology depends upon a readily receptive audience. In other words, the prevailing social context has developed to a point where that new technology can be accepted. Consequently, the development of cinema depended upon the presence of spectators attuned to a model of spectatorship, or the acceptance of a particular set of viewing conditions, required to enable cinema to flourish. As will be discussed in further detail below, many theorists are of the view that the conditions which allowed early cinema to develop are inextricably linked with or indeed are the same as those which heralded the “modern” era or gave rise to the advent of modernity. Cinema may be both a reflection and a creation of modernity and one of its most visible representations. Whatever may be the case, cinema was not the result of a linear, teleological process which saw it emerge from a clearly defined predecessor, either technologically or socially. As Gunning has stated: “...cinema...has its origin in a morass of modern modes of perception and new technologies which coalesced in the nineteenth century. To trace back cinema’s origins leads not to a warranted pedigree but to the chaotic curiosity shop of early modern life” (2004a, p.102).

If any one location can be identified with the reception of the very first forms of cinema, it is late nineteenth century Paris although, as is apparent from a review of this area, the conditions necessary to create the “cinematic spectator” extended also at least to Britain and probably the United States at the same time. Given that the phenomenon of modernity was, at least in its early stages, confined to urban areas, it is not surprising to also see it developing at an early stage in London and New York (Charney and Schwartz, 1995, p.3). Paris, described as the capital of the nineteenth century, was particularly susceptible to the conditions which gave rise to modernity (Benjamin, 1999, pp. 3 to 26). Consequently, it has been the subject of particular study by Schwartz, looking at the cultural and social conditions which paved the way for the reception and development of early cinema (1994; 1998).

Schwarz suggests that rather than seeking to understand cinematic spectatorship “through a universal and timeless theory of psychic spectatorship constructed in direct relation to the cinematic apparatus or as an idealized vision produced through discourses about perception and embodied in technological innovations” (1994, p. 87; 1998, pp.7 and 8 and 178 and 179) it is more useful to frame this issue within a particular social and cultural context, acknowledging that theory does not exist in a vacuum. Whilst, as suggested above, technological innovation clearly plays a part, it can only develop if it has a ready audience. Consequently, Schwarz proposes that cinema flourished in late nineteenth century Paris precisely because it incorporated so many elements that could already be found in so-called modern life. Charney and Schwartz in fact identify six elements that are central to both the cultural history of modernity and modernity’s relation to cinema:

The rise of a metropolitan urban culture leading to new forms of entertainment and leisure activity; the corresponding centrality of the body as the site of vision, attention and stimulation; the recognition of a mass public, crowd, or audience that subordinated individual response to collectivity; the impulse to define, fix, and represent isolated moments in the face of modernity’s distractions and sensations, an urge that led through Impressionism and photography to cinema; the increased blurring of the line between reality and its representations; and the surge in commercial culture and consumer desire that both fuelled and followed new forms of diversion (1995, p.3).

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to review all of these issues in detail, many of these will be discussed further below in the context of the model of spectatorship which is developed in this chapter.

A notable feature of Parisian culture in the late nineteenth century was the mass consumption of spectacle, whether this was the newly-constructed Eiffel Tower, the catacombs or some other attraction. Another element was the recreation of everyday life as spectacle, as evidenced by the extraordinary popularity of the Paris Morgue, which displayed its dead bodies in tableaux or panoramas. The aim of the presentation of the bodies at the Morgue and the

creation of tableaux at the wax museum in the Musee Grevin was to achieve as much verisimilitude as possible (the “reality effect” which has been noted as one of the defining characteristics of early cinema) (Chanan, 1980, pp. 271 and 272). The Musee Grevin went to extraordinary lengths to reinforce the reality of its displays, relying not just on the lifelike appearance of the figures themselves but also on other devices such as the use of genuine artefacts associated with the scene being depicted. So, for example, the model of Victor Hugo held Hugo’s real pen, the tableau of Marat’s murder included the actual bathtub and Zola’s model was wearing a suit donated by the author (Schwartz, 1994, p.95).

This activity represented a form of mass entertainment, mass consumption of a spectacular sight intended to shock, amuse or thrill. The dead bodies in the Morgue or the tableaux in the wax museum represented a form of presentation or mimetic narration, particularly in the case of the stories depicted in successive tableaux in the museum, such as a series describing a murder and the subsequent apprehension and execution of the murderer by the authorities described by Schwartz (Schwartz, 1994, pp.99 to 105). Embedded within even a single tableau such as a body at the Morgue was a basic narrative structure supplied not so much by the tableau itself as by the public’s pre-existing knowledge of the story surrounding the body on display or the wax recreation of a particular scene. This knowledge derived from newspapers and other sources of information. Consequently, a feature of this form of entertainment was its reliance upon the spectator’s knowledge of the context in which the event was presented. As will be discussed below, early cinema functioned in much the same way, relying upon the audience’s pre-existing knowledge of the storyline being shown on the screen or the routines or characters being portrayed by the actors, many of whom were already well-known figures from the stage or vaudeville. In this way, the melodramatic theatrical spectacle, a popular form of mass entertainment at the end of the nineteenth century examined by Flanders, paved the way for the cinematic spectacle and the rise of the melodrama as a cinematic form in the early years of the twentieth century (Flanders, 2006, pp. 252 to 291). The audience for early cinematic spectacle and the melodramatic serials of the 1910s and 1920s

was already in existence when the coincidence of technology and other social and cultural factors allowed the cinema to develop.

Singer in his book on the cinema of melodrama in the early twentieth century remarks upon the similarities between the raucous, interactive nature of late nineteenth century popular theatre and the behaviour of the early cinema audience. In the same way, as Gunning has pointed out, (1994, p.118) that early cinema audiences were prepared to participate in a willing suspension of disbelief whilst simultaneously acknowledging the fact of the technology used to produce the cinematic illusion, so audiences of stage melodrama may have found the conspicuous mechanical contrivance of such theatrical productions to be part of the attraction rather than a distraction from the event itself (Singer, 2001, pp.177 to 179). Singer's comment on this somewhat paradoxical relationship between artificiality and realism applies equally to the relationship enjoyed by the early cinema audience with the new medium: "Its pleasures were based on the flux between absorptive realism (or perhaps only apperceptive realism) and the enjoyment of overt theatricality" (2001, p.178).

Melodrama as a genre of film, one of the first to develop out of the early cinematic period, relied upon the use of spectacle for its impact and appeal and it is worth noting that Singer identifies that as a genre melodrama "activates various kinds of excess in the spectator's visceral responses" (2001, p.39). Here we see articulated the link between spectacle and a direct, visceral response in the spectator, a relationship developed in the popular theatre which passes through into early cinema. Melodrama tended to thrive on generating agitation in the spectator, whether through a sense of moral injustice, powerful sentiment or pathos or situations of extreme peril. A popular device was the race against time or chase sequence, a powerful melodramatic sequence since Griffith's day (Singer, 2001, p.40).

In addition, melodrama's emphasis on and consequent need to supply the sensational, the shocking and the emotive inevitably lead to it acquiring an episodic nature, or what Singer describes as its "nonclassical narrative

structure” (2001, p.46). This involved a departure from the narrative structure of cause and effect that was developing at the time and a reliance instead upon coincidence, implausibility, convoluted plotting and “episodic strings of action that stuff too many events together to be able to be kept in line by a cause-and-effect chain of narrative progression” (Singer, 2001, p.46). The response that critics displayed to the cinematic melodramas of the early twentieth century, as noted by Singer (2001, p.47) bear a striking similarity to the response of later critics to the action movies of the 1980s and 1990s, lamenting the apparent demise of cinematic narrative.

Another element to note in relation to the model of spectatorship adopted by early cinema is the manner in which these displays showed the story to the audience rather than presenting them with a detailed narrative structure which was essentially self-contained. As noted above, the understanding of the narrative context of the displays depended upon the spectator’s pre-existing knowledge and it was therefore left to the tableau in question to show or display the scene rather than to explain it all to the spectator. This has echoes of Bordwell’s mimetic narration, the presentation of a story by showing the spectator what is happening rather than telling them.

The popularity of tableaux in waxworks museums suggests that an element of the spectacle was the capturing of life and, importantly, the increasing popularity of detailed panoramas and dioramas towards the end of the century noted by Schwartz depends upon capturing and representing (or re-presenting) life in motion (Schwartz, 1994, p.105). As Schwartz suggests, the development of increasingly detailed panoramas and dioramas incorporating movement does not point to the inevitable technological development of the cinematic apparatus, but rather that the public taste for the blurring of reality and fiction and the spectacular presentation of that fictionalised but detailed reality creates the conditions in which cinema can emerge (1994, p.110). As explored in further detail below, this atmosphere was accompanied by changes in the nature of spectatorship, changes which had their origins in the earlier nineteenth century, which also allowed the concept of the mobilized gaze of the spectator to be embodied in a physical observer participating more

fully in the process of viewing than contemplated by the more traditional view of the disembodied, detached observer. It is notable in this context that the crowds flocking to the Morgue and the wax museum were not the solitary, detached observers of the classical spectatorial model, but people congregating to participate fully and emotionally in a form of mass entertainment based around the presentation of spectacles designed to shock, astonish and thrill.

The spectator at the Morgue or the wax museum was by definition mobile, passing by the bodies on display in the Morgue or the tableaux in the museum. The spectator's gaze becomes mobilised, linked to the ability of the spectator to move from one spectacle to the next. This newly-mobilised spectator is also represented by the *flaneur*, a term now virtually shorthand for the mobilized gaze of the pre-cinematic spectator but also, of course, referring specifically to a particular cultural activity in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Paris observed and analysed in the writings of, amongst others, Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire (Benjamin, 1999; Baudelaire, 1982).

The *flaneur* (originally always a man but subsequently, Freidberg argues, women as well once the department store enabled them to walk in public unchaperoned without being taken for prostitutes or women of "low virtue") wandered the streets of nineteenth century Paris in a daze of dreamlike distraction, observing the sights and spectacles of his urban environment (Friedberg, 1994, p.62). Friedberg sees him as "the quintessential paradigm of the subject in modernity" (1994, p.61). The *flaneur* is celebrated in Baudelaire's collection of poems *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which was itself the cornerstone for Benjamin's uncompleted Arcades project, an examination of the Parisian arcades with their displays of commodities in shop windows available for the consumption of the strolling crowds. Thus the mobilised gaze of the spectator, evident in the crowds at the Morgue and the wax museum and the *flaneur* strolling through the streets, is one thread in the cultural and social matrix which enabled the early cinema to develop.

In addition to the spectacles attended by the Parisian crowds, Friedberg documents the popularity of the shop window display and its increased use as a vehicle for the presentation of tableaux as a means of selling commodities to newly-mobilized female shoppers (as well as drawing a direct analogy with the cinema screen itself) (1993, pp.65 and 66). Benjamin also traces the path of the *flaneur* from the arcades into the department store, noting that the department store itself makes use of the concept of *flanerie*, relying upon the consumer's distracted stroll past the shop windows or through the shop itself whilst "just looking", to sell its goods (Friedberg, 1994, pp. 61 and 62).

The mobilised gaze of the spectator combines in Friedberg's formulation with the virtual gaze of the visual arts, a representational activity which stretches back to cave painting but finds its most significant development in photography. The combination of these two elements leads to what Friedberg terms the "mobilised virtual gaze" (1993, p.2). It is the increased centrality of this concept, articulated first in cinema and then television and other media, that evidences for her the transition from the modern to the postmodern.

The development of panoramas and other such displays, however, marks a significant change in the spectatorship model from the later nineteenth century crowds at the Paris Morgue or the window shoppers in turn of the century New York. The spectator at the panorama is immobile and is presented with the illusion of movement whereas the spectator at the Morgue or the window shopper is mobile and is viewing a static display. Physical movement is substituted by the illusion of movement. This effect was reproduced in the cinema, exchanging physical movement for the illusion of movement but extending this illusion of movement through not only space but also time.

The mobilized gaze of the spectator, developed through the nineteenth century and enhanced by the rise of activities such as tourism and shopping thus combines with the virtual gaze of photography to produce the mobilized virtual gaze crucial for the development of the cinema. This model of spectatorship initially finds expression in the appreciation of static spectacle

such as the morgue and the wax museum, but as the century draws to a close increasing efforts to produce ever more realistic presentations (or rather representations) of reality allied with technological advances result in the moving panoramas and dioramas in which the spectator exchanges actual movement for the illusion of movement. As Friedberg neatly summarizes:

The same impulses that sent flaneurs through the arcades, traversing the pavement and wearing thin their shoe leather, sent shoppers into the department stores, tourists to exhibitions, spectators into the panorama, diorama, wax museum, and cinema (1993, p.94).

Charney and Schwartz emphasize the close connection between cinema and modernity, and that cinema did not “simply provide a new medium in which elements of modernity could uncomfortably coexist.” Cinema “forced” elements of modern life into active synthesis with each other. Consequently cinema

...must not be conceived simply as the outgrowth of such forms as melodramatic theatre, serial narrative, and the nineteenth century realist novel, although all of these modes influenced its form. Nor can technological histories sufficiently explain the emergence of cinema. Rather, cinema must be reunderstood as a vital component of a broader culture of modern life which encompassed political, social, economic, and cultural transformations (1995, p.10).

Inherent in the model of spectatorship described above, in the excited crowds at the Morgue or the museum, the shoppers and the *flaneurs* and even those immobile spectators at the panoramas and dioramas, and particularly those who went to the vaudeville theatre or the sideshows at the funfair, is the element of physicality, of a spectator emotionally and physically involved in and being part of the event he or she is watching. Again, this is different from the classical model of the disembodied, detached observer who has no direct link in this way to what is being observed.

In fact, the detached observer as a spectatorial model belongs more to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and had been changing and developing since the beginning of the nineteenth century, finding its expression in

developments in the visual arts later in that century. The model of spectatorship that existed at the end of the nineteenth century, and upon which early cinema developed, was based upon the embodied spectator who was engaged emotionally, far more intimately and physically involved in the viewing process than more traditional models of spectatorship would suggest. Changes in the methods of perception of the spectator which had been taking place since the early part of the nineteenth century have lead to a rethinking of the importance of the material, visceral effect of cinema as part of the cinematic experience. This visceral impact is central to a definition of spectacle.

2.3 The embodied spectator

The concept of the embodied spectator is a prerequisite to the reconsideration of the spectatorial model necessary to allow spectacle to achieve its proper place as part of the cinematic experience. It will therefore be helpful to consider the various models of spectatorship based upon the concept of the embodied spectator and to review the strengths and weaknesses of these models to conclude which is most suited to a spectatorial model sufficient to cater for the presence of spectacle. I will commence this review by considering the clearest exposition of what can be described as institutionalised spectatorship: the model proposed by Baudry, known as apparatus theory. As I will show, this tends to lead to rather abstract conclusions that do not seem to accord with the more open, pragmatic approach necessary to create a model which accords with the actual historical conditions of spectatorship as described in the previous section. I will therefore go on to consider other models, principally those advanced by Crary and Sobchack, which afford a more open and historically-grounded approach. I will conclude that Crary's approach in particular is more suited to the actual conditions of spectatorship at the time and in the context of the newly-created cinema.

What came to be called the apparatus model was developed in the context of the psychoanalytical and ideological theories of the 1970s and explored the

parallels between film viewing in the cinema (that is, sitting still in a darkened cinema before a screen) and situations central to psychoanalytical theories of the subject related to dreams and regression in particular (Mayne, 1993, p.20). The apparatus saw cinema as an institution, both in its literal sense and as part of the machinery intended to reinforce existing social and political positions. Thus the apparatus can be seen as a model of spectatorship which is based on psychoanalytical and ideological bases. As Mayne points out, virtually every major theorist of the 1970s used apparatus theory given that it provided a model of spectatorship which accorded so precisely with the theoretical concerns of the time:

The apparatus which thus emerges as so central to institutional models of spectatorship is a technological system with psychic ramifications, concerning fantasies of regression and affirmations of the imaginary order (1993, p.44).

Whilst apparatus theory was implicit in the writings of Mulvey, Metz and Bellour, it was foregrounded by Baudry, who significantly developed the model in two essays: “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”, published in 1970, and “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema”, published in 1975. In these essays, Baudry argues that the cinema produces an ideological position through its very mechanics of representation and the spectator’s immobile position situated before a screen. Ideology is not imposed upon the cinema; it is already implicated in it (Mayne, 1993, p.45). As Rosen points out, “the apparatus” is not just the machinery of the cinema itself but also this machinery in the context of a larger social and/or cultural and /or institutional machine “for which the former is only a point of convergence of several lines of force of the latter” (1986a, p.282). In fact, although the term “apparatus” appears in both essays, it is a translation of two different words, the first referring to the entirety of the institutional mechanism and the second, more akin to “arrangement”, referring to the machinery of projection itself (Rosen, 1986b, p.317, footnote 2).

In Baudry's view cinema does not deliver a representation of the spectator's ordinary impressions of reality, but something that is more-than-real, an intense effect arising out of the peculiarly charged relationship between spectator and film. This effect arises not out of the films in themselves but is the product of the apparatus in which the spectator becomes, in Hansen's words, "the transcendental vanishing point of specific spatial, perceptual, social arrangements" (Hansen, 1991, p.4). It is the totality of these arrangements, rather than what is being screened, that accounts for this impression-of-reality effect. Baudry proceeds to draw a series of analogies between dreams and the apparatus on the basis that both experiences engender a highly-charged impression of reality. In psychoanalytical terms, both dream and film give an impression of reality through a regressive mechanism whereby the spectator is reduced to an earlier psychosexual stage, that of primitive narcissism where the self is apparently not differentiated from the other and perception is not differentiated from representation:

Thus the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees: this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay (1986a, p.295).

In Baudry's formulation, the identification the spectator makes is both psychoanalytical but also ideological: that is, with the dominant ideology itself. Baudry is here not concerned with a model of spectatorship that envisages communication solely between film and spectator but instead with the cinema as a mechanism for the preservation of the dominant ideology:

The cinema can thus appear as a sort of psychic apparatus of substitution, corresponding to the model defined by the dominant ideology. The system of repression (primarily economic) has as its goal the prevention of deviations and of the active exposure of this model (1986a, p.296).

It is interesting to note Baudry's use of the term "spectacle". Baudry does not give any consideration to the distinction between narrative and spectacle or to consider film in that way: he is concerned with larger, sweeping issues in relation to ideology and psychoanalysis. His use of the term is clearly largely

dismissive in terms of the content of what is seen on the screen; a spectacle that is by definition not capable of critical analysis. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, the shift to a semiological analysis of cinema in the 1960s meant a concentration on narrative methods and, as Mayne points out, there was a “common interface” between narrative and psychoanalysis which meant that it was almost inevitable that theorists of the 1970s would concentrate on narrative to the exclusion of spectacle: “...the act of storytelling needs to be understood as one of the most fundamental ways in which one constructs an identity, in both cultural and individual terms” (1993, p.24).

Consequently, Baudry’s use of the term “spectacle” may owe far more to the ideological connotations of spectacle advanced by Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*, which argued that the consumption and contemplation of images has replaced all forms of human communication. Consequently, cinema is quite literally a training ground for acculturation to the spectacle, again seen as a way of enforcing the dominant ideology (Mayne, 1993, p.28). It is therefore perhaps hardly surprising that concentration on narrative allied with the pejorative connotations of spectacle in the 1970s meant that little attention was paid to seeing spectacle as a subject worthy of serious study in itself other than as a threat to narrative coherence, as discussed in Chapter One.

Famously, in a metaphor mentioned in the 1970 essay and developed fully in the 1975 essay, Baudry compared the spectator’s position in both the dream and the cinema to that of the prisoners’ in Plato’s myth of the cave, chained in a darkened vault and only able to see the shadows of others moving behind them projected on the wall in front as those others pass between them and the flames beyond. The prisoners mistake these shadows for reality, the basis for Plato’s disparaging estimation of the ordinary person’s knowledge of the world being in fact based on illusion (1978, pp. 316 to 325). For Baudry, however, the cave analogy arises from the same fundamental psychic conditions and regressive desires that drove the development of cinema: “We can thus propose that the allegory of the cave is the text of a signifier of

desire which haunts the invention of cinema and the history of its invention” (1986b, p.307).

As Hansen points out, whether theorised in terms of Plato’s cave, the metaphor of the mirror stage, the principles of Renaissance perspective or the ideological self-effacement of classical continuity conventions, the apparatus refers to the general conditions and relations of cinematic reception. As such, whilst avowedly not about real, individual spectators, Hansen acknowledges that the apparatus spectator is “a somewhat abstract and ultimately passive entity”, a far cry from the physically engaged spectator of early cinema (1991, p.4). Mayne also acknowledges that the cinematic subject of psychoanalytical theory does not refer to real people, who may in the real world react to films in any number of unpredictable ways “but rather to positions constructed by the various and interconnecting institutions of the cinema” (1993, p.33).

Apparatus theory has been the subject of some criticism ranging from a detailed critique of the basis upon which the theory is founded to criticisms of the limitations of the theory in terms of its failure to deal adequately with either sound or gender issues (Carroll, 2004; Creed, 1998). In addition, many of the conditions in which the apparatus is said to work would in any event hardly apply to modern domestic viewing conditions. Its attraction lies in the way in which it provides an overarching spectatorial model of the cinema as ideological institution which married perfectly with the predominant concerns of film theory in the 1970s. Arguably, the tendency towards the sweeping generalisation and the lack of any real historical specificity in Baudry’s essays proves to be one of its major weak points. Of equal concern, Baudry was studying classical narrative cinema and as such gave no consideration to a cinema which was not as narrative-centred (Mayne, 1993, p.50). As discussed above, the study of spectacle as anything other than a dangerous threat was unlikely at the time and consequently the apparatus model fails to deal with the implications of spectacle and its emotional impact. Finally, the immobile and largely passive observer of the apparatus bears no relationship to the emotionally and physically involved embodied spectator sketched by

Crary and apparent from the historical context discussed below. Although in historical terms psychoanalysis, the development of consumer culture and cinema all developed at about the same time at the end of the nineteenth century, the psychoanalytically-based apparatus does not provide an adequate spectatorial model to account for the presence of spectacle in the cinema other than possibly as an overarching ideological construct which applies more to society as a whole than films in particular.

Central to a more revisionist view of the modes of spectatorial perception in the nineteenth century is the work of Crary, particularly *Techniques of the Observer*, (1990) in which Crary sets out his contention that there was a fundamental change in the conditions of the spectator (or “observer” as Crary has it, using a more Foucauldian term) which has its roots in the early nineteenth century and which is the real precursor of the development of modernist painting and visual arts towards the end of that century. Similarly, the notion that the camera obscura led inexorably to a series of technological developments via photography to the cinema is misleading. The camera obscura as a central metaphor for the spectator is displaced early in the nineteenth century:

My contention is that a reorganisation of the observer occurs in the nineteenth century before the appearance of photography. What takes place from around 1810 to 1840 is an uprooting of vision from the stable and fixed relations incarnated in the camera obscura...In a sense, what occurs is a new valuation of visual experience: it is given an unprecedented mobility and exchangeability, abstracted from any founding site or referent (1990, p.14).

Given Crary’s Foucauldian approach to this issue, much of his discussion turns upon the “industrial remapping” of the body in the nineteenth century as a function of the exercise of power and control. The delinking of sight from the sense of touch, which had been an integral part of classical theories of vision in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, led to a prioritisation of sight, a historical condition necessary for the “rebuilding” of the spectator or observer able to appreciate the “tasks of ‘spectacular’ consumption” which are briefly reviewed above as these developed in the late nineteenth century.

Crary also points out that that this “empirical isolation” of vision not only allowed it to be quantified and homogenized (and, presumably, more capable of control through standardisation and manipulation of images), it also enabled the new objects of vision, whether these be commodities, photographs or the act of perception itself, to “assume a mystified and abstract identity, sundered from any relation to the observer’s position within a cognitively unified field” (1990, p.19). Again this traces the conditions necessary for the appreciation of the spectacles of the late nineteenth century, the commodity-led experience of the shop window, the experience of the Morgue, the wax museum, the panorama or, eventually, the cinema.

Though not explicitly so stated in his book, Crary’s work directly challenges the concerns of apparatus theory. Central to Crary’s consideration of the effects of this change in perception, and implicit in the notion of the mobilized virtual gaze set out above, is the abandonment of the detached, immobile and disembodied spectator predicated by the classical theories of spectatorship or the passive, immobile spectator of apparatus theory. The mobilized virtual gaze implies a physicality, an ability to move through space and time, and consequently the focussing of the spectatorial experience in the body of the spectator. Again, as Crary notes, this is explicit in Benjamin’s writings on the *flaneur*: “Perception for Benjamin was acutely temporal and kinetic; he makes clear how modernity subverts even the possibility of a contemplative beholder” (Crary, 1990, p.20). The conditions of modernity dictate that uninterrupted access to a single object capable of pure contemplation is impossible.

For Crary, this embodiment of the spectator, inherent in the physicality of the mobilized gaze, was in fact prefigured in changes in scientific enquiry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. At this time, the development of the science of vision resulted increasingly in the investigation of the physiology of the human subject rather than the mechanics of light and optical transmission which had interested scientists in earlier centuries and which, therefore, did not concern itself with the physical attributes of the perceiver. Consequently, the visible moves from the disembodied realm of mechanics

and optics, from the order of the camera obscura, to the unstable corporeality and temporality of the human body (Crary, 1990, p.70). Developments in this area reflected a larger project undertaken during the first half of the nineteenth century, which amounted to an exhaustive inventory of the body, a transfer of subjective mental life to a quantitative, empirical plane and the fragmentation of the holistic subject into specifically identifiable mechanical or organic systems (Crary, 1990, p.81). Vision thus emanates from the spectator and becomes controllable via the images observed. Arguably, we may see this process as part of the commoditisation of reality, enabling its subsequent consumption by the audience, the way that experience is, in Schwartz's terms, "configured into moments and events" (Schwartz, 1998, p.11) and becomes translated into spectacle (Schwartz, 1998, p.200).

One of the results of the shift documented by Crary was that the functioning of vision became dependent upon "the contingent physiological makeup of the observer, thus rendering vision faulty, unreliable, and even, it was argued, arbitrary" (Crary, 1995, p.46). This gave rise to the idea of subjective vision, that the quality of perceived sensations depends less upon the nature of the stimulus and more upon the make up and functioning of the sensory apparatus. The notion of subjective vision was, in Crary's view, one of the conditions for the historical emergence of notions of autonomous vision, for the severing of perceptual experience "from a necessary and determinate relation to an exterior world". This disintegration of the indisputable distinction between interior and exterior became a condition for the emergence of "spectacular modernising culture" (1995, pp.46 and 47). The notion of subjective vision leads inexorably to issues relating to control, given Crary's view of the function of the management of vision in the nineteenth century.

Part of the cultural logic of capitalism, in Crary's view, "demands that we accept as *natural* the rapid switching of our attention from one thing to another" (emphasis in original) (1995, pp.47 and 48). Thus whilst attempts were made to create a relatively stable notion of a distinct subject/object relation, ultimately attention came to be seen as "only a fleeting

immobilization of a subject effect and an ephemeral congealing of a sensory manifold into a cohesive real world" (1995, p.51). The instability of attention, its lack of fixity in the conditions imposed by the modern world, perhaps points to the importance and popularity of spectacular events such as the Morgue and the wax museum and, as the century progresses, ever more realistic and dramatic spectacles in the theatre and, eventually, the cinema. Inherent in this description is, of course, the assumption that this condition is ongoing, that the need to address the instability of attention continues to require ever more novel and spectacular distractions. In many ways, it can be argued, this need provides the basis for most mainstream cinema, let alone the other audio visual experiences now available such as theme park rides, television, interactive computer games and so on. This also points us to another central characteristic of spectacle: that in order to continue to astonish, amaze and entertain it must continually change.

Insofar as one can take Baudry's analogy between Plato's prisoners and the film spectator's experience beyond the psychoanalytical and the ideological, it is notable that apparatus theory is essentially voyeuristic in that there is a distinct separation between the observer and that which is being observed and no direct interaction between the two. Crary's embodied corporealised observer, in common with the mobilised virtual gaze of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is not immobile, but quite the opposite and is directly and physically involved in the viewing process. The interaction between the observer and the observed in Crary's model is therefore exhibitionistic in that the structuring of the event being observed by the observer (or spectator) involves a direct address to the observer, a direct communication arising out of the physical involvement of the observer. This physicality of direct involvement also implies a more emotional response to the event being witnessed than that suggested by the disembodied, detached observer.

The separation between observer and observed and the solipsistic self-absorption of the psychoanalytical model upon which the apparatus is based is, as stated above, essentially voyeuristic. Consequently, it is suggested, it

must be inherently incomplete in that it fails to take account of the clearly exhibitionistic elements of the early cinematic experience, elements particularly prevalent in spectacle and the sensual image discussed in Chapter One. This distinction between the disembodied, detached spectator of apparatus theory (and, indeed, the traditional spectatorial model criticized by Crary) and the physically engaged embodied cinematic spectator is equally valid even if the increasing immobility of the cinematic spectator during the classical era is taken into account. The crucial difference lies in the physicality of spectatorial engagement, not the mobility of the spectator.

Kennedy points out that the effect of the camera obscura model of vision, which was supplanted in Crary's view by the corporealised spectator/observer, was to create a "centered subjectivity" as a model for spectatorship, a model which was reinforced by psychoanalytical film theory: "The classical model of spectatorship, in its prioritisation of ideology and psychoanalysis has always prioritised a decorporealised, distanced, monocular eye, unimplicated in the experience of an image" (Kennedy, 2000, p.55). The psychoanalytical gaze allows no room for the experience of astonishment, of absorption created by the experience of spectacle in the cinema and, as such, is unable to accommodate an aesthetic of spectacle. Kennedy suggests that Crary's approach allows different models of spectatorship to emerge which move away from a concern with visual representation or psychoanalytical theory and instead allows her to posit an "aesthetics of sensation" based upon Deleuzian principles (2000, p.53).

Crary's is not the only theory that posits an embodied spectator. Another alternative to the psychoanalytical model is offered by Sobchack's phenomenological approach (Sobchack, 1992 and 1994). Referring back to Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack suggests that "More than any other medium of human communication, the moving picture makes itself sensuously and sensibly manifest as the expression of experience by experience" (1994, p.37). The cinema is a "lived-body" experience, "in the activity of embodied consciousness realising itself in the world and with others as both visual and

visible, as both sense-making and sensible" (1994, p.39). The film experience is therefore:

...a system of communication based on bodily perception as a vehicle of conscious expression. It entails the visible, audible, kinetic, aspects of sensible experience to make sense visibly, audibly, and haptically. The film experience...*presents* the direct and reflective experience of a perceptual and expressive existence as the film (emphasis in original) (1994, p.41).

Utilizing the metaphor of formalist, Realist and psychoanalytical theories as seeing the cinema screen as a frame, a window and a mirror respectively, Sobchack argues that all three of these approaches are inadequate because none of them take account of the spectator as a physical presence: all are focussed upon the screen itself and see the screen as a static viewed object, thus perpetuating the subject/object distinction of the classical spectatorial model: "The exchange and reversibility of perception and expression (both in and as the film and spectator) are suppressed, as are the intrasubjective and intersubjective foundations of cinematic communication" (1994, pp.45 to 50). There is a physical, embodied interplay between spectator and film, a meeting between the spectator's vision of the film and the film's vision of itself. This lived and embodied experience outside the diegesis of the film also underlies the exhibitionistic nature of the experience, the direct communication between film and spectator.

Consequently we can see the embodied spectator - utilising a mobile virtual gaze, actively participating in and being an inextricable part of a spectatorial experience on an emotional and intellectual level - emerging as a more suitable model for the visceral, material encounter inherent in the experience of early cinema, a product of the social and cultural processes that had been in play for most of the nineteenth century. Prior to considering the extent to which we can apply this model to present day cinema, and the extent to which this model assists us in a definition of spectacle, it will be worth considering in more detail the nature of early cinema itself. This will enable us to review the spectatorial model discussed so far in cultural and theoretical terms in the

context of the development of early cinema and to consider the issues arising in the application of his model to the cinematic experience at that time.

2.4 Early cinema

Early cinema (1895 to approximately 1907) was for some time considered to be rather primitive or to represent a pre-narrative stage in development when the technology available to filmmakers and the early stages of cinematic development meant that the medium was struggling towards a properly developed narrative construction. These assumptions have now largely been dismissed and early cinema has been recognised as a phase of cinematic development, a different kind of cinema as Hansen suggests, when the priority of filmmakers lay elsewhere and the necessity to provide a well-formed narrative was not paramount (1995, pp.362 and 363).

Analysis of early films has shown that many features which were taken as primitive, such as simultaneous playing areas, editing within the frame or tableau scenes arose in fact as conscious stylistic choices by filmmakers. Furthermore, the unit of early cinema is the autonomous shot or scene, where actions and events are continuous and spatial coherence is of paramount importance. Consequently, the shot's objective was to present not a small fragment of a larger sequence, as would be the case later when scenes were fragmented by editing, but rather the totality of an action unfolding in a homogenous space. Spatial anchorage prevails even over temporal logic. There is evidence that films as early as 1899 employed cross cutting (such as *Henley Regatta* by Smith and Williamson) hence it seems that the single shot film or a film which allowed for action to take place in various parts of the same scene represent a choice by the filmmaker, not ignorance or a lack of resource, in the same way that the use of multiplanar activity by Renoir and Welles arose as a conscious stylistic decision (Elsaesser and Barker, 1990, pp. 12 and 13).

The notion that early films represented some primitive form of attempt to arrive at a fully-realised narrative cinema is in fact based upon preconceptions

deriving from a familiarity with classical narrative cinema, which enables the spectator to gather all the information necessary to interpret and understand the film from the film itself. In the same way that it is not unusual for modern films to refer to other films or even to the personalities of the actors themselves, so the early cinema often referred via the use of well-known theatrical or vaudeville performers to those performers' acts on stage or to other social and cultural information familiar to the audience at the time but something of a mystery to the present day spectator. In fact, Popple and Kember suggest that instead of being seen as a primitive and half-successful attempt to achieve the status of classical Hollywood cinema, early film "can be seen as the apex of nineteenth-century entertainments – even as the epitome of representational media at the fin-de-siecle" (Popple and Kember, 2004, p.34).

Consequently, the conditions of exhibition and reception of early films and their development in the context of the forms of mass entertainment at the turn of the nineteenth century play a crucial part in understanding their content and the stylistic choice made by the filmmakers. Whilst it is clear that such filmmakers were limited by the technology available to them, stylistic choice may have been dictated by the context in which the film was to be shown. It may have been made as part of a programme of other short films or stage or vaudeville entertainments so that the context of its reception dictated its form. Early film depended upon a much more direct relationship between the audience and the material upon which the film was based, the performers and even the projectionist than classical cinema expected. Audiences were likely to know the story or anecdote the film represented already, they were probably familiar with the screen actors, who might well be reprising their already famous stage routines, and there was a level of communication between audience and the lecturers or showmen who often introduced such films which would be alien to a classical and post-classical cinema audience, trained to view a film from something of a distance in relatively disciplined conditions of silence and attention. Early cinema was a mass entertainment medium, reflecting far more the interactive behaviour of the crowds that gathered at the theatre, in the morgue or the wax museum than those queuing

patiently for the next screening. As Popper and Kemble note, in historical terms, early cinema can be seen as the vehicle through which the mass entertainment media of the nineteenth century were transformed to the essentially individualised screen entertainments of the twentieth (2004, p.85; See also Hansen, 1991, pp.1 to 19).

It is important to note the essentially interactive nature of early cinema. The actors would often turn and look directly at the camera, directly at the audience. Melies in his films would perform magic tricks directly to the camera, lecturers and showmen would address the audience in person and, according to reports, the audience would respond. Chanan points out that early cinema, like music hall (and stage melodrama), was not naturalistic. Direct addresses to the camera were acknowledged (again, replicating the direct address to the theatre audience in many stage melodramas) although the camera was still required in such circumstances to film the scene as naturally as possible, contributing to the “reality effect” of the cinematic image. It was only with the development of the more distanced classical narrative model with its voyeuristic approach that the direct address to the camera began to decline (Chanan, 1980, pp.271 and 272).

It can therefore be argued that early cinema as a medium is exhibitionistic: it acknowledges the audience and addresses it directly outside the diegesis of the film itself. A relationship is established between the filmmakers and the audience outside the self-contained world of the film because the film explicitly recognises the existence of the audience. This is to be contrasted with the classical narrative structure which many commentators have described as voyeuristic because no such communication with the audience outside the diegesis of the film occurs. In fact, this is an over-simplification of the position, which arises out of a narrative-driven analysis of film and the effect of the psychoanalytical approach to film studies. Even narrative-driven films can in certain circumstances address the spectator directly outside the diegesis of the film. These circumstances arise primarily during moments of spectacle because it can be argued on the basis of the above that it is a

characteristic of spectacle that it is exhibitionistic rather than voyeuristic in nature.

In film theory terms, commentators such as Bazin approached the analysis of early film as a first step in a development that would lead to a fully developed cinematic experience (inevitable in Bazin's case given the teleological basis of his Realist aesthetic) (Bazin, 1967c, p. 27). Noel Burch argues that early cinema (up to 1906 in his view) produced a "Primitive Mode of Representation" (PMR) in contrast to the more developed and sophisticated "Institutional Mode of Representation" (IMR) produced by the classical Hollywood cinema. Both of these represented a stable system each with its own inherent logic and durability, but the PMR exhibited characteristics different from the IMR and need not be seen as a stepping stone to the more developed form. Although Burch considers the PMR to be "unquestionably semantically poorer" than the IMR, much of his discussion of the differences between the two modes centres on devices (such as closure) that relate to an explicit narrative structure, a characteristic of a narrative driven cinema but not necessarily early cinema, which does not privilege narrative to the same extent (Burch, 1990).

It is clear that early cinema did not privilege narrative above all else, but that does not mean that the films contained no narrative content at all. Even single shot films contained a narrative element notwithstanding the view that a characteristic of narrative is the use of editing. It has been argued by Deutelbaum that single shot films such as *Sortie d'usine*, *Arrive d'un train* or *Demolition d'un mur*, all by the Lumiere brothers, are not in fact plotless but highly structured, reflecting a number of carefully chosen decisions about sequential narrative (Elsaesser and Barker, 1990, p.15). More pertinent perhaps is the approach taken to narrative structure by early cinema, which reflected the existing knowledge and conventions of the early cinema audience and which only gradually developed into the patterns of narrative structure associated with the classical period. Gaudreault's formalist account suggests that early cinema combined theatrical traditions of performance (particularly predominant in the first ten years of cinema) with more literary

traditions of narration as the development of more sophisticated story telling evolved, no doubt assisted by technological developments in the editing process (1990, pp.68 to 75). Popple and Kember suggest that in essence during the period 1895 to 1914 the cinema developed from a position where film audiences - like theatre audiences, *flaneurs* and the crowds at the Morgue and the wax museum - were shown what was happening to a position where they were told what was happening (2004, p.99). Again, there is in this description an echo of Bordwell's distinction between mimetic and diegetic narration. It is also worth noting that Gunning identifies the period 1907 to 1913 as that of the "narrativisation" of cinema: the period during which the voyeuristic, distancing effects of a narrative structure became predominant (Gunning, 1990, p.60).

It is against this background that Gunning has articulated his theory of the Cinema of Attractions. Gunning's theory draws precisely upon the exhibitionistic nature of early cinema, seeking to develop a coherent view of early cinema avoiding the "hegemony of narrative films" which coloured earlier attempts to construct a coherent theory of early cinema (Gunning, 1990). In Gunning's view it was precisely this "act of showing and exhibition" which the pre-1906 cinema displayed most intensely. The films did not lack narrative content as such but instead filmmakers saw films "less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power" (1990, p.57). Knowledge of the technology involved and of the fact that this was an illusion did not lessen the enjoyment of the experience: in fact it was part of the experience, part of the extra-deictic relationship established between the filmmakers and the spectator. The cinema was itself an attraction in the early years of cinema, and the notion that the audience will go to the cinema to see the latest technology on display has persisted through the history of the medium, from the earliest projectors to those who flocked to see the capabilities of CGI in films such as *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991).

Gunning emphasizes that the Cinema of Attractions is an exhibitionistic cinema, as opposed to the voyeuristic cinema examined by Baudry, Metz and

others, based upon its ability to show things rather than to tell the audience about them:

...the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself (1990, p.58).

The notion of the direct display to the audience as a vehicle for shock or surprise therefore dominates over the need for narrative drive and, importantly, the establishment of a direct extra-diegetic relationship with the spectator is central:

Theatrical display dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct simulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe. The cinema of attractions expends little energy creating characters with psychological motivations or individual personality. Making use of both fictional and non-fictional attractions, its energy moves outward towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative (1990, p.59).

This experience was not based upon an attempt to convince spectators that the images were real, but to astonish them with the transformation from the static photographic image to the illusion of movement:

Rather than mistaking the image for reality, the spectator is astonished by its transformation through the new illusion of projected motion. Far from incredulity, it is the incredible nature of the illusion itself that renders the viewer speechless. What is displayed before the audience is less the impending speed of the train than the force of the cinematic apparatus. Or, to put it better, the one demonstrates the other (Gunning, 1994, p.118).

What is being described here is one of the effects of spectacle upon the spectator: the simultaneous astonishment at the illusion but also at the display of the technical virtuosity involved in producing the spectacle itself. This sense of self-conscious display also extended to the manner in which these early films were presented, involving the promoter addressing the audience directly before the film began and even working them up into a state of

excitement and apprehension about the effect of the display they are about to witness (Gunning, 1994, p.120). Much of this technique of showmanship was carried over from the vaudeville or fairground tradition, which is the real precursor of cinema, notwithstanding the early theorists' attempts to distance cinema from the theatre and align it more with a literary pedigree (Tredell, 2002, pp.15 to 19; Eisenstein, 1949b).

“Cinema of Attractions” alludes to the fairground attractions from whence cinema developed and also to Eisenstein’s montage of attractions, intended to shock the spectator into a new ideological awareness:

The aesthetic of attraction addresses the audience directly...Rather than being an involvement with narrative action or empathy with character psychology, the cinema of attractions solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer’s curiosity. The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment (Gunning, 1994, p.121).

Gunning goes on to make the point that this element of the cinematic experience did not die when the narrative form became dominant:

However, even with the introduction of editing and more complex narratives, the aesthetic of attraction can still be sensed in periodic doses of non-narrative spectacle given to audiences (musicals and slapstick comedy provide clear examples). The cinema of attractions persists in later cinema, even if it rarely dominates the form of a feature film as a whole. It provides an underground current flowing beneath narrative logic and diegetic realism, producing those moments of cinematic *depaysement* beloved by the surrealists (1994, p.123).

Whilst it is clear from this passage that the Cinema of Attractions refers to a particular sort of spectacle in its historical context and does not account for all cinematic spectacle, and also that Gunning assumes that this type of spectacle is “non-narrative”, the model offered by the aesthetic of astonishment provides an attractive way out of the predicament presented by the twin demands of Neoformalism and the psychoanalytical gaze in that it allows for a more direct and emotional involvement on the spectator’s part beyond the cognitive processes of Neoformalism and acknowledges the importance of the

emotional aspect of the cinematic experience which had been overlooked by psychoanalysis. It emphasizes those aspects of the spectatorial experience that have been overlooked and can be read as a particular formulation of the effect of the sensual image discussed in Chapter One. In addition, it perfectly describes aspects of cinema that have been undervalued by recent theory. In fact, as Williams observes, the readiness with which this concept has been taken up over the last decade perhaps pointed to the willingness to find an alternative to the existing paradigms (1994, p.12 and footnote 13).

It can be argued that Gunning is also suggesting that there was a particular way of experiencing the Cinema of Attractions and that that way of seeing still persists, albeit subsumed to the dictates of the need to read the dominant filmic narrative. Notwithstanding this, the Cinema of Attractions is capable of coexisting alongside the dominant narrative mode and expressing itself from time to time in the form of a particular type of spectacle. There are notions here which I will discuss below and which are important to an understanding of an aesthetic of spectacle, albeit I will argue that this aesthetic will go beyond Gunning's view as expressed above.

The first point to make is that spectacle in mainstream cinema involves a particular way of seeing, implicitly different from the way we see (or read) narrative. That particular model of spectatorship evolved in the early cinema in the context of developments in the nineteenth century, as discussed above. Given that the element of spectacle contained in those early films has remained a component of film throughout its history, there are clear continuities between early cinema and the cinema of the present day, particularly marked by the resurgence of films with a high degree of spectacular sequences which form the basis of much mainstream cinema. The second element to note is the relationship between spectacle and technology which is as much part of the pleasure of watching spectacle as the images themselves. Spectacular films both use and advertise the technology that has gone into the production of their spectacular effects and are marketed as vehicles for the display of those effects as much as for their plot or storyline, as will be discussed further in Chapter Four. The spectator may go to see a

film simply because he or she wants to see the technology on display. The third point to draw out from Gunning's comments is the idea of the coexistence of the Cinema of Attractions and the dominant narrative mode during the course of a film. This co-existence generally reflects the relationship between narrative and spectacle, or narrational and non-narrational transmission, proposed in the transmission model.

In Hansen's formulation, early cinematic displays solicit the viewer in a more direct manner than "classical" cinema "as a member of an anticipated social audience and a public, rather than an invisible, private consumer" (1991, p.34). This comment points back to the mass entertainment element of early cinema, carrying over from the other forms of mass entertainment at the end of the nineteenth century discussed above. These displays are the variety of "competing spectacles" available in the cinema of attractions, in contrast to the coherent narrative of classical cinema into which the spectator is absorbed by way of a "unified spectatorial vantage point" (Hansen, 1991, p.34). As this quote indicates, Hansen suggests that a coherent spectatorial model could only be established once a narrative structure was in place, a development which occurred during the period 1907 to 1917. Consequently, as Hansen acknowledges, the development of a narrative structure involved the creation of a voyeuristic relationship between the spectator and the film which did not exist in early cinema: "With their emphasis on display, early films are self-consciously exhibitionist, whereas classical cinema disavows its exhibitionist quality in order to maintain the spell of the invisible gaze" inherent in the unified spectatorial vantage point and the classical narrative structure (1991, p.36).

Consequently, to evaluate early cinema in terms of the transmission model, there is a predominance of non-narrational rather than narrational transmission but by no means an absence of narrational transmission. Further, the predominant mode of narrational transmission is, in Bordwell's terms, mimetic rather than diegetic, based upon showing an audience what is happening rather than telling them. Whereas many modern films cross refer to other films, early cinema cross refers to other forms of popular mass

entertainment. In addition, it is important to note the exhibitionistic nature of early cinema, linking directly to emotions and visceral sensations which appear to have been overlooked by the voyeuristic, psychoanalytically-based approach to cinema or the hermetically contained approach of Neoformalism with its emphasis on narration. It is therefore arguable that the study of early cinema when contrasted with the more narrative-centred classical cinema demonstrates that a concentration on narration leads towards a more voyeuristic medium which tends to exclude any prospect of a direct relationship with the spectator and yet it is precisely this direct relationship which is established by spectacle.

Bordwell argues that the construction of a complex narrative structure and a narrative-driven cinema inevitably entails the construction of an unseen observer (represented by the unified vantage point of the camera). This applies whether, in Bordwell's terms, the narration is mimetic (when the presence of the camera-as-observer structures the approach) or diegetic. The unseen observer implies the disembodied, detached subjective viewer of the classical approach, the voyeuristic spectatorial experience which does not accord with the more complete model associated with the embodied spectator with its exhibitionistic elements. Consequently, an issue with the Neoformalist approach in this respect is that it may lead to an incomplete picture of the spectator's experience because it excludes the visceral sensations and the extra-diegetic relationship that the film establishes with the spectator through the exhibitionistic display offered by spectacle. Spectacle is exhibitionistic because it engages the spectator directly rather than through the medium of the diegesis of the film itself. It plays directly upon the spectator's emotions of shock, surprise, excitement and sometimes fear and, as Gunning suggests, its energy is directed outward toward the spectator rather than inward towards the characters in the film. Because of this change in focus and energy, soliciting a direct response from the spectator, the tendency has been to view the spectacular event as a wholly exhibitionistic display which sits uncomfortably with the essentially voyeuristic and self-contained structure of narrative-driven cinema. It can be argued, however, for the reasons set out in Chapter One that spectacle, as a balance of narrational

and non-narrational transmission, contains elements that contribute to the narrative. Our enjoyment of a spectacular sequence and our emotional involvement in it does not derive solely from the excitement of the action but also from our empathy with the characters. Empathy leads to an emotional investment, and empathy is most likely to be created by the narrative. Consequently, narrative and spectacle do not work independently of each other but, in fact, usually work together in a complimentary manner if they are to work effectively. Spectacle arguably therefore also works with the narrative to *amplify* the spectator's emotional response to the film beyond that which, working separately, spectacle or narrative might otherwise achieve. It may be that the phrase "empty spectacle" in reality denotes a spectacle in which the spectator has little or no emotional involvement, either because the narrative has been ineffective or there is perhaps insufficient narrational transmission to create the desired effect.

Singer points out that attempting to contrast the cinema of attractions as an historical event confined to early cinema up to, say, 1907 with the classical cinema thereafter is overly deterministic and creates a false dichotomy between attractions (which he defines more broadly than Gunning as "any element prompting sensory excitation") and the cinema of narrative integration:

To reiterate a point that has been made innumerable times already, attractions were not rendered extinct by the onset of narrative integration; rather, arousing spectacle became an important component of narrative film. Moreover, there is no reason to think that the emergence of "formal operations" designed to improve narrative comprehension and effectiveness would have mitigated the impact of attractions. On the contrary, it is more likely that classical narration amplified the stimulating capacity of attractions by endowing them with strong dramatic and emotional significance (2001, p.129).

Singer emphasises that spectacle, seen as a larger phenomenon than just Gunning's cinematic *depaysement*, did not go underground but integrated itself, as Gunning suggests, into the unified classical narrative structure. This is, however, once again a narrative-driven view of events. It might be more accurate to say that, historically, the narrational transmission element

increases with the development of cinema after 1907 so that the balance of narrational and non-narrational transmission is altered more in favour of greater narrational transmission over the course of films taken as a whole. Even this is to generalise too far since clearly genres such as melodrama, Westerns and war films by definition maintained a different transmission balance to, say, romances or musicals, but at least it does move away from the idea that first there was spectacle and then narrative came along and pushed it into the shadows.

What has actually happened is that whilst spectacle has existed as a component of film throughout what has been termed early, classical and post-classical periods, film theory has chosen to concentrate upon the implications of the voyeuristic, narrative-based elements of film and in the process has chosen to ignore or marginalise the function of spectacle. In fact spectacle, and indeed other reasons to go to the cinema such as the desire to see a favourite film star on the screen, have always been an integral part of the spectator's experience. As such there are more continuities than differences in this approach: so-called differences are in reality simply reflections of the fluctuating balance between narrational and non-narrational transmission. As King has pointed out, when discussing the enduring appeal of the spectacular blockbuster, a genre which has been around for almost as long as cinema itself (Neale, 2003):

Once reasonably coherent narrative became established as a primary basis of organisation (by the 1910s) it was constantly subject to combination with all sorts of other appeals, ranging from the presence of larger-than-role star performers to the vicissitudes of melodramatic coincidence and the pleasures of large scale spectacular attraction...This may sometimes be foregrounded to an extra degree in the spectacular blockbuster, but the differences, generally, are relative and of a degree rather than absolute (King, 2003, p.125).

It is interesting to note that as narrative sophistication developed in early cinema, the process of deliberate incorporation of the spectacular into film was already under way: Popple and Kember point by way of example to *The Long Strike* (1911), a melodrama adapted from a stage play to which was

added a new scene in which one of the characters dives fifty feet into the water from the deck of a passenger liner (a stunt in fact performed by the film's director) (2004, p.113). This sequence was heavily used in the advertising campaign for the film, an early example of reliance upon a spectacular effect to bolster interest in an otherwise lacklustre storyline, a tactic to which the studios have had recourse on many occasions since.

2.5 Conclusions

The review carried out above suggests that spectacle draws the spectator into a complicit and complex relationship based upon a direct, extra-diegetic communication. That relationship is established by appealing to the spectator's visceral sense of astonishment or excitement, and the spectator's complicity in recognizing that what they are watching is an illusion but their willingness in going along with it. In the same way that the early cinema was spectacular, so the technology employed in such sequences involves a direct relationship with the spectator in the material process of the filmmaking itself. In addition, the awareness of the physicality of the actions on the screen, of the stunt man jumping off a high building or leaping between cars travelling at high speed, for example, also establishes a direct link with the spectator that is outside the diegesis of the film.

Far from spectacle being an element of the film that should be banished to the margins of the cinematic experience, as Neoformalism seeks to do, spectacle can be seen as working with narrative to heighten the emotional impact of the narrative structure of the film just as narrative emphasises the impact of spectacle by generating empathy between the characters on the screen and the audience. This is a relationship that has existed throughout the history of cinema. What has altered is the balance between narrative and spectacular elements, between narrational and non-narrational transmission. From this perspective Gunning's cinema of attractions may be seen as a useful historical model and corrective to the then-prevailing views regarding the emotional content of the cinematic experience, but overall it remains a theory grounded in its historical context and concerned with one facet of non-narrational

transmission, namely the sequences which survive in slapstick and musicals rather than the spectacular action sequence, for example. Singer's wider definition is more helpful here in locating that element of the cinematic experience that needs to be brought back into the theoretical mainstream.

Spectacle can therefore at this stage be defined by reference to three essential characteristics: first, it is a balance of narrational and non-narrational transmission, predominantly but not exclusively non-narrational transmission; secondly, it constructs an exhibitionistic relationship with the spectator based upon a direct address to the spectator's emotions - in Gunning's formulation, the energy of the sequence flows out towards the spectator rather than inward towards the characters; thirdly, spectacle arouses shock, excitement, awe, astonishment and other emotional responses in the spectator, affecting the spectator in a physical, visceral manner.

The first two propositions above can be stated reasonably objectively and, it is suggested, are consistent as elements of a definition of spectacle in mainstream cinema. The third characteristic, however, is far more difficult to define precisely because it is the most mercurial and subjective. Clearly, it is going to change over time, and change quite rapidly. This is evident from the history of film itself. Early cinema audiences were captivated first by the fact of the technology so that a film of, for example, a rowing boat leaving a harbour, would be sufficient to arouse interest and excitement. As film techniques develop and the advent of editing encourages the development of the chase format, so we see action, special effects and parallel editing being employed. Arguably all of these developments are aimed at keeping the audience interested and excited, progressing from equally technically adventurous and exciting spectacles constructed in the theatre and vaudeville. The search for what keeps the audience excited and astonished and coming back to the cinema in the face of competition from other sources of audio visual entertainment such as television and, more recently, computer games, fuels technological advancement, be that sound, colour, widescreen or CGI.

Consequently, it is too simplistic to suggest that early cinema contained a great deal of spectacle, that this subsequently all but disappeared during the dominance of the narrative classical period only to re-emerge again with the arrival of the revitalised action movie in the 1980s. The reality is that spectacle has remained an essential part of the cinematic experience, albeit that the precise delineation of spectacle has developed and changed over the course of the history of cinema as filmmakers seek to create the emotional response that spectators want from the cinematic experience. Spectacle alters dependent upon context but is always in the service of what will thrill, amaze and astonish.

Having proposed a model of spectatorship sufficient to include spectacle, the next step is to consider its cognitive basis. Some existing cognitive models, concentrating upon a narrative-driven view of cinema, do not take this element sufficiently into account. Given that the Neoformalist approach appears to construct the idea of a narrative cinema apparently to the exclusion of spectacle and its attendant emotional impact it appears to be incomplete for our purposes. The next chapter will therefore review cognitive approaches to this area to consider whether they adequately account for the presence and impact of spectacle. To the extent that they do not, a revised approach will be proposed sufficient to cater for spectacle and the transmission model.

Chapter Three

Emotional Intelligence: Spectacle and Cognitivism

3.1 Introduction

The development of the working definition of spectacle in Chapters One and Two has lead to a re-evaluation of the basis of the spectator's cinematic experience, an understanding that emotion is an important and fundamental aspect of that experience and that films should be seen as communicating directly and exhibitionistically with the spectator. The transmission model invites us to see films holistically as involving a constantly fluctuating balance between narrational and non-narrational transmission. As a result, concepts such as narrative and spectacle, voyeurism or exhibitionism become more relational, interacting with each other as the film progresses. The transmission model and the act of looking described in the previous chapter tie, in Frampton's words, "content, form and filmgoer together" so that the spectator experiences the film as an organic whole (Frampton, 2006, p.212). In such circumstances, the concept of spectacle as simply being antithetical to narrative vanishes as spectacle instead permeates the spectator's cinematic experience, becoming one element of the dramatic forms used by film to communicate with the spectator.

In order to consolidate the working definition of spectacle developed in the previous chapters, it is necessary to consider another facet of spectacle as an aspect of the transmission model, and that is the mental processes that underlie the spectator's response to spectacle. This exercise will complement the theoretical and historical approaches taken in the previous chapters. The study of such mental processes and the spectator's emotional response to film is a central concern of cognitive film theory. This chapter will therefore consider the progress that cognitivism has made in delineating these mental and emotional processes and the extent to which, as a result, a cognitive model is able to accommodate the idea of transmission and the redefined concept of spectacle. This exercise will be valuable in tracing the contribution

that cognitive film theory has made to an understanding of the spectator's mental processes and emotional responses to film. In addition, as an important approach to the examination of the mental processes underlying cinematic spectatorial activity, it is an area that must be carefully considered and addressed. It is therefore worth taking time to examine the most relevant cognitive theories carefully to see what they can reveal about the cognitive approach to spectacle and the idea of transmission and to consider whether as they stand they can accommodate the ideas proposed in this thesis.

It will be argued that whilst existing cognitive theories have much to say that is useful in terms of understanding underlying mental processes, they have in certain respects reached something of a dead end in that they are developing along lines that do not allow them to reflect the direct and immediate experience of spectacle and the inclusive nature of the transmission model. In order to cater for the presence of spectacle I will argue that we need to combine our intellectual and emotional responses to the cinematic experience in a theory sufficient to encompass the totality of the experience of watching, listening to and participating in a film. This inclusive approach supports the transmission model and the model of spectatorship outlined in the previous chapters.

Very broadly, cognition is the study of the mental processes underlying our ability to perceive the world (Andrade and May, 2004, p.1). Cognitive film theory is therefore primarily interested in how spectators make sense of and respond to films, together with the textual structures and techniques that give rise to spectatorial activity and response (Plantinga, 2002, p.23). The cognitive approach to film theory was originally developed in the mid-1980s with a series of books and essays questioning the then prevalent basis of film theory which, as discussed in Chapter One, utilised a combination of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism and Barthesian semiotics (Plantinga, 2002, p.17). Cognitive film theory was used in both *Narration in the Fiction Film* and *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Bordwell further clarified his methodology in 1989 in his essay "A Case for Cognitivism" and in 1990 in another essay "A Case for Cognitivism: Further Reflections".

Critiques of the existing theoretical paradigms also appeared, in particular Carroll's *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*. Bordwell and Carroll's *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* continued the assault. These works represented a strand of film theory which stretched back to Munsterberg and Eisenstein and which focussed on the study of film from a cognitive rather than a psychoanalytical perspective. Given Bordwell's close association with cognitive film theory, it is appropriate to start this chapter by considering the cognitive basis of Neoformalism and its relationship to spectacle before moving on to consider cognitive film theory and spectacle in general.

Although Neoformalism has exerted a powerful influence since the publication of Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* in 1985, it has also inevitably attracted criticism. It has been shown, for example, that the picture it paints of an industrialised film production system turning out largely homogenised products may be historically inaccurate (Cowie, 1998). It can be argued, however, that one of the main issues with the approach taken by Bordwell in *Narration in the Fiction Film* in the present context is that Neoformalism appears to allow no room for any emotional content in the spectatorial experience. When considering the nature and effect of spectacle, this renders Neoformalism an incomplete theory since it fails to take account of the presence of the direct, emotional impact of spectacle. Further, I will argue that narrative is not the end in itself which Neoformalism suggests. It is a means to an end, and that end is the spectator's affective or emotional response when watching a film.

Since the advent of the Neoformalist approach, however, cognitive theory has sought to integrate emotion into a cognitive framework. A number of significant studies have been made which explicitly deal with the concept of emotion within a cognitivist framework. Thus, Smith has reviewed the issue of emotion in the context of character identification and Tan has addressed the question of whether the spectator watching a film experiences "authentic" emotion and, if so, the nature of that affective response. Perhaps the most comprehensive theory in this area since *Narration in the Fiction Film* is

Grodal's work on emotion and cognition as expressed through a study of different film genres, most notably *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*. These theories will be reviewed to consider the insights they offer into the experience of spectacle and the mental processes involved before moving on to examine a more inclusive approach which, I will argue, is more able to accommodate spectacle and the transmission model.

As will become apparent, those cognitive theories that developed in the wake of Bordwell's Neoformalism, whilst addressing issues of emotion that Bordwell neglected, still tend to adopt Bordwell's categorisation of mainstream cinema as essentially narrative-driven, thus relegating apparently non-narrative elements such as spectacle to at best a secondary position. This suggests that we need to go further than simply seeking to adapt existing cognitive theories to fit the transmission model: we need to move beyond the cognitive approach altogether. In fact, taking this radical step forward in reality involves taking a number of steps backward, stripping away the layers of theory that have accumulated over the years to look again at the direct emotional impact of the cinematic experience. This is the approach adopted by Frampton, who relies significantly in his work upon early theorists such as Munsterberg and Artaud, who experienced cinema as a fresh, new art form unencumbered by pre-existing theoretical conceptions.

This chapter will therefore outline the development of cognitive film theory and examine the cognitive basis of Neoformalism. A consideration of the way that cognitive film theory has dealt with the question of emotion will then follow, which will include a more detailed consideration of particular theories advanced by Smith, Tan and Grodal which seek to deal with emotional response in a cognitive context. Frampton's *Filmosophy* will then be reviewed to see whether this offers an approach which can adequately cater for the transmission model and the presence of spectacle. This exercise will require a consideration of the models proposed by Smith, Tan, Grodal and Frampton in some detail to allow a proper understanding of the extent to which these models address, or fail to address, the presence of spectacle. It

will be argued that in order to deal adequately with the transmission model and spectacle, as that term should now properly be understood as central to the cinematic experience, existing cognitive theories are unsuitable and that the more holistic, intuitive approach suggested by *Filmosophy* is to be preferred. Ultimately I will argue that when all of these considerations are taken into account and the developments of previous chapters in this thesis are considered, it becomes apparent that in fact spectacle and narrative are two of a number of resources available to the film to provide the emotional impact that the spectator seeks and, in the case of spectacle, to amplify that impact. Given that this emotional impact is central to the spectator's cinematic experience, it follows that spectacle itself occupies a central position in that experience.

3.2 Neoformalism and Cognition

Given its importance to the issues raised in this thesis, as discussed in previous chapters, the starting point for an examination of cognitive theory is Bordwell's Neoformalist approach. A critique of Bordwell's approach has already been undertaken in Chapters One and Two, but it is necessary to return to this model in this chapter to consider it explicitly in the context of the cognitive theory that it adopts. Cognitivism holds that people's perceptions, feelings and actions result substantially from processes which start as input to the senses but then give rise to mental activity via a series of mechanisms which can be described and observed. Such processes include prior mental representations which can be mapped onto the external world (as perceived by the senses) as a way of ordering it. This is often referred to as a "top down" approach – the imposition of preconceived mental patterns onto the observable world. In other cases, conclusions can be drawn directly from sensory input, colour perception being a good example. This is the "bottom up" approach. Bordwell suggests that both bottom up and top down processing are inferential "in that perceptual 'conclusions' about the stimulus are drawn, often inductively, on the basis of 'premises' furnished by the data, by internalised rules, or by 'prior knowledge'" (1985, p.31). Broadly, in his view, whether such processes can be described as perceptual or cognitive,

they involve organised clusters of knowledge to guide the decision making process. These clusters are the schemata that Bordwell then uses as the basis for his Neoformalist account.

This approach therefore posits a dynamic interaction between the observer and the environment. In the context of film, as Bordwell puts it, the spectator *thinks*. There is, however, more involved when watching a film than just perceiving movement and sound and understanding these as representations of the veridical world. To make sense of a narrative film, the spectator must also understand the mechanics of story construction. This leads Bordwell to divide the narrative into plot and story, an approach originally devised by the Russian Formalists in the 1920s in the context of literary analysis. This route is taken because Bordwell is looking at a model of a narrative-driven film. By this he means a film that has a narrative structure. This is a reasonable distinction to make for the purposes of analysing the narrative element of mainstream cinema but ultimately it can be argued that it has the effect of implying that anything that does not contribute to the narrative is outside the boundary of Bordwell's model.

As a result, Bordwell's approach becomes problematic when considering spectacle, as demonstrated in Chapter One. Furthermore, Bordwell seeks to treat emotion as being separable from the narrative, thus denying even the emotive effect of narrative let alone the presence of spectacle. Consequently, Bordwell deals with what he calls "affective features" in the context of cognitive processes as follows:

As a perceptual-cognitive account, this theory does not address affective features of film viewing. This is not because I think emotion is irrelevant to our experience of cinematic storytelling - far from it - but because I am concerned with the aspects of viewing that lead to constructing the story and its world. I am assuming that a spectator's comprehension of the film's narrative is theoretically separable from his or her emotional responses (1985, p.30).

Bordwell is never less than careful with his definitions of terms. Here his framing of the issue is such that on its own there is perhaps not much to

debate. The real issue is the extent to which an area has been so carefully fenced off that it in fact deals only with a part of the cinematic experience, leaving a very significant section outside the theoretical pale. It can be argued that whilst Bordwell does not suggest that emotion plays no part in the experience of cinematic storytelling, the passage cited above is structured so as to separate the emotional response from the narrative comprehension. As a proposed model, this seems abstract and distanced from what might be seen as the lived experience of going to the cinema. As described in the previous chapter, the narrative may increase our empathy for the characters in the film, thus adding additional emotional impact to a spectacular sequence in which they are involved, and the spectacle will often advance the narrative more than seems to have been admitted by the proponents of narrative-driven cinema.

Secondly, as a result of the very wide definition of narration employed by Bordwell, this approach implicitly excludes any emotional response that arises from any non-narrational element of the film, such as the delight and pleasure that we might feel from a particular camera movement allied with an evocative piece of music (for example, the moment the camera rises over the railway station roof to follow Claudia Cardinale's progress into the town in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969)). Such considerations play no part in Bordwell's analysis. In fact, Bordwell suggests that psychoanalytical models may be "well suited" for explaining the emotional aspects of cinema. (1985, p.30) Given his dismissal of the psychoanalytical approach elsewhere in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, this seems like an attempt to relegate emotion to second class status.

Bordwell does review the emotional impact of narrative strategies, but again one has to question whether emotional impact arises as a by-product of narrative in this way:

When we bet on a hypothesis, especially under pressure of time, confirmation can carry an emotional kick; the organism enjoys creating unity. When the narrative delays satisfying an expectation, the withholding of knowledge can arouse keener interest. When a

hypothesis is disconfirmed, the setback can spur the viewer to new bursts of activity. The mixture of anticipation, fulfilment, and blocked or retarded or twisted consequences can exercise great emotional power. The formal processes of perception and cognition – as Eisenstein well knew – can trigger affect (1985, pp.39 to 40).

Bordwell's description may work to some degree as a partial, albeit somewhat clinical, explanation of the emotional effect of narrative development, but it leaves out a significant element, being the emotional impact of spectacle addressed directly to the spectator. Whilst it is of course correct that Eisenstein was well aware of the emotional effect of perception and cognition, these processes can apply equally to spectacle as they can to narrative, and Eisenstein paid little attention to trying to split narrative off from spectacle, seeing the film instead as an organic whole. In fact it is Eisenstein who conceives of a cinema approached through the reconceptualisation of the cognitive process in terms of intellectual passion and activity (Frampton 2006 quoting Eisenstein, p.199). In essence, Eisenstein is working towards and seeking to create a “sensual cinema” a term which neatly encapsulates a cinema which properly accommodates the emotional impact of film and which forms the basis of the sensual image discussed in Chapter One. In addition, the fact that, in Bordwell's terms, the organism enjoys creating unity does not seem an adequate explanation for what we feel when, for example, Eric Liddell wins the gold medal in *Chariots of Fire* (1981) or Brody kills the shark in *Jaws* (1975). This highlights a point made by Frampton when considering the cognitive approach as a whole: film experience is not totally understandable as a continuation of normal experience (2006, p.151). It is something else, something different not least because the film world is not reality; it is “a *cousin* of reality” (emphasis in original) (2006, p.1). It is constructed to engage with the spectator both intellectually and emotionally.

Bordwell may subsequently have relaxed his position somewhat in relation to the emotional aspect of the cinematic experience, as evidenced by his nod towards the emotional aspect of cinematic representations in a more recent essay reviewed by Browne (2004). In fact, after *Narration in the Fiction Film*

was published he responded to criticisms that his theory did not take sufficient account of the emotional aspect of the cinematic experience, referring to the passage cited above where he suggests that narrative is theoretically separable from the spectator's emotional response and pointing out that this passage "speaks of a theoretical idealisation for the sake of explanatory specificity" and that whilst emotional qualities are a "controversial topic within cognitive theory" they are the subject of substantial work by other theorists such as Noel Carroll (1990, pp.107 and 108). Whilst this may be correct as far as it goes, Bordwell does not really deny that Neoformalism does not seek to deal with the emotional content of the spectator's cognitive engagement with film. As such given that, as argued in Chapters One and Two, emotion is central to the spectator's cinematic experience, this again points to the limitations of Bordwell's approach in this respect. Arguably, his comments above confirm that we cannot see his Neoformalist approach as being a comprehensive theory of narration in the fiction film if we take the approach that emotion is not separable from the spectator's experience of the film, even when considering only the narrative content, let alone spectacle. When we go further and consider the transmission model and the interaction of narrational and non-narrational transmission, the limitations of this approach become even more apparent, for the reasons already explored in Chapters One and Two.

3.3 Cognition and emotion

Having reviewed and critiqued the cognitive basis of Bordwell's Neoformalist approach in the previous section, this section will examine other cognitive theories to consider the insights they offer in relation to the presence of spectacle and in the light of the transmission model. It will be argued that whilst there is much of value in these models, they do not of themselves cater for the idea of transmission or for the presence of spectacle as it is now understood following the arguments set out in Chapters One and Two. This limitation arises largely as a result of these models adopting the view of spectacle advanced by Bordwell in *Narration in the Fiction Film*. This enables certain issues to be considered and addressed but also prevents

these models from progressing beyond the limitations imposed by the Neoformalist approach in the context of spectacle. In addition, as will be discussed, these models have a tendency to over-analyse certain aspects of the spectator's mental processes, creating a distance between the abstract model and the actual experience. It will be necessary, to do justice to these cognitive models, to explain them in some detail to set them in the context of the issues being explored in this thesis.

As discussed above, the issue of the spectator's emotional responses as part of the cognitive process arose at an early stage in the development of cognitive film theory. Works published in the late 1990s and since have sought to incorporate emotion into the cognitive framework, arguing that in responding to films, thinking and feeling are intimately related (Plantinga, 2002, p.25). The most significant of these works for our purposes, by Smith, Tan and Grodal, will be considered below. The development of cognitive theories incorporating emotional response in the years after the publication of *Narration in the Fiction Film* was such that by 1999 it was possible to produce a work such as *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, a collection of pieces dealing explicitly with the emotional aspects of the cinematic experience from a cognitive perspective. In the introduction to this work the editors pointed to what had traditionally been seen as the incompatibility between cognition and emotion, reflecting the basic Cartesian distinction between thinking and feeling which has underlain Western philosophy for a considerable period and which made it relatively easy for film theory between the 1950s and the 1980s simply to dismiss the emotions as incompatible with a proper theoretical approach to the study of film.

As Eitzen puts it in an essay included in *Passionate Views*: "What the average moviegoer wants most of all from movies is not narrative *per se* but strong and concentrated affective responses" (1999, p.91). This neatly emphasises the main point of the argument, namely that narrative is not the end in itself which Neoformalism suggests. It is a means to an end, and that end is the affective or emotional response the spectator gains from watching the film. As such, it is more useful to see narrative as existing within the context of a

sensuous cinema designed to deliver this emotional response where narrative is simply one of the methods by which that response is produced. Arguably, mainstream cinema in particular is created for this express purpose, as Tan and Fridja note: “The Hollywood movie, it has been observed by many, is thoroughly melodramatic in a wider sense, in that it is theatrical, excessive, and aims at enlarging emotions” (1990, p.51).

Bordwell’s suggestion in *Narration in the Fiction Film* that emotion could be left to be dealt with by psychoanalysis is at least indirectly rebuffed by the editors of *Passionate Views*, who point out that psychoanalysis is fundamentally incapable of dealing with the particulars of cinematic emotion, dwelling instead on subject positioning and the mechanisms of desire: “Psychoanalytic film theory, with its joint emphasis on identification and ideology, has tended to discuss the politics of identity in much more detail than it does the nuances of a film’s emotional appeal” (1990, p.11). In discussing cerebral concepts such as “desire” and “pleasure” psychoanalytical theorists could appear to be studying emotion without actually dealing with specific emotional content or response at all. In fact, as Plantinga suggests, the word “desire” “becomes a kind of clearinghouse for the entire panoply of unconscious drives, instincts and motivations” but cannot in fact account for emotions such as “suspense, anticipation, surprise, mystery, sadness, shock” and a number of other kinds of viewing affects and experiences (2007, pp.5 and 6). Plantinga and Smith point out that current psychoanalytic theory situates spectator desire within specific historical and social contexts rather than utilising more overarching concepts of desire and pleasure (1990, p.12 and footnotes 26 and 27). Notwithstanding this development a fundamental problem still remains in that Freudian theory itself did not deal in any detail with emotions. Freud saw emotion as a discharge phenomenon, a way of dissipating bottled up psychic energy. Instinct is the foundation of human behaviour hence emotion became less central to Freudian theory. Plantinga and Smith argue that this leads to the use of the broad concepts of pleasure and desire upon which psychoanalytic film theory proceeds but which are too general to deal with the specifics of emotional response necessary for a proper study of this area (1990, pp.12 and 13).

There are precursors to the idea of approaching the affective element of the cinematic experience from a theoretical perspective. One of the earliest is Munsterberg's book *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, originally published in 1916 but which is still relevant to this area today. Munsterberg deals with the expression of emotion and the emotional response of the spectator, dividing this into two broad categories: those identical with the emotions of the protagonist and those which may be entirely different or even opposite to the emotions displayed on screen and which spring from the spectator's own affective response (2002, pp.99 to 108). For Munsterberg, the former, empathic type of emotion is far more prevalent (2002, p.104). The emotions elicited by a film are central because they bring "vividness and affective tone into our grasping of the [film's] action" (Quoted by Plantinga and Smith, 1990, p.14).

Further work in this area was carried out by V. F. Perkins in his 1972 book *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, in which Perkins argues for a film criticism that takes account of and values the spectator's involvement and emotional experience. Criticizing the psychoanalytical reliance on "identification" as being impossible to attain, he denies that emotional reactions submerge intellect and judgement: on the contrary, they often involve a kind of second-order reflexive response even while we experience them (1973, p.140). Most importantly, he emphasises the experience of going to see a film: it is not just an escape from our real lives but an addition to them (1973, pp.137 and 138).

Whilst Bordwell's Neoformalism may be open to the criticisms reviewed above in relation to its lack of emotional content, there is no doubt that Bordwell and others such as Branigan and Carroll paved the way for the current cognitively-based theoretical approach by both attacking the dominant psychoanalytical model and positing their own theories emphasising the cognitive activity of the spectator in the film experience. Carroll went on to provide one of the first studies of film and emotion in the context of the horror genre (*The Philosophy of Horror*). Since then there have been a

number of general studies of filmic emotion, two particular works of note being Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* and Ed Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*.

Smith's book is concerned with the issue of emotion in cinema as it arises in the context of the spectator's "identification" with the characters in the film. In Smith's view, the concept of "identification", whilst often used as a way of describing our engagement with the film through our identification with the characters, is in fact a more complex phenomenon which fundamentally breaks down into two distinct concepts, or as he puts it, levels of "engagement", which are often confused. The first of these is "alignment", being the way in which a film gives us access to the actions, thoughts and feelings of the characters. The second is "allegiance", being the way in which a film attempts to marshal our sympathies for or against the various characters within the diegesis (Smith, 1995, p.6). Clearly these concepts interact but are not interchangeable. Furthermore they can be complex in the way they interact with the spectator; so, for example, a film can seek to align us with an unsympathetic character, a situation which would have difficulty fitting into the undifferentiated concept of "identification". Similarly, the notion of allegiance can become complex, particularly when considering characters other than those that are simply "good" or "evil", but which may fall somewhere between these two poles. To these two levels of engagement Smith subsequently adds a third, "recognition", which describes the spectator's construction of character. These three elements together form what he terms the "structure of sympathy".

Importantly for our purposes, Smith sets out early on a number of presuppositions upon which his approach is based. One of these is the concept of "classical cinema", which he adopts from Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson. Whilst it is clear that Smith is avoiding too rigid a categorisation of films along classical lines, nevertheless this usage does signal the adoption of the narrative-based approach to this area with all of the preconceptions that such an approach entails, as discussed above (1995, p.11). Consequently,

characters for Smith exist within their narrative context and, it would appear, arise from the narrative element of the film. The issues Smith raises in relation to character spring from the narrative. The narration is “the force which generates recognition, alignment and allegiance, the basic components of the structure of sympathy” (1995, p.75). Each concept defines a level of narrative structure which relates to characters. Whilst it appears that characters are therefore delimited by narrative, the narrative itself may occasionally look elsewhere:

More radically, a narration may direct our attention to peripheral ‘forceless’ objects, as in the lingering shots of rooms and doorways in the films of Straub and Huillet, or the so-called ‘pillow’ shots in the films of Ozu. Such cases border on the domain of non-narrative form, where the construct of character becomes irrelevant (Smith, 1995, p.76).

This passage reveals the familiar separation of the narrative from any other element of the film and the assumption that there will be no narrative content in such lingering shots. These objects become “forceless”, apparently almost redundant in the context of the narrative-driven cinema upon which Smith’s approach is based. Further, why is it the case that the construct of character becomes irrelevant in such non-narrative moments? Arguably, even if we adopt the view that there is no narrative content in such moments, nevertheless the characters may still be interacting with their environment or, even if there are no characters visible, the film is still interacting with the spectator. Do we actually need to have a character visible to learn something else about them? Their very absence from a scene may be enlightening in this regard. It is also interesting that these objects are classed as “peripheral”. Peripheral to what? They may, strictly, be peripheral to the narrative taken on its own, but not to the film as a whole.

On the basis of the transmission model, it is clear that characters do not just exist in the context of the narration. We may learn a great deal about a character from, for example, the room in which they live, the clothes they are wearing and so on. We may learn something from observing a character’s reaction to events, spectacular or otherwise. Such elements of the film may

contain a great deal of non-narrational transmission, but they are still part of the spectator's experience of the film and the fact that they may not contain a balance of narrational transmission does not rob them of importance or affective impact, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Five. It is not necessary for all such elements to feed into the narrative in order for them to have an emotional effect on the spectator. Consequently, from this perspective Smith's approach whilst interesting and consistent within its own terms is limited given that it is based upon a Neoformalist view of the central purpose and function of narrative, a view which has been demonstrated already to be incomplete when the transmission model and the need to consider the presence of spectacle is taken into account.

In the year after Smith's book, Ed Tan published his work on cognition and emotion in the cinema: *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*. Tan's central issue was whether a spectator watching a film experiences authentic emotion and, if so, the nature of that emotion. Again, Tan places narrative at the centre of his concerns:

Current film theory is concerned with the role of narrative in film and the way narrative determines film style and film technology. Concepts of narration in film are especially relevant for understanding emotion in the viewer, because narrative is a way to arouse emotion (1996, p.x).

Tan proceeds on the basis that film narration and the emotions felt by the spectator when watching a film are inextricably intertwined:

The notion that film narration and viewer emotion are actually two sides of the same coin provides us with a hypothetical answer to both parts of our central question. First, it assumes that films do evoke emotions, and second, it presupposes that film narration is responsible for a characteristic systematics in the emotion felt by the viewer (1996, p.4).

The implication is that the emotions felt by the spectator arise *exclusively* from the narrative, although Tan suggests that the emotion generated by the

narrative may be amplified or emphasised by other elements of the cinematic experience:

The film as narrative...manipulates individual and easily observable characteristics of the medium in order to convey subtle meanings and produce highly specific effects. Film technology, including the acting, directing, and camera work, serve to present fictional works in such a way that they produce the intended effect on the viewer (1996, p.6).

Tan's theory is in fact an attempt to create what Plantinga has referred to as a "global affect structure"; that is, an overarching theory of affect in film viewing (Plantinga and Tan, 2007, pp.1 and 2). For Tan the chief emotion aroused by film is "interest". Interest in a film covers the entire span of that film although it may be punctuated by moments of higher emotional response, which are more memorable and enjoyable than the background emotion of interest. Interest is "the inclination to call on resources from a limited capacity, and to employ them for the elaboration of a stimulus, under the influence of the promises which are inherent in the present situation with respect to expected situations" (1996, p.86). As such interest dominates the emotional background to the film and acts as a global affect structure. It increases the intensity of the other emotional episodes in the film, which themselves feed back into the interest emotion. For Tan interest is defined as an emotion because it makes possible relational action even if that is cognitive and not physical action (2007, p.9). The question of whether there is in fact a global affect structure for film is far from resolved, but the fact that the debate is currently taking place indicates the degree to which emotion has become the focus of discussion in cognitive film theory circles.

Tan sees the cinematic experience as an active process involving both thought and emotion. Certain images and narrative devices are seen to trigger specific emotional effects on the spectator. Tan distinguishes between "fiction emotions" and "artefact emotions" (or F and A emotions, as he calls them). F emotions are linked to the diegesis and arise out of the spectator's involvement with the fictional world of the film. A emotions involve recognition of the film's construction or its artistry and would encompass for

example emotions arising out of the recognition of great acting or cinematography. Tan observes that a spectacular sequence would fall within this category when the fact of that sequence causes the spectator to become aware of the mechanics of its creation. Citing Bordwell, Tan points out that such displays of artistic motivation usually arise out of their fictional context and are intended to generate intense emotion. Consequently, we can see that Tan's approach may account for the direct emotional effect of spectacle but only to the degree permitted by the Neoformalist model.

In a traditional film of the sort Tan is studying (broadly Bordwell's classical cinema) F emotions tend to dominate with A emotions largely hidden, principally because the narrative bias of the film results in a considerable degree of identification with and therefore emotional investment in the characters by the spectator. This is linked to the extent to which such emotions are empathic. It is easy to conceive of empathic F emotions, such as pity or sadness for a character, since such empathy arises out of our feelings for the character. It is, however, also possible to experience empathic A emotions arising out of, for example, delight in a particularly beautiful camera movement, as suggested by the example from *Once Upon a Time in the West* referred to above. The major A emotions are, however, nonempathic, relating to feelings such as enjoyment, admiration and astonishment. It is also possible to conceive of nonempathic F emotions, which would relate to, for example, fear arising when watching a sequence or desire to see a particular sequence, and the fear aroused by a character's predicament or the desire to see that predicament resolved (1996, pp.81 to 84). As a result of the diegetic effect all F emotions, whether empathic or nonempathic, are witness emotions; that is, the emotions that one would feel if actually witnessing the event depicted at first hand. Such emotions would include anger, joy, fear, pity, relief and gratitude. It is notable that when we consider the sort of emotions we might experience when watching a spectacular sequence, they seem to fall into both the A and the F emotion categories in that the spectacle may generate an empathic emotional response but we may also feel awe or excitement at the execution of a particularly spectacular stunt, for example.

How does spectacle fit into this categorisation of empathic and nonempathic A and F emotions? Tan's remarks on spectacle are worthy of some consideration:

Spectacle in film is, as the term implies, appealing, simply because it is largely divorced from the fate of the protagonists. And there is a great deal of spectacle in films because the medium itself is spectacular. Few film plots are set in totally empty space, and there is always some aspect of the background to enjoy, from a breathtaking landscape to indoor spaces that most people have never been privileged to enter... (1996, p.83).

There are a number of points to take from the above. The first is Tan's implicit definition of spectacle, which seems to be anything which is not directly related to narrative-driven character actions. Tan's definition seems to imply a lesser status for spectacle than that afforded to narrative. The second point to consider is whether spectacle is really divorced from the protagonists' fate to the extent Tan suggests. Whilst it is clearly the case that not all spectacle is closely linked to the fate of the characters (one has only to consider by way of example the opening of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)), a substantial amount clearly is, and the interdependence between spectacle and narrative that has already been noted reinforces this position.

Another question raised by the above extract is the nature of the emotion which Tan thinks is elicited by spectacle. Is it A or F emotion, empathic or nonempathic? The extract referred to earlier seemed to suggest that Tan regarded spectacle as falling within the realms of Bordwell's artistic motivation and hence generating A emotion. I have suggested above that the range of emotions that seem to be generated by a spectacular sequence would appear to cover both A and F emotions. Tan subsequently suggests, however, that spectacle calls up nonempathic F emotion. When watching films that involve a substantial element of spectacle "watching fictional events is the prime attraction, almost divorced from their significance for the characters" (1996, p.175). Nonempathic interest in such circumstances can be described as "fascination" with the spectacle itself. Nonempathic emotions are not

associated with the implications for the protagonist but rather with the actual witnessing of the event. As suggested above, the emotions aroused relate to what the spectator will feel when watching, say, a scene of horror or violence rather than empathic identification with the characters involved in the sequence. These nonempathic emotions are still F emotions because they arise out of the diegesis of the film itself. It is, of course, easy to imagine that such emotions could be accompanied by A emotions relating to the staging or technology involved in the spectacular sequence.

Notwithstanding the essential characteristic of the spectacular sequence as being nonempathic F emotions, Tan does acknowledge that such sequences will still have a certain significance for the characters and hence generate empathic F emotions. This rather restricted view of the emotional effect of a spectacular sequence may arise out of Tan's implicit definition of spectacle. The implication of the intertwining of narrative and spectacle suggested in Chapter Two by virtue of involving the fate of the characters generates both empathic and nonempathic F emotions and thus is experienced more intensely by the spectator than a sequence which has less character involvement. This does not imply that this first example necessarily contains more narrational transmission than the second since it may not be the case that a character's involvement in a spectacular sequence has to advance the narrative significantly. There is clearly room for further investigation here of the link between character involvement in spectacle and the emotions generated using Tan's model. Indeed, the rise of the action movie in the 1980s and 1990s, with its increased emphasis on action as opposed to character development, might be seen in these terms as spectacle that concentrates primarily on nonempathic F and A emotions whereas earlier spectacular sequences (such as those in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) for example) incorporated a greater element of empathic F emotions by virtue of their comparatively better developed characters.

For our purposes, the major issue with Tan's formulation is his definition of spectacle. One of the consequences of this definition is the suggestion that a spectacular sequence gives rise only to nonempathic F emotions. This would

seem overly reductive. Spectacle is for Tan something that is largely left over rather than a significant element of the cinematic experience:

The events of the narrative befall the character, not the viewer. Nor are viewers under the impression that these events touch them; the diegetic effect creates the illusion that one is present in the fictional world, but as a spectator or witness. In short, the situational meaning for the viewer always contains, in addition to the situational meaning for the protagonist, an element of spectacle (1996, p.190).

“Situational meaning” here means the appraisal of a situation by the protagonist (or the viewer) in terms of its personal significance. “If it is to give rise to an emotion, the appraisal of a situation must contain certain critical meaning features. This is the law of situational meaning” (1996, p.45). Thus, the viewer whilst becoming absorbed in the film’s diegesis retains a certain objectivity, a certain distance from the events in the screen borne of the knowledge that they are not actually in the situation in which the characters find themselves: they are at best an invisible witness. Consequently, in addition to the identification with the characters’ emotional situation, the viewer experiences nonempathic F emotion (and possibly A emotion) arising out of this distancing. This appears to be categorised by Tan simply as “spectacle”, something to be experienced largely only on a nonempathic level. This has echoes of the centred point-of-view voyeuristic spectator of the Neoformalist model discussed in the previous chapter. Consequently, this would appear to be an incomplete definition for our purposes and, furthermore, leads Tan to underestimate the emotional complexity of a spectacular sequence, which encompasses the full range of emotions he considers, both A and F empathic and nonempathic emotions. As a result, although Tan’s categorisation does accommodate the presence of spectacle, his definition of the term leads him to perhaps limited conclusions about its emotional impact.

In his concluding chapter, Tan describes film as “a conductor of fantasy which...produces emotions” (1996, p.236) through the spectator’s willing involvement in a series of multiple illusions which draw the spectator into the

film's diegesis and create a genuine emotional response to the filmic events. Tan summarises his conclusions as follows:

...in general, narration may be seen as the systematic evocation of emotion in an audience, according to a preconceived plan. Narration by means of film is one way of doing this...The film generates, as it were, like a moving belt, for the entire 90 minutes, a continuous emotional situational meaning, programmed as part of its specific affect structure, that results in an ongoing, genuine emotional response (1996, pp.250 and 251).

It is interesting to note a slight slippage in the above passage, which starts with a reference to how narrative evokes emotion but ends up talking about the effect the film has overall. It is true to say that it is the film that generates an emotional meaning, not just the narrative itself. Narrative is only one element of film: in fact Tan himself remarks that "the narrative does, of course, represent only one – highly abstract – point of view from which the film can be described" (1996, p.6).

This brief discussion of Smith's and Tan's work has shown that whilst they can both contribute to a consideration of how spectacle and the transmission model may be considered in the cognitivist context, the applicability of their approaches remains limited given their adherence to Bordwell's view of the nature and function of spectacle. Will other, cognition-based approaches be of more assistance? Perhaps the most complete model of filmic emotion from a cognitivist perspective to date is Torben Grodal's *Moving Pictures: A new Theory of Film Genres, Feelings and Cognition*. This is a major contribution to this area of study and it will therefore be useful to consider Grodal's work in more detail to see whether this can accommodate spectacle and the approach suggested by the transmission model. As will be argued below, whilst Grodal's approach again offers valuable insights into the mental processes that underlie emotional and cognitive responses to films, some issues remain in relation to his treatment of spectacle as it is now understood following Chapters One and Two.

Grodal commences his book by stating his aim: “to describe the experience of viewing visual fiction and the way in which this experience is created by the interaction between fiction and viewer” (1997a, p.1). “Experience” as used here is a holistic approach to the way in which visual fiction is viewed, encompassing not only a cognitive approach but also expressly including (as his title suggests) the emotional aspect of the cinematic experience. Grodal’s theory encompasses disciplines well beyond the traditional reach of aesthetics and is (as he later suggests (Grodal, 2006, pp.1 and 2)) as much a scientific theory as an aesthetic approach:

My hypothesis is therefore that cognitive and perceptual processes are intimately linked with emotional processes within a functionally unified psychosomatic whole. Because visual fictions are experienced in time, a description of the interaction between cognition and emotion will be concerned with temporal flow. The theories and models for describing the flow of experiences must be brought together from several disciplines: film theory, first and foremost; and general aesthetics, narrative theory, neuroscience, physiology, and cognitive science (1997a, p.1).

In a subsequent article, Grodal defended this approach not only in terms of its substantial reliance upon scientific theories but also its stated intention to be an overarching theory of film (2006, pp.1 and 2). This may have been in response to a criticism made by one reviewer of the book, Eric Parkinson, who suggested that the book would have benefited from a more general discussion of how cognitive science and traditional aesthetics intersect, although Grodal’s article does not explicitly cite Parkinson’s review (Parkinson, 1997). In fact Grodal subsequently responded to Parkinson in some detail (1997b) suggesting that Parkinson’s criticisms were misplaced and that his theory could be read not only at a cognitive level but at a “psychological” level as well, as he had demonstrated by producing a “psychological” outline of his theories separately (reproduced in fact in *Passionate Views*).

Central to Grodal’s project is a model of mental activity describing the reception of (primarily) visual information into the brain and its subsequent processing. This is seen as a flow from perception through emotional

activation and cognitive processing to motor action. Grodal subsequently described this as the PECMA flow (short for perception, emotion, cognition and motor action) (2006, p.1; 2009). The notion of then either facilitating or blocking this flow is used as a basis for sketching out a theory of what he refers to as narrative and “lyrical” genres. “Lyrical” in this context refers to an experience of intense perceptions or “saturated networks of associations”, which in turn broadly means that the viewer will experience an intense (or “saturated”) emotional experience through the blocking of the PECMA flow by the presentation of emotionally salient images outside a “classical narrative” (in Bordwell’s definition of the term).

In contrast to the “lyrical” mode, the classical narrative structure as defined by Bordwell involves goal-oriented characters acting coherently in a coherent space-time and thus affords opportunities for the emotional impact of the images to be discharged by the narrative structure, usually via the process of the attainment of the characters’ goals. Hence the steps of perception, emotion and cognition are undertaken and the desire for motor action relieved by the vicarious implementation of those action tendencies, usually by the screen character taking control of his or her situation.

To summarise, the classical narrative structure as defined by Bordwell allows the PECMA flow to be completed, thus discharging the emotional effect of the images. In contrast, the lyrical mode impedes or blocks this flow as a result of its alteration of the classical narrative structure, resulting in an attempt by the spectator to deal with the emotional impact of these images by building up a series of associations and common denominators divorced from any narrative context: “Although the build up of emotionally-charged associations has no clearly focussed narrative meaning, such associations may produce an experience of perceptual, cognitive and emotional plenitude and deep meaning because of the complexity and emotional charge of the mental associations involved” (1997a, p.5). In other words, we do not need to rely upon a narrative structure to derive a strong emotional charge from an image: the image itself may be enough, via the associations with other images it

conjures in our minds, to create the requisite feelings without the need for these feelings to be explained by a narrative context.

It is notable that Grodal's approach is predicated on the notion that cinema is primarily narrative-driven. As is clear from the brief explanation given above of the lyrical mode, the discharge of the PECMA flow is via a narrative process. Grodal suggests that the PECMA flow, certainly at its initial stages, does not distinguish between data drawn from the veridical world and that drawn from a film; that sorting process comes later (2006, pp.3 and 4). However, the theory proceeds on the assumption that the cognitive stage of the process will automatically look for a narrative structure and as in the real world so in films that structure will facilitate the full mental flow. Whether the real world is capable of disrupting the PECMA flow by becoming lyrical in the same way that, for example, art-house or avant garde films do is perhaps unanswerable, and indeed unnecessary to consider here, but it is clear that a fundamental presupposition about this mental process as it applies to cinema is that it distinguishes between narrative film on one hand and everything else on the other. What happens to spectacle in this scenario?

It is clear that the PECMA model is based upon a narrative flow and that Grodal is constructing a model to deal principally with this aspect, although his construction of the alternative lyrical model and his discussion of genres does cater for the possibility of divergence from the classical narrative model (1997a, p.39). Grodal touches briefly upon the visceral response to what he calls certain "physical" films, although he does not elaborate upon precisely what this term means (1997a, p.42). This recalls Eisenstein's kinaesthetic response, part of the visceral response to spectacle discussed in previous chapters. Whilst Grodal does not elaborate upon this physical aspect of the spectator's experience further, he does introduce the concept of "enaction". Enaction is the barely suppressed motor activity which occurs when watching emotionally charged or exciting sequences or, as Grodal puts it: "a level of 'motor meaning'...which anchors the structuration of the relations of a subject to objects"(1997a, p.48).

To elaborate upon this point a little further, a film works by activating a range of psychosomatic dimensions in which mind and body work together. This includes perception, cognition, memory, emotion and enaction, embodied in the PECMA flow model. As discussed above, the release of the stimulation of the motor reflex is carried out primarily vicariously. Interestingly, Grodal suggests that this release occurs as a function of the narrative, via a character taking control of a situation or attaining their goals. He does not appear to consider that a similar release may occur via a spectacular sequence, particularly if that sequence also involves narrational transmission, arguably another example of his narrative-centred approach.

Grodal proposes that a film could activate one of two different mental processes: the associative, in which one image or phenomenon is linked to another by some likeness, and the sequential, in which each image or phenomenon follows on from the previous one. This is the basis for the lyrical and narrative modes respectively, discussed above. Implicit in these two mental processes is the narrative function inherent in the sequential process and the lyrical or non-narrative in the associative process. In fact, given that the PECMA flow moves “downstream” from perception to action (or vicarious action) the most exact analogous “downstream” flow in cinematic terms is what Grodal calls the “canonical narrative”. This is his term for Bordwell’s classical cinema. “Canonical” as Grodal uses the term does not therefore relate to a film that forms a part of an accepted “canon” of outstanding works (although a film could of course also fall within that category) but one which follows an essentially linear form, a form dictated not by abstract considerations but as a result of “real world constraints on the sequencing of events and... the “downstream” relations between motives, cognitions, and acts” (1997a, p.279). As described above, goal-oriented characters act logically and coherently to achieve their goals in a coherent time and space continuum in accordance with the well constructed narrative progression of the classical Hollywood cinema. In Grodal’s terms: “The typical time-structure is one of simple chronological progression, and the dominant enactions are voluntary and telic” (1997a, p.167).

As Grodal points out, the canonical narrative is “by far the dominant genre of visual fiction” (1997a, p.167). It is one of a number of genres that he discusses in the third section of his book through an examination of the way in which these genres block or impede the PECMA flow. In the case of the canonical narrative, of course, it does neither of these things: instead it facilitates the PECMA flow and in fact represents as it were the base model against which the other genres can be judged by the extent of their deviation.

Grodal’s genres are partly familiar but partly driven by his PECMA flow model, so that they are distinguished from each other primarily by the different ways in which they diverge from the standard canonical model. The genres identified are the lyrical “associative” form, the canonical narrative, obsessional narratives (when the actions of the characters appear to arise out of obsessive rather than logical goal-oriented behaviour), melodramas, horror, schizoid (where the spectator perceives the characters on the screen without fully identifying with them as the spectator would have done in a canonical narrative situation), comedy and metafiction, where the film deliberately communicates with the spectator outside its diegesis, the most obvious example being when a character addresses the audience directly or the film in other ways draws attention to its own substance or creation. Confusingly, the terminology adopted by Grodal appears to mix existing genres (melodrama and horror) with others that seem to have been coined by Grodal himself (schizoid and metafiction).

The issue of concern for our purposes is where to locate spectacle in Grodal’s work. Whilst cognitive film theory has now clearly acknowledged that the emotional impact of film is an integral part of the cinematic experience and an object worthy of detailed study and, furthermore, that mainstream cinema is largely geared towards providing that emotional impact, Grodal’s work does not really address the presence and effect of spectacle as such apart from a few tantalising hints in relation to “physical” films, as described above, and hints here and there in the concepts of “enaction” and the “associative lyrical” mode.

The lyrical mode in its pure form is by definition non-narrative in that it depends upon the absence of any characters with which we can identify or empathise or objects which will carry (presumably narrative-related) associations. Consequently, lyricism is driven by “visual rhythm and oscillation, supplemented by motion from the represented world” (1997a, pp.164 to 166). The most common form of this sort of sequence is the music video, although Grodal points out that a lyrical sequence within a mainstream film is usually narrationally motivated, such as the hallucinations in *Altered States* (1980) or the “visions” in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Considering this from the transmission model perspective, it is of course the case that both the hallucinations in *Altered States* and the visions experienced by Bowman at the climax of *2001* contain narrational as well as non-narrational transmission which is distinct from their presence as sequences prompted by the narrative. It is therefore perhaps not entirely satisfactory to assign spectacle solely to the associative lyrical mode. It would appear to straddle the lyrical and canonical models at least by virtue of the fact that it has a narrative content. Interestingly, Grodal does not appear to consider whether the canonical narrative and associative lyrical modes could coexist simultaneously, as is suggested by the transmission model. In addition, it appears unclear as to whether the enactive effects noted as part of the canonical model would be experienced in the lyrical mode. Given that it appears that the lyrical mode blocks the PECMA flow at the second, emotion stage, this would appear not to be the case, and yet the experience of watching a spectacular sequence does arouse the kinaesthetic responses noted by Eisenstein and others (Grodal, 2006, pp.4 and 5). Consequently, it would appear either that the experience of spectacle is incompatible with being assigned to any particular place in Grodal’s structure or that, perhaps, it can be seen as a function common to both lyrical and canonical modes.

Grodal’s theory provides an extensive and detailed model for an analysis of cognitive and emotional processes, but the difficulty of finding a place for spectacle in his model, as argued above, and for accommodating the transmission model suggests that we need to look elsewhere.

Subsequent theories have developed upon Grodal's work. For example, Frome posits a theory intended to deal not just with films but also other representational media, particularly videogames, by positing three types of emotion (developing from Tan's theories) being world, artefact and game emotions, and two kinds of participation, being observer-participant (where the spectator responds to the artwork but doesn't change it materially) and actor-participant (where the spectator does change the artwork materially, as in a videogame). Combining these three types of emotion with the two levels of participation allows Frome to construct a matrix of possible emotion inputs across a variety of situations not confined to film alone. It is recognised that these are not mutually exclusive categories, hence several may be experienced during any given sequence (Frome, 2006). At its most basic level, Frome's approach is the mapping of an emotional structure onto a cognitive background intended to address and develop a number of scenarios beyond those discussed by Grodal. As such, whilst this is perfectly acceptable, the issues raised by the cognitive approach and the complexity of these theories when compared to the actual experience of watching a film can equally be applied to Frome's work.

As is the case with the other theories considered above, there is perhaps little to criticise in relation to the detailed working of the models proposed. Of more relevance is the fact that, given the Neoformalist narrative-centred approach adopted, it is difficult to locate adequate room for spectacle in these models without, at best, constructing a theoretical position which does not reflect the range of activities involved in the cinematic experience.

Is it implicit in the cognitive approach, with its analysis of the facilitating or impeding of the mental process, that it inevitably adopts a narrative-driven perspective, or is this a consequence of the pervasive influence of the Neoformalist account? Tan appears to give some consideration to the part spectacle plays in this activity but does not seek to define spectacle as anything other than that which remains when narrative is removed. As we have seen, this does not assist when attempting to formulate a comprehensive

view of the role that spectacle plays in cognitive theory. Grodal and Frome posit complex models that concentrate upon establishing processes that explain the emotional response to films, based upon the fundamental cognitivist premise that the spectator's emotional response to texts (such as a film) is dependent in part on how they evaluate and assimilate textual information (Plantinga, 2002, p.24). Whilst this is a perfectly acceptable strategy, I would argue that the resultant abstract models create a distance between the model and the lived experience of film which needs to be bridged at least to an extent to do justice to the impact of spectacle as it is now understood following the arguments advanced in Chapters One and Two. What is required is a framework (in the broadest sense) that can reflect the spectatorial model discussed in Chapter Two and accommodate the presence of spectacle and the transmission model. This will allow a more complete working definition of spectacle which can then be applied in the following chapters to certain elements of the cinematic experience.

The way out of this conundrum may therefore be to move beyond the cognitive approach. Arguably we may see the development of film theory from a semiotic base through psychoanalysis to cognitivism as a process of moving closer to the actual experience of watching film as layers of theoretical constructs obscuring the experience itself are gradually removed. The cognitive approach to the issue of spectacle, however, suffers from two important limitations. The first is the tendency of cognitive theorists working in this area to base their approach on Bordwell's narrative-centred model in *Narration in the Fiction Film* and the second is the tendency towards an abstract and reductive approach which once more begins to remove theory from the experience of watching a film in the cinema. Consequently, the models considered above do not accommodate the concepts of spectacle and transmission. This requires a more inclusive approach which attempts to mediate directly between the spectator and the film and which recognizes the interrelationship between narrative and spectacle.

3.4 Filmosophy

The previous section discussed the approach taken by various cognitive models and the insights that these could offer to the issue of the extent to which cognitive film theory can cater for spectacle and the transmission model. The conclusion reached was that whilst these models have much to recommend them, they do not adequately cater for the presence of spectacle as it is now understood following the reassessment undertaken in Chapters One and Two, neither do they permit the more flexible and inclusive approach taken by the transmission model. Cognitive film theory has, in this respect, reached something of a dead end. The way to move beyond this position, however, is to reconsider earlier theories which were more aware of the direct and emotional impact of the film upon the spectator and to look at ideas which move self-consciously away from cognitivism. The rest of this chapter will examine this approach.

This new approach potentially supplies a conceptual framework within which spectacle and the transmission model can be accommodated. This section will therefore examine the approach proposed by Frampton in his book *Filmosophy*. It will be argued that the reframing of the various concepts that underlie Frampton's model align with the basis of the transmission model as showing that film should not be seen as primarily a narrative-driven medium. Transmission then becomes a way of describing the communication between film and spectator that is the basis of *Filmosophy*. In addition *Filmosophy* can adequately accommodate spectacle, locating spectacle along with narrative as one of a number of dramatic forms available to the film to communicate with the spectator.

Frampton's book, which he describes as “a manifesto for a radically new way of understanding cinema”, arises out of two main preoccupations: first, the manner in which much film criticism and discussion centres on what he sees as overly-complex layers of philosophically based approaches, obscuring the emotional impact of film, or on a vocabulary that creates a false link between the technical aspects of film (jump cuts, edits, tracking shots and so on) and

the film's emotional impact; and secondly that film has reached a stage where the availability of digital technology has made the image infinitely malleable and the increasing use of the point of view shot and the unreliable narrator has made film become increasingly subjective. As a result there is a need for a language of film criticism and analysis which is both adaptable to these new conditions and "poetic" in its approach (2006, p.6).

As has been pointed out by McKibbin in his review of *Filmosophy*, Frampton is really calling for a new form of critical approach to film, an approach that allows for a more direct, empathic and poetic feel for what the film is communicating rather than filtering this through layers of structural, post-structural or psychoanalytical theorising (McKibbin (2007)). The basis of Frampton's model, which he calls the "filmind", is a way of describing a particular approach to thinking about how and what films communicate to the spectator. It is revealing that Frampton tends to use the verb "thinking" rather than "analysing" when describing the interaction between film and spectator. This underlies his more intuitive and philosophical approach and that film is an interaction which implies direct, exhibitionistic communication between film and spectator. In fact he suggests in an essay which predates the publication of *Filmosophy* that his use of the term "philosophy" in this context is "a more ruminative thinking about film, with a healthy distrust of inherited terms and concepts, and the setting about, where necessary, of forming new words and concepts to open up and reveal the working of film" (1996, p.86).

Filmosophy is a study of film as thinking, as an entity in its own right communicating the film to the filmgoer through the way in which it presents the film on the screen. The filmind is *Filmosophy*'s concept of "film-being", the theoretical originator of the sounds and images experienced by the filmgoer, and "film-thinking" is *Filmosophy*'s theory of film form, whereby an action of form is seen as the dramatic thinking of the filmind. Thus, seeing the film as "thoughtful" allows us to understand the ways in which film can communicate both meaning and effect. It also allows us to approach issues such as the digital image, which falls into neither the realist nor the formalist

school of film theory, and the unreliable narrator, where the film appears to know more than the spectator, with a new critical framework unencumbered by notions of Bazinian realism or theoretical constructs: “The filmgoer experiences film more intuitively, not via technology or external authorship, but directly, as a thinking thing” (2006, p.8).

It follows that Frampton’s approach is not narrative-driven: “...to say that film can only present ideas in terms of story and dialogue is a narrow, literary view of film’s possible force and impact” (2006, p.9). The narrative is an element of the film, a way in which the film communicates with the spectator, but by no means the only one. Further, Frampton’s creation of the film-being, the originator of the images and sounds experienced by the spectator, highlights that something creates these sounds and images “beyond or prior” to the creation of the narrative or any possible narrator. In fact, the notion of a “film-being” is not new to Frampton, and he duly surveys those thinkers that have to some degree or other suggested such a theoretical being in the past. It is notable that whilst Frampton is influenced in the creation of Filmosophy particularly by thinkers such as Perkins, Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty (as interpreted by Sobchack) and Cavell, he also relies frequently upon writers such as Artaud, Balacz and Munsterberg, those who experienced film at its inception as a vital new force and approached it unencumbered by the weight of theory to come.

In taking film on its own terms Filmosophy also removes film from the ideological or political sphere and from the realms of the *auteur* theory. Filmind exists beyond and before narrative hence includes all the elements of the film; in our terms the filmind encompasses the totality of transmission, narrational and non-narrational. Frampton sees it in fact as a “rhetorical extension” of Deleuze’s “spiritual automaton”, identifying that the cinema is more than an “eye” just mechanically recording what it sees but is also a brain, possessed of content and structure and a working nature. Filmind is therefore a “psychomechanics” with its own logic, a “union of the material and the spiritual” (2006, p.74).

This approach does not exclude the input of the filmmakers into the process but seeks to emphasize that, from the spectator's point of view, it is the film that communicates to the audience, not the filmmaker. Although he does not explicitly deal with this point as such, we may see this approach as a response to the sort of problems that Hall posited with the transmission model referred to in Chapter One: the issue of what the filmmakers put into the film matters less than what the spectator takes away from the film. If the spectator sees something which may not have been consciously inserted by the filmmaker, Frampton will say that nevertheless that is what the film has communicated to the spectator, hence is part of the filmind. Concentrating upon what the film communicates rather than the intentions of the filmmakers "reinvigorates the experience of film" (2006, p.75).

Again, in emphasising the totality of the filmind, the totality of transmission, Frampton is not creating something entirely novel but is in fact echoing the experiences of those who encountered film early in its development and felt its full emotional force. Frampton refers to Eisenstein's concept of the cinema as "sensuous thought": feelings, thoughts, concepts and action are on the same level of imagistic thinking. Hence, as Frampton suggests, film thinking, or image structuring, can be seen as both logical (narrative and dialogue) and prelogical (colours and movements) (2006, pp.59 and 60). It is apparent that Frampton's approach is capable of accommodating narrative and spectacle and integrating these together into the filmind as devices through which the film communicates with the spectator. It is not necessary to attempt the elaborate structural adjustments needed to incorporate spectacle into, for example, Grodal's cognitive analysis as discussed above. The transmission model is simply a way of describing the communication that passes between the film and the spectator.

Consequently, film-thinking is not read but felt. Frampton characterises most film-thinking as emotional or sensuous, although he does not rule out the possibility that the film may intend a more structurally rigorous approach towards its characters and objects. There is a sense here that the mental processes suggested by Bordwell's Neoformalism are reversed: the spectator

does not approach the understanding of a film through the cognitive analysis suggested in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, resulting in a reading of the film's narration with any emotional content left to artistic motivation or psychoanalysis. Instead the spectator experiences the film emotionally and directly through the devices the film uses to communicate, some of which may be narrational and others purely imagistic. The spectator's involvement with the film experience is not therefore voyeuristic but rather predominantly exhibitionistic: the film communicates directly with the spectator rather than using some sort of theoretical construct such as the imagined observer of narrative theory as a conduit through which the film's narrative is filtered (2006, p.38). There is the first suggestion here that not only can Filmosophy accommodate the transmission model, it may allow a broader re-evaluation of the concepts that have governed this enquiry so far: it is possible to argue that instead of seeing spectacle as something which has to be fitted into a narrative-driven cinema, we could see narrative as a device which can be incorporated into an essentially sensuous, emotionally-driven cinema. The historical dimension to Frampton's analysis emphasises that early commentators such as Munsterberg and Balacz saw cinema in far more direct, emotional terms than later theorists and it may be now with the development of more malleable, subjective images and the decline in narrative driven cinema that we are coming to the end of a particular era in film when narrative was dominant:

The concept of narration tells us that a certain moment of style is assisting the plot, the concept of the filmind tells us that this moment of style is a dramatic imaging of the story (2006, p.113).

Importantly, Frampton adds: "The filmind's basic film-thinking is structure, which can be either non-narrative...or narrative...or moving from one to the other" (2006, p.113) or, we can add, which can be both at once as anticipated by the transmission model.

The spectator's understanding and interpretation of the film therefore arises from what the film communicates but also the spectator's experience of the film:

The filmosophical filmgoer engages the film with their personality, backed by concepts that tie form to thinking, to build an interpretation of the film that responds to the whole film, colour and dialogue, shifts and plots (2006, p.174).

It follows that as Frampton puts it *Filmosophy* encourages an “opinionated and personal form of film interpretation” in which we can again see the emphasis on the subjective and empathic approach, the direct communication with the spectator (2006, p.178). This is also apparent in Frampton’s comments on the action movie: “Pleasurable, kinetic adventure films are ripe for this kind of personal recounting, as they often deny overly plot-led interpretations” (2006, p.179). In such circumstances, the experience of the film feeds its interpretation. Interpretation and understanding are not therefore linked solely to narrative or indeed to any other single element of the film, but instead to the experience of the film as a whole, including all narrational and non-narrational elements. From this perspective, the spectator’s interpretation of film will arise from the totality of the transmission, whether it is intended or otherwise by the filmmakers and whether it bears upon the narrative drive or not. The film is experienced holistically and interpreted subjectively and emotionally; indeed, Frampton characterises *Filmosophy* as “emotional intelligence” (2006, p.196):

Seeing film as ‘thinking’ ties content, form and filmgoer together, such that the filmgoer perceives an organic whole of the film thinking about its characters and events through dramatic forms, rather than layers of story and style (2006, p.212).

Frampton advertises *Filmosophy* as a manifesto and as such perhaps there are ideas here that need to be worked through in more detail. Certainly a number of reservations were expressed about precisely how, in philosophical terms, the concept of filmind would work: the presence of a mind does not of itself connote intelligence and more would be needed to prove that film can be seen as some sort of autonomous mind (Nowell-Smith, 2006). Frampton has responded in detail to a number of issues raised in reviews of *Filmosophy* (Frampton, 2008). Having said this, the fresh approach suggested by

Frampton does allow analysis of a film's mood rather than an approach which concentrates either on the technical aspects of a film or buries it in theory.

Perhaps of more interest are the comments made by McKibbin in his review of the book for *Senses of Cinema* (McKibbin, 2007). He points out that insofar as *Filmosophy* is really about the critical analysis of film, many respected film critics such as Raymond Durgnat, David Thomson and Pauline Kael have been practising this form of criticism for many years, so to that extent *Filmosophy* feels like “yesterday’s news offering itself up as tomorrow’s world”. McKibbin suggests that Frampton might in fact present the work as volume one of a two part study (echoing Deleuze) with part two being either a survey of or extracts from precisely the sort of informed and involved criticism which Frampton advocates and which is in fact already in existence. (Frampton’s response can be found at Frampton 2008, p.369.) There is some force in McKibbin’s observations and it may be fair to characterise *Filmosophy* as a work that straddles philosophy and criticism, with one discipline informing the approach taken by the other. This is not a criticism of *Filmosophy* and indeed there may be much to recommend an approach which blends the theoretical rigour of philosophy with an informed and imaginative critical analysis. It may well be that this is the very approach required to accommodate the idea of transmission and the revised definition of spectacle proposed in this thesis.

The crux of *Filmosophy* is about how the spectator can approach film not as a made thing but as a “perceptual opportunity”. Frampton may take his dislike of the technical approach too far; instead of dismissing it outright McKibbin suggests it could instead be broken down so that technical language can describe not just the film’s making but also the viewer’s perceptions. After all, it may be just as legitimate to describe a camera movement as a “tracking shot” as in any other way, and useful shorthand into the bargain. What is to be avoided is the automatic assumption made by much writing in this area that there is a straightforward correlation between technical skill and emotional effect. The language of the tracking shot and the dolly and so on becomes if not redundant then at least partially meaningless when considering wholly

animated or digitally created films, where no such camera movements actually take place, but only appear to do so. In such circumstances, technical language can perhaps be used to describe what a sequence does, but we must allow that such language can be used affectively as well as technically. Interestingly, although McKibbin does not make this point, this is a conceptual difficulty that existed long before digital imaging became widespread: it has been at least a theoretical issue for as long as animated features have been in existence.

Filmosophy is valuable in pointing the way to a more holistic approach to the experience of film which not only accommodates the transmission model but also suggests that we can see mainstream cinema not as a medium that is necessarily narrative driven and into which we need to find a place for spectacle, but as a medium that primarily has a direct, emotional communication with the spectator and in which narrative is only one of a number of devices used by the film to communicate with the spectator. Of equal weight (although the precise balance will of course vary from film to film and indeed sequence to sequence within a film) are the images and sounds which may not bear directly upon the narrative drive but which go to form the organic whole.

The concept of the organic whole reinforces the conclusions reached in the previous chapters that it is unhelpful in any event to attempt to label certain elements of the film experience as narrative or spectacle, or as being voyeuristic or exhibitionistic, since these distinctions erect false barriers in the way of an understanding of the film experience as a whole and historically emphasise false distinctions between types of cinema – classical or early or late – when a more inclusive approach would emphasise continuity. Frampton offers a way to move beyond these distinctions and, for our purposes, to utilise an approach that allows us to accommodate spectacle into a coherent whole.

3.5 Conclusions

At the beginning of Chapter One, when reviewing what film theory had to say about spectacle, if anything, it appeared that spectacle formed a relatively minor and self-contained element of the cinematic experience. Fitting uncomfortably within the narrative-dominated approach adopted by most major film theories, spectacle was excess material to be marginalised or overlooked or was the Other, a dangerous threat to narrative unity to be cast into the shadows. The hegemony exercised by the narrative-driven view of film, however, hides the fact that spectacle can be seen as the core of the cinematic experience: the direct, emotional relationship between the spectator and the film. An examination of issues of spectatorship in Chapter Two and the discussion of a model of spectatorship sufficient to cater for spectacle with reference to the social and cultural conditions that surrounded the development of early cinema demonstrated that the theoretical approaches described in Chapter One have erected a series of largely false distinctions between concepts such as spectacle and narrative, voyeurism and exhibitionism that result in a distortion or at best compartmentalisation of the cinematic experience which does not do justice to that experience as a whole. The transmission model proposed in Chapter One represents a way to develop beyond these restrictive concepts to accommodate the more expansive and inclusive approach which is reinforced by the exercise undertaken in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three then deals with these issues in the context of cognitive film theory and the extent to which cognitivism can accommodate the transmission model and the redefined concept of spectacle. The purpose of this chapter has been to consider the cognitive framework adopted by much current film theory and whether it is adequate to accommodate the transmission model. As has been shown, Bordwell's Neoformalism does not prove an adequate model in this regard for a number of reasons. Later cognitive models, whilst seeking to deal specifically with emotion as a component of the cinematic experience, have taken matters further but are generally still overly analytical in their approach.

Frampton's approach in *Filmosophy* offers a fresh insight into this area, largely by suggesting that much of this theoretical framework is not required and indeed does not allow for a full understanding of the experience of film. Frampton constructs his "manifesto for a radically new way of understanding cinema" via the creation of a filmind, the notion that the film thinks for itself and communicates with the spectator through the devices open to it. These devices may include narrative (and usually will in mainstream cinema) but narrative is by no means the only element of the film that should be taken into account. It is simply part of the overall experience.

Frampton therefore avoids the baggage of much contemporary film theory and emphasises the holistic, subjective and essentially emotional nature of the spectator's engagement with the film. The totality of the film, expressed as the filmind, can accommodate the transmission model, which may itself be seen as the communication which takes place between film and spectator without the intentionality implicit in the filmind's communication with the spectator. As such, the transmission model does not posit the presence of an autonomous film mind but does propose that a film transmits the totality of its information to the spectator, who then interprets that information for him or herself, and that this information will be narrational and non-narrational, the precise balance altering from sequence to sequence.

It follows that in order to provide a more complete picture cognisance needs to be taken of non-narrative elements and those aspects of cinema that are not voyeuristic in nature. In fact, we need to go further and dispense with such categories altogether. The voyeuristic model is a by-product of the narrative-driven approach and when that falls away, so does the notion of an implicit voyeurism. Describing spectacle as essentially exhibitionistic in its direct and emotional rapport with the spectator is useful when distinguishing it from the narrative model but unnecessary when we dispense with that model and recognise also that it is the film as a whole that communicates directly and emotionally with the spectator. The film may do so via narrative or other

devices, and we have seen in Chapter Two how in fact narrative operates to reinforce the impact of spectacle and vice versa.

In such circumstances, it is time to acknowledge that in reality cinema itself is, in Eisenstein's formulation, "sensuous thinking", an essentially direct, emotional experience which may be expressed by the film through any number of devices, some of which are narrational and others not. The only gloss to be added to Frampton's formulation in these terms is to acknowledge that not only is it the case that the filmind's basic film-thinking is structure, which can be non-narrative or narrative or move from one to the other, but that in fact the structure of film-thinking can encompass non-narrative and narrative thinking simultaneously, as predicated by the transmission model. As such we can see cinema as an essentially emotional experience which accommodates narrative and spectacle as dramatic forms employed by the filmind to communicate with the spectator. Spectacle and narrative are two of a number of resources available to the film to provide the emotional impact that the spectator seeks and, in the case of spectacle, to amplify that impact. Given that this emotional impact is central to the spectator's cinematic experience, it follows that spectacle itself occupies a central position in the cinematic experience.

Notwithstanding this broad reformulation, it is still necessary to utilise a more precise working definition of spectacle so as to apply this to the elements of the cinematic experience considered in Chapters Four and Five. Drawing together the various arguments advanced in Chapters One and Two therefore, spectacle can be defined as, first, a point or series of points in the spectrum of transmission in which there is a preponderance of non-narrational as opposed to narrational transmission; secondly, as essentially exhibitionistic in nature, communicating directly with the spectator, appealing to the spectator's emotions in a direct, visceral way; and thirdly, that this appeal to the spectator's emotions is intended not only to provoke an emotional response in the spectator but also, insofar as spectacle works with the narrative as described in Chapter Two, to amplify the spectator's emotional response to the film as a whole. The spectator and the film enter into an interaction

whereby the spectator, whilst willingly suspending judgment and disbelief, is nevertheless aware that technology is harnessed to create an illusion on the screen, but it is an illusion willingly entered into by the spectator.

In Tan's memorable phrase, films are "emotion machines" expressly intended and designed to provide an emotional experience, whether this be by way of narrative, spectacle or otherwise. When we seek to define spectacle we are also defining how we see films, why we see them and the effect they have upon us. Spectacle, far more than narrative, reflects the fundamental cinematic experience.

It follows that far from being narrative-driven, mainstream film is emotion-driven. Narrative will contribute to the emotional drive of the film, but it is only one of the devices that film employs to achieve the emotional fix the spectator is seeking. Spectacle represents another device. Spectacle may appear to be more amorphous and resistant to definition precisely because it is not as self-contained as narrative and because it bears so closely on the very basis of the filmgoing experience. The survey carried out in Chapter Two showed how the corporealised spectator, involved in a direct and physical way in the spectatorial experience of early cinema, is not confined to a periodised early cinema but remains a consistent feature throughout the history of the medium. It is necessary to create a working definition of spectacle but in one sense, if the fundamental shift in the basis of the cinematic experience described above is accepted, spectacle as an Other marginalised on the fringes of theory disappears as being all but indistinguishable from the cinematic experience itself.

Chapter Four

Formation, Assimilation and Formalism: Spectacle and Technology

4.1 Introduction

In January 2004 journalist Dan Brown wrote a piece for CBC news online headed “Special effects become Mannerist” (Brown, 2004). This referred to an observation made by one of Brown’s interviewees, screenwriter Mark Rosenthal, that in his opinion effects created by computer generated imagery (CGI) had by that time reached a stage similar to that experienced in painting in the sixteenth century: painters had become so proficient at producing realistic figurative art that they began to experiment, resulting in a deliberately exaggerated, distorted art-form known as Mannerism. The article was written in the context of a review of the latest developments in CGI noting that, following over a decade of development of the CGI image integrated seamlessly into its optical background, films such as *The Matrix* (1999) and *Hulk* (2003) began to include almost abstract sequences or images which clearly were not intended to be seen as realistic. CGI, in at least some films, had entered a Mannerist stage. To put this development in another way, and with reference to existing historical divisions of film theory, CGI had moved from Realism to Formalism.

These observations did not of course encompass all CGI being created at that time. The article does however point to a particular relationship between technology and the cinematic image which finds its most obvious incarnation in the presentation of spectacle, that aspect of film most often associated with technology. The notion of formalist spectacle suggests both earlier and later stages of development in that relationship. Further, it also offers a way of historicising spectacle by examining its ongoing relationship with technological development. An examination of this relationship will be revealing not only in terms of spectacle but also the use of technology in the cinema. I will argue below that a consideration of this relationship leads to

the formulation of a number of types of spectacle linked to the use of technology at any given time and that an examination of these types of spectacle is helpful in beginning to formulate an aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema.

Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the link between spectacle and technology as a way of historicising spectacle so as to develop our understanding of the more theoretical considerations undertaken in the first three chapters of this thesis. This chapter will therefore proceed by investigating three particular technological developments in cinema: colour, widescreen and CGI, although brief consideration will also be given to more recent developments in the use of the Imax format. This investigation will enable the formulation of a number of propositions about the relationship between spectacle and technology, the developmental arc followed by the technologies under discussion and the way that these two elements broadly link with each other. I will argue that it allows us to see how certain types of spectacle evolve out of this ongoing relationship with technology.

Building on the comments made in Brown's article, this chapter proposes a model which shows that the spectacle associated with the use of technology passes through three stages. The first of these stages is where the use of the technology in question drives the film's structure such that in many ways the film exists to promote and foreground the technology in question. At this stage the technology is often relatively crude and, by virtue of its own limitations, obtrusive. I have called this the formative stage, hence the spectacle associated with this stage is formative spectacle.

In the second stage, the technology becomes less obtrusive not only because its technical limitations have been addressed but also because it is no longer seen as a novelty, something which the film exists to promote. Consequently, the technology in question is used to assist in the creation of spectacular sequences or the film's mise-en-scene generally without drawing attention to itself as something inherently spectacular in its own right. In other words, there is no spectacle at this stage that is expressly related to the overt presence

of the technology itself. The technology has become assimilated into the film's fabric, hence I have called this is the assimilated stage.

The third and final stage in this process is where the filmmakers choose for aesthetic reasons as discussed in Brown's article, or because the technology has developed significantly, to highlight the use of that technology again. This is not, however, a return to the formative stage because the film does not exist solely to promote the new technological development. In addition, the pressure exerted to make films as realistic as possible, within the accepted cinematic definition of what is real as opposed to realism in the veridical sense, means that in order to draw attention to itself this new technological development will deliberately distort the film's constructed realism in an abstract or Mannerist fashion. For the reason set out above, I have called this the formalist stage and the spectacle associated with it formalist spectacle.

It can be argued that in its formative and formalist stages technology is a spectacle in itself irrespective of whether the films in question employ any other spectacular sequences (which may be the case). Spectacle associated with technology passes through the formative and assimilated stages and may move on to the formalist stage depending upon the aesthetic choices of the filmmakers, the drive for novelty which underlies the development of spectacle generally and, as always, the economic imperative in mainstream cinema to attract the spectator to the film. An alternative way of describing this process is to say that the technologies under discussion in this chapter follow a developmental arc in which they are at first visible, then become invisible and may in some circumstances become visible again. To differentiate the first and third stages, the third stage can better be described as "prominent". Broadly, the formative stage equates to visible technology, the assimilated stage invisible technology and the formalist stage prominent technology.

I will argue that the fact that the technology in question is capable of being first visible, then invisible and then prominent suggests that spectacle in this context does not in fact reside in the technology itself, but in the *presentation*

of that technology. It is for this reason that not all technological developments are spectacular *per se* but have to be presented as spectacle by the film. Developments in lens technology, for example, have not been heralded as spectacular in their own right although they have undoubtedly helped to improve the quality and impact of spectacle and film generally.

Analysing the relationship between spectacle and technology using the concepts of the formative, assimilated and formalist stage allows a consideration of the historical perspective in relation to the aesthetics of spectacle. It also enables us to consider the changes in the presentation of spectacle in the context of the development of its underlying technology. It is apparent that the nature and characteristics of spectacle change not only as a result of economic or market forces or the demands of novelty, but also the dictates of technological development, which is also driven by the same forces.

The three stages through which spectacle passes will be examined by reference to each of the three technologies identified above. Although each of these represents a distinct technological development in the history of cinema and each follows a broadly similar trajectory in terms of development and subsequent use, as will be discussed below there are many differences between the technologies beyond the obvious in relation to their application to certain aspects of the cinematic experience. Both colour and widescreen had been experimented with from virtually the beginning of cinema itself, although ultimately colour was introduced as a viable commercial prospect some twenty years before widescreen cinema. The technology required to create CGI was not available in any meaningful form until the 1980s and again early experiments with its use were not commercially successful so that its eventual introduction into the mainstream market did not take place until the early 1990s.

Colour and CGI may both be described as characteristics of the cinematic image whereas widescreen cinema needs to be split into its function as a method of film presentation, involving developments in lens technology that

led to changes in the screen size and shape and the introduction of more sophisticated sound systems, and the adoption of a particular style of film image composition consequent upon the use of film screen ratios different from the Academy ratio that had been the accepted norm until that time. For convenience we can describe these as its “presentational” and its “cinematic image” aspects. As such, in its presentational aspect widescreen enjoyed its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, although as discussed below we may be on the brink of a resurgence in widescreen presentational aspects given the increase in the use of the Imax format. Widescreen’s legacy remains in its cinematic image aspect in the use of the 70mm widescreen format and the opportunities for more extensive lateral composition of the elements in the image that this allows.

It is overly simplistic to suggest that there is a clear chronological progression from formative spectacle to formalist spectacle and from visible to invisible to prominent technology. Formative spectacle arising from the promotion of visible technology will arise first, or at least at a point in time at which the economic driver behind film production dictates that the promotion of that technology on a mass scale is required. The assimilation and increasing invisibility of that technology and consequently the disappearance of this type of spectacle may however then take place at the same time as the development of prominent technology through formalist spectacle. In the context of colour, for example, Everett points out that the early use of tinting and toning prior to the invention of Technicolor was “an aesthetic or symbolic device for strengthening the narrative” rather than contributing towards the “realist imperative” and it is clear that there has been an aesthetic tension between the realist and abstract use of colour for almost as long as cinema has existed (Everett, 2007a, pp. 18 and 19 and 2007b, p.108). Similarly, as will be discussed below, CGI has, in the context of developing a tendency towards hyperrealism, concurrently demonstrated both assimilated technology and formalist spectacle.

An issue relevant to the relationship between spectacle and technology is the apparent paradox between the conflicting drivers for technological change. It

will be helpful to an overall consideration of the relationship between technology and spectacle to review this issue since it has a bearing on the way in which spectacle develops, particularly in the context of the tendency towards, or away from, realism in the cinematic image.

It is clear from even the cursory review set out above that all three technologies affected the way the image was constructed and consequently the manner in which spectacle was presented to the spectator. As will be seen, there are also similarities in the way that these technologies were developed and marketed. As Enticknap has put it:

...a pattern emerges whereby a significant technological advance...tends to happen in two stages: the research and development which makes the process technically viable, and the changes to economic and industrial practice which enables its widespread, commercial use (2005, p.16).

Comolli has suggested that the lag between technological development and its widespread use was the lag between technology and ideology, between the point at which the technology became available and the point at which the ideological basis for the deployment of that technology arose (Quoted in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985, p.358). Enticknap proposes that this might more accurately be characterised as the lag between technology and commerce, the point at which it becomes economically viable to use the technology extensively without making films prohibitively expensive to produce.

Buscombe reviews this issue in the context of similar comments to Enticknap's made by Gomery to the effect that economic theory can explain the coming of sound. Buscombe was of the view that economics could not adequately explain technological innovations, only demonstrate that they are an essential part of the system:

Economics can explain the necessary but not the sufficient conditions for innovation. No new technology can be introduced unless the economic system requires it. But a new technology cannot be

successful unless it fulfils some kind of need. The specific form of this need will be ideologically determined; in the case of the cinema the ideological determinant most frequently identified has been *realism* (emphasis in original) (1978, p. 5).

This leads Buscombe on to a discussion of realism, particularly in the context of the introduction of colour. He reaches the conclusion that some of the objections to the introduction of colour can only be explained by accepting that realism in the context of what is seen on the cinema screen does not equate to what we see in the real world: "...in fact it has never been a question of what *is* real but of what is *accepted* as real" (emphasis in original) (1978, pp. 5 to 6). This is particularly apparent in the context of colour, which as discussed below was initially seen as denoting only fantasy or stylisation until the advent of mass produced colour television, when the position was entirely reversed. It is however a characteristic of all the technologies examined here that when they are first introduced they are marketed as being essentially spectacular in nature although all of them had the potential to make cinema more realistic. It is suggested that this apparent paradox is resolved by bearing in mind the difference between the initial presentation of these technologies as spectacle for marketing purposes and their subsequent use by filmmakers, which was to assist in the creation of cinematic realism, as will be discussed below.

"Real" in this context equates to a cinematic reality which does not necessarily accord with our experience of the veridical world. Ellis suggests that "Reality is taken as being the subject and object of the representation" but admits that what is deemed to be "real" can be altered over time (1982, pp. 8 to 9). He goes on to point out that cinematic reality is really a juggling of the potentially fantastic and the codes of realism rather than a strict representation of the real world. Thus, particularly in what he describes as "entertainment cinema" there has been a tendency to make "the real spectacular and the spectacular plausible", as pithy a description of the practice of most Hollywood blockbusters as one could hope to find (1982, p. 51).

The tendency to realism in the cinema is therefore in fact a tendency towards a realist aesthetic, not necessarily in the Bazinian sense, but more the creation of a cinematic reality which simultaneously reflects the real world and distorts it through cinematic devices such as lighting, sound and editing as well as more overt methods such as colour manipulation and extreme slow or fast motion. As a result, what is taken to be real in cinematic terms is constantly altering, as Ellis points out (1982, pp. 8 and 9). Consequently, old films appear less real than more recent films even if some older films are, in a Bazinian sense, more realistic.

It can be argued that once technology has become invisible, however, the tendency towards the realist aesthetic (or realist imperative as Everett calls it) which underpins mainstream cinema means that the technology is used to make the film look cinematically real even if the narrative element deals with the fantastic or unreal. Put another way, bearing in mind the distinction between initial presentation and subsequent use outlined above, technology is no longer presented as a spectacle in its own right but is instead now used for promoting cinematic realism. Even the fantastic or clearly unreal is therefore presented with enough recognizable signifiers to make them seem capable of existing in the real world. Prince's term for this phenomenon is "perceptual realism": the link between "the represented fictionalised reality of a given film and the visual and social coordinates of our own three-dimensional world" through a correspondence-based model rather than one relying upon either Bazinian indexicality or a semiotic approach (2004, p. 277).

Prince was writing in the context of a discussion of how to deal, in theoretical terms, with CGI, which does not appear to fit comfortably into either the semiotic or indexically-based schools of thought. As a consequence, he proposes an approach which steps outside both:

A perceptually realistic image is one which structurally corresponds to the viewer's audiovisual experience of three-dimensional space...Perceptual realism, therefore, designates a relationship between the image or film and the spectator, and it can encompass both unreal images and those which are referentially realistic. Because

of this, unreal images may be referentially fictional but perceptually realistic (2004, p.277).

Although written in the context of CGI, I suggest that this theory will serve for any image created in a film whether intentionally unreal or as realistic as possible on the basis that cinema does not depict the real world. It is a given in Prince's article that the cinema does tend towards the realist aesthetic even when depicting the unreal. Cinema is, as Frampton says, a cousin of reality (2006, p.1). It is a heightened representation of reality in which the narrative tidies up the messiness of the real world (to a greater or lesser extent) and the image presents amplified elements of the real world which are accepted by the spectator as being real through the mechanism of perceptual realism. It is therefore more accurate to suggest that the realist aesthetic operates to direct film towards perceptual realism.

Consequently, whilst widescreen offered the possibility of making the cinematic experience appear more realistic through the use of more pronounced lateral compositions permitted by the new screen ratio, as Bazin believed, (Quoted in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985, p.360) it is clear that the screen's monumental size and shape "tended towards stylization and the enhancement of spectacle" as Bordwell puts it (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985, p.361). It is of course the case that widescreen cinema was marketed primarily as a spectacular experience. Finally, whilst CGI has the ability to blend invisibly into the image (and the majority of CGI is used in this way) it was the visible use of CGI, principally the integration of a CGI-created image into an optical background, that was initially prominently marketed.

To summarise, in the context of the propositions set out above, new technology is presented and marketed in such a way as to make it visible, and the spectacle created by the presentation of that technology is therefore at its formative stage. The ideological driver of the realist aesthetic pointed out by Buscombe and Ellis asserts itself once the novelty of the new technology has worn off and the technology becomes invisible, no longer presented as a

spectacle in its own right. At this stage the technology has become assimilated, has developed an aesthetic that governs its use. It is controlled within the diegesis and serves the ends of the film itself rather than the film serving the technology as spectacle. Spectacle associated with technology during this stage therefore disappears. Given this fundamental bias towards perceptual realism, if the technology is subsequently to become prominent it will usually do so by being presented as a spectacle that is essentially unreal or formalist; that is, spectacle that deliberately exaggerates or otherwise distorts the prevailing realist aesthetic. Consequently the difference between formative and formalist spectacle is that the former significantly influences the film's mise-en-scene and often its narrative structure whereas the latter is deliberately foregrounded to a greater extent than would be expected within the context of perceptual realism. As always, the driver for this change from assimilated technology to formalist spectacle is novelty: the need to find something new to bring audiences into the cinema.

In the following sections these propositions will be examined in more detail, drawing upon examples from mainstream cinema.

4.2 Formative spectacle

I will argue in this section that when the economic conditions are favourable for the introduction of a new technology, the use of that technology in a film is presented as a spectacle in its own right. This is a principle that is common to colour, widescreen and CGI and also applies to the introduction of the original cinematic apparatus itself, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. At this stage the films are constructed to showcase the technology on show. Consequently, the spectacular elements of these films appear excessively ostentatious, stepping outside the bounds of perceptual realism. The spectacle is generated by the technology which the film is serving rather than existing within a set of aesthetic parameters that defines assimilated technology.

It will be helpful to consider a number of examples in relation to the three technologies under review. The first of these is the first full length live action

feature film to use the three strip Technicolor process: *Becky Sharp* (1935). At this time, the use of colour in films was considered to be problematic. Buscombe quotes Douglas Fairbanks, whose picture *The Black Pirate* (1927) had been produced in two strip Technicolor, complaining that colour always met with overwhelming objections and that it would distract from the action and would militate against the simplicity and directness which films derived from the use of “unobtrusive” black and white (1978, p.25). Hughes felt the same way, even suggesting that moviegoers were not physically able to cope with the experience of a colour film:

It is indeed doubtful whether man will ever be able physically to appreciate colour in motion, except in the most obvious masses...our colour sense may be developing, our spectrum dividing, but until the retino-cerebral apparatus is far more advanced than it is at present, it is improbable that we shall sensually enjoy coloured films, except for their purely Kaleidoscopic characteristics (1933, p.17).

Arnheim argued in 1933 in “The Complete Film” that as colour moved closer to reality so it reduced the artistic choices available (1958, pp.129 to 134). It should be the aim of film to move away from the urge to be realistic:

The reduction of actual colour values to a one-dimensional grey series (ranging from pure white to dead black) is a welcome divergence from nature which renders possible the making of significant and decorative pictures by means of light and shade (1958, p.62).

Eisenstein, whilst welcoming the advent of colour, also pointed to the huge colour range already available in black and white films but felt that “complete organic unity – the unity of picture and sound – will be achieved only when we have films in colour” (1970a, p.118). He did not feel, however, that realism should be the ultimate goal of colour in films:

...colour [and music] are both good where and when they (they and not the other elements) can most fully express or explain what must be conveyed, said, or elucidated at the given moment of the development of the action (1970b, p.126).

Arnheim and Eisenstein represent an artistic response to the possibility of colour film whereas Fairbanks and Hughes reflect wider concerns about the difficulty of adapting to this new technology. It is interesting to note Hughes' objections, which appear to be based on the premise that the human brain is not capable of dealing with visual colour stimulus notwithstanding the fact that it does so every day already. What lies behind these objections appears to be the idea that the brain cannot cope with such information *on the cinema screen* and that this information is some way differently processed from that acquired from the real world, a subconscious distinction perhaps between perceptual realism and observable reality.

Natalie Kalmus, the chief Technicolor colour consultant, was nevertheless striving to attain a natural balance of colour within the image whilst at the same time using colour to direct the spectator's emotional response (Dalle Vache and Price, 2006, p.26). Given that these were her priorities, it is interesting to see how colour was actually used to spectacular effect in *Becky Sharp*.

Becky Sharp was adapted from a play of the same name which was in turn based upon *Vanity Fair*. It seems likely that this particular story was chosen because of the opportunities for colour treatment afforded by the ladies' ball gowns and dresses and the soldiers' red, white and gold uniforms, opportunities which are seized upon enthusiastically by the filmmakers. The opening titles are set over single colour green curtains and there is a tendency throughout to maintain fairly restricted background colour palettes, usually blue/grey or red/brown. Against these backgrounds, however, are set bright blocks of largely primary or secondary colours. So for example in her first scene Becky wears a grey dress accompanied by a shocking sky blue ribbon and hat and subsequently appears in a bright yellow and sky blue outfit (matched by cushions on a sofa). Central to the film is the Duke of Richmond's ball, which takes place immediately before Waterloo, and which affords plenty of opportunity for the deployment of dresses of many colours.

The effect of these bright colours set against drab backgrounds is wholly unrealistic and at times almost abstract, as in one scene where the camera looks down on a swift procession of soldiers in red cloaks passing beneath a red light. It was generally felt that the film showcased the Technicolor process impressively but the film itself was considered to be poor (Higgins, 2006, pp.154 to 160). The spectacle of the colour used in the film overwhelms the rest of the film. The technology on display is highly visible and serves only to advertise its own presence. The film is constructed so as to present the technology on display as a spectacle in itself, consequently the technology presented as spectacle here is formative, operating largely outside the realist aesthetic.

Another example of formative spectacle can be found in *The Robe* (1953), the first film made in CinemaScope. There was a concerted effort to introduce widescreen formats into cinema in the 1920s, coinciding with the introduction of sound, but this failed, possibly as Enticknap suggests, because it occurred at the same time as the industry was absorbing the cost of converting to sound and, as the 1920s progressed, feeling the effects of the Wall Street crash and the depression that followed (Enticknap, 2005, pp.53 to 55; Belton, 1992, pp.53 to 68). It was not until the 1950s that the conditions were propitious for the successful introduction of the widescreen format.

The main widescreen formats that developed in the 1950s showed a technological progression marked by competition between the various companies promoting the competing formats and the desire to overcome the challenges and difficulties inherent in each format (Belton, 1992, pp.57 to 66). The first widescreen system was Cinerama, introduced in 1952. This introduced a novelty which remained one of the defining features of widescreen presentation and a significant contributor to the participatory nature of widescreen cinema: the curved screen. As Belton suggests, the curved screen “automatically amplified the sense of audience participation by surrounding spectators with the image” (1992, p. 169). As will be discussed in more detail below, this sense of participatory entertainment is not only central to the change in spectator experience and requirements during the

1950s, it is also, as a direct and exhibitionistic experience, a key element of spectacle and one of the reasons why spectacle is so readily identified with widescreen presentations.

During 1953 Twentieth Century Fox worked on an alternative to Cinerama which would be less expensive and which would involve less adjustment to the fabric of cinemas (other than catering for the wider screen). This alternative was CinemaScope. CinemaScope and its variants along with Todd-AO and its variants would become the most successful of the formats, largely because CinemaScope and Todd-AO were the most backwards compatible with the existing technology, always an advantage from the economic perspective.

The Robe therefore represents the first significant example of formative spectacle in the context of widescreen cinema in a fiction film as opposed to the documentaries used to showcase the possibilities of Cinerama, which preceded CinemaScope. The film was one of many Biblical epics made in the 1950s adapted, as others were to be, from an existing bestseller. Shot in Technicolor the film was, *Time* enthused, “Hollywood at its supercolossal best” (www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,818950,00.html). The overwhelming impact of the size of the screen and its curvature, allied with the introduction of stereophonic sound, lead to a sense of immersion in the experience, almost against the spectator’s will, as Barthes observed (Barthes, 1954).

It has often been proposed that the introduction of television and the rapid development of the suburbs in the 1950s caused the sharp decline in the huge cinema audiences of the 1930s as families moved out of the city and away from the cinemas and spent more time at home. As a consequence, cinema had to try to win audiences back by providing something that the small, black and white television image could not; namely a huge, colour image accompanied by stereophonic sound. Belton suggests, however, that these were not the only reasons why widescreen technology finally succeeded in the 1950s. This was to do with the nature of the cinematic experience itself:

Thus the suburbanization of postwar America did not single-handedly wrest the movies from their audiences. The standard motion picture, whether shown in drive-ins, suburban shopping centres, neighbourhood theatres, or downtown movie palaces, no longer held spectators in thrall. Postwar consumers demanded more engagement from their diversions. Passive entertainment no longer satisfied those millions of Americans who now had more time and money to spend on their leisure-time activities (1992, pp.76 and 77).

It is the requirement for a more participatory form of entertainment, an experience that physically involved and encompassed the spectator, that provides the key here. Belton points out that during the 1950s there was a massive increase in sporting activities, the playing of musical instruments and attendances at amusement parks, fairs and carnivals; all participatory leisure-time activities (Belton, 1992, pp.76 and 77). In terms of cinema, the requirements of the new leisured classes generated new genres of films such as the teen exploitation movies and car and motorcycle films. There was also, however, amongst older generations, the desire for the spectacular, manifested in musicals and historical costume dramas. This desire for participatory cinema clearly reflects the participatory nature of spectacle, the direct communication with the spectator on an emotional level. Implicit in the notion of participation, and the need for something else to hold the spectator's attention, is the need to find an emotional reengagement with the spectator which Belton implies is missing by the 1950s.

The effect of widescreen cinema, of being almost engulfed by sound and image, at once the centre of the experience and yet simultaneously having to search across a huge visual field to concentrate on the details, (Belton, 1992, p.197) not only provided a new way of experiencing cinema but of engaging directly with the cinematic experience itself:

Virtually overnight, the traditional conditions of spectatorship in the cinema were radically redefined. On September 30 1952, Cinerama launched a widescreen revolution in which passive observation gave way to a dramatic new engagement with the image (Belton, 1992, p.2).

This dramatic reengagement, on an emotional as well as physical level, was achieved through the emotive and exhibitionistic power of spectacle, a spectacle that extended not only to the huge screen itself and the stereophonic sound, but also to the presentation of the film as event. The appeal of widescreen is thus the appeal of spectacle, and through the use of the spectacular in all its manifestations in this context we can see once again the salient characteristics of spectacle, of an exhibitionistic display aimed directly at the spectator outside the boundary of the film providing an enhanced emotional experience. Belton has argued that it was spectacle rather than realism that accounted for the success of widescreen (1992, p.2).

The director of photography for *The Robe* felt the same way. Writing in *Films in Review* in May 1953 Leon Shamroy suggested that watching a CinemaScope film “engenders a keener sense of participation in the action” (1953, p.226). The advent of CinemaScope as used in *The Robe* highlighted the disappearance of the proscenium from the cinematic experience:

The absence of a framework imprisoning the action enables you to feel you are actually witnessing an event, rather than watching a picture of it (1953, p.226).

The overwhelming effect of widescreen came from its sheer size and this inevitably had an effect upon the way in which the cinematic image was composed. Zanuck ordered filmmakers to use the full width of the screen so as to maximize the physical effect of the spectator having to turn their head to see everything that was happening on the screen, (Belton, 1992, p.198) and lateral compositions became more prominent with the advent of widescreen ratios (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985, p.362). This is evident in the full-screen staging not only of large crowds and huge sets but also in the way that characters are separated by significant spaces across the screen to emphasize their differences of opinion, as occurs for example in the courtroom scene in *The Robe* or the discussion between Messala and Ben-Hur’s family over a meal in *Ben-Hur* (1959).

Whilst the opportunity for more extensive lateral compositions clearly offered scope for literally extending and redefining the way the image was populated, again we can see evidence of *The Robe* being constructed to suit the opportunities offered by the new format, another example of formative spectacle, the aesthetic choices made by the film being dictated by the presentation of the technology. The film's opening titles are shown over red theatre curtains, which not only emphasise the link between the cinema and prestige theatrical productions but also, when they subsequently open as the action begins, emphasise the width of the screen. A similar moment occurs shortly after the film has commenced, when a shot of the teeming slave market is placed between two pillars and, as the camera moves forward, the pillars appear to move apart, once again emphasising the width of the screen and the difference between the old Academy ratio and the new CinemaScope ratio. Throughout the film opportunities are taken to populate the sets with large numbers of people and often to emphasise the screen shape with strong verticals (usually pillars) placed well apart.

Zanuck's instructions regarding placement of characters across the full width of the screen to maximise the effect of the new screen ratio, requiring the spectator to physically turn their head to follow conversations between characters, is another example of the way that widescreen emphasised the participatory nature of the new cinematic experience. *The Robe* demonstrates this tendency to string people out across the full width of the screen in a line rather than rely on any real sense of depth in the frame, leading to a rather artificial feel to many of the more static scenes, though Bordwell points out that some critics at the time felt that this arrangement clarified the confusion that had been caused by deep focus photography (1997, p.241).

In the case of *The Robe* it is no doubt also pertinent that the fixed focal length of the anamorphic lenses used to shoot the film and the relative immobility of the cameras contributed to this sense of flatness. The director Henry Koster remarked that the restrictions on the cameras lead to the film being blocked out as if it was a theatrical production. At the time although some reviews considered that it was a superior example of the Biblical epic genre and were

overwhelmed by the size of the screen (the *Time* reviewer noting, rather alarmingly, that during close ups “an average adult could stand erect in Victor Mature’s ear”) there were others who felt that, as was the case with *Becky Sharp*, the demonstration of the technology was impressive, but the film itself less so. Writing in *Film in Review* Henry Hart felt that *The Robe* represented a milestone in the evolution of the movies but was not of itself a good motion picture:

Although *The Robe* is an inferior motion picture, its Cinema Scopic presentation is a superior mode of motion picture exhibition, which yields new and deeper esthetic and emotional experiences. What is shown in the large Cinema Scopic screen is more life-like, and richer in detail and incident, than what has been shown on the conventional screen of the past... (1953, p.428).

Again this demonstrates the apparent paradox between the increased perceptual realism of the new technology and its initial, spectacular impact. Bazin was of the view that widescreen was another step towards his realist aesthetic although it was Barr who most coherently extended the application of Bazinian realism to widescreen cinema (1974, pp.120 to 146). Writing in 1963, well into the period of what for our purposes is assimilated spectacle, Barr noted that the early CinemaScope films were indeed “crude” but that it had not been the trivial sensation limited only to spectacle that many had anticipated. He identifies that the resistance to classifying this reformulated cinematic image was based upon adherence to an established aesthetic which was challenged by the widescreen format but which was, of itself, not particularly superior to that which widescreen could now offer. This traditional aesthetic emphasised framing, the close-up, camera angles and montage. It did not of itself, however, produce films that were any more real than those subsequently produced by widescreen techniques. Rightly, Barr is careful to qualify what real means in these circumstances, identifying that cinematic reality is clearly distinct from what is observable in the real world and that even those films that strive towards as close a surface representation of reality as possible are still nonetheless artistic creations. CinemaScope encourages a simultaneous presence of subject and object, character and landscape that previously had to be achieved through camera movement and

staging and hence offers increased possibilities for subtlety and freedom of participation. He suggests ultimately that CinemaScope allows for more “gradation of emphasis”, requiring on the spectator’s part an “active interpretation on every level” but that this will require critics to overcome their pre-conditioned approach to viewing films only recognising a style “based on montage and the close up and on ‘signposting’ of effects, as valid...”. There is an echo here of Hughes’ rather more extreme comments on the apparent inability of the human eye to perceive colour film correctly, disguising perhaps the need to adjust pre-existing aesthetic conceptions.

To summarise, like *Becky Sharp*, *The Robe* was constructed to present new technology, in this case CinemaScope, through its full use of the width of the screen, emphasised on many occasions throughout the film. In fact, the restrictions imposed by this new technology in terms of the short focal length of the lenses and the relatively static camera, which dictated the way in which the film was made, contribute to the formative spectacle on display by making the presence of the technology more obtrusive, the sense that the need to present the new technology dictates the way that the film is made. Everett makes a similar point in relation to the early Technicolor films, noting that the “striking artificiality of the densely saturated colours” inevitably attracted attention to colour “in its own right” (2007b, p.109). Such artificiality would operate outside the film’s diegesis, providing another example of formative spectacle arising out of the technical restrictions of the new technology. The centrality of formative, visible technology presented as a spectacle in its own right contributes towards these films appearing to be less realistic even in cinematic terms than otherwise. The practical constraints of utilising this technology therefore adds to this effect.

It is worth at this stage drawing a modern parallel with 1950s widescreen films not only in relation to the impact of the screen size in presentational terms but also the effect on the cinematic image. This is through a consideration of the recent use of the Imax format in *The Dark Knight* (2008).

Imax is a variant of VistaVision, utilizing a 70mm film stock with the same perforation size and pitch as Todd-AO but moving horizontally through the projector with 15 perforations per frame. Consequently the image is three times the size of a 70 mm image, allowing it to fill a screen 24m high (Enticknap, 2005, pp.71 and 72). It has survived since its inception in 1970 owing to its application to a niche market and hence its relatively limited distribution. Until recently it has been limited to documentaries, travelogues and music videos, but since 2002 it has been possible to transfer digitally 70mm films to Imax format, and this has been done with a number of films, all of them perhaps not surprisingly action/adventure/fantasy films. Consequently, although, as Belton suggests, Imax remains largely an advertisement for its own technology, (1992, p.88) it is interesting to see that six action sequences in *The Dark Knight* were filmed on Imax cameras.

Many of the comments made by the film's director in relation to the use of Imax equipment echo those relating to the introduction of widescreen (Details available on DVD release). So, for example, the opening bank robbery was shot in Imax format in order to make an immediate impression on the spectator and to "throw them into the action". The advantage of the Imax format is that it is "an immersive medium". Given that the bulk of the film was shot in 70mm format, this is a revealing comment. When it was introduced, as indicated by the comments detailed above the advantage of the new widescreen format was precisely that it was a medium which immersed the spectator in the action. Barr noted in his article in 1963 that "CinemaScope scarcely makes any impact any longer for its own sake: most of the really big pictures today are made on 70mm film or in Cinerama" (1963, p.120). It seems that now 70mm hardly makes any impact of itself, perhaps not surprising since virtually every big blockbuster movie since *Star Wars* (1977) has been shot in this format (Belton, 1992, p.158). This development would echo the way in which both colour and widescreen technologies were available for many years before becoming economically viable in the context of mainstream commercial cinema. It is of course a good example of the way in which the need to provide novel, new experiences to

entice spectators into the cinema drives technological change in the service of the provision of spectacle.

At present the practical difficulties recorded in using Imax cameras on *The Dark Knight* recall many of the practical issues faced by those shooting *The Robe*: the cameras are relatively immobile (in fact an entirely new hand-held rig was invented to use the cameras for the film) and have a shallow depth of field, limiting the area in focus to four or five inches instead of the twelve feet usually available with a 70 mm format. As a result the number of edits is reduced and takes are held for longer, exactly the same effect as that which CinemaScope had on existing practises in the 1950s. In both cases the method of composition of the cinematic image is altered to suit the technology available.

A final example of formative spectacle in the context of the introduction of new technology (in this case, CGI) is that which appears in the film *Tron* (1982). In common with the trajectory of the development of the other technologies reviewed in this chapter, CGI became used widely once the cost of the technology and the ease of its use enabled it to become widely available, a trend that has continued to the extent that it is now virtually ubiquitous in mainstream cinema and entry-level computers can enable anyone to replicate the computer generated effects achieved by films considered to be cutting edge in the 1980s (Cubitt, 2002, p.25). Enticknap points out that again the economic imperative drove the development of the digital recording of sounds and images, the precursors to CGI, in that digital recordings can be reproduced with one hundred percent accuracy, a considerable quality and cost advantage in an industry which is required to reproduce its products accurately over and over again (2005, pp.203 to 204).

There were a number of developments in the limited use of CGI in the 1970s, but it was *Tron* that began a significant advance in the use of CGI, employing four major production companies to produce over 20 minutes of full three dimensional graphics. (Leonard, undated) It also used more than 50 minutes of backlit animation. The story was written with the intention of using CGI,

hence from the start the film was fashioned around the technology it was showcasing (Details available on DVD). The live action was matted onto CGI-created backdrops and there are some entirely CGI-created sequences not involving any live actors. As a result, there is no attempt to link the real world with the CGI-created world inside the computer, which is rendered in bright, unrealistic colours. This may be justified by the plot, which requires the central character to enter into the video game world created by the computer. In the context of the technology available at the time, it seems likely that this was the only option open to the filmmakers. The integration of a CGI image into an optical background did not really begin until *The Abyss* in 1989 and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* in 1991. The film's real weakness is its story, which does not emphasise the narrative, but even then the effects overwhelm the story so that there is little or no identification with any of the characters, as some critics pointed out at the time (<http://www.variety.com/reviews/>).

Consequently, the level of CGI technology available at the time that *Tron* was made defined the context in which the story had to be set, entailing a separation between the CGI world and the real world in which the characters usually existed. Again the spectacle created by the technology itself is formative and clearly drives the rest of the film. Up until this point, CGI effects had appeared in films in relatively limited circumstances such that the impact of the spectacular effects created by the technology was limited (similar to the restricted use of Imax cameras in *The Dark Knight*).

The common thread that links *Becky Sharp*, *The Robe* and *Tron* is that the technology employed in their making is visible and the films themselves are structured so as to present that technology as a spectacle in its own right. The limitations of the technology available at that time further add to the sense of formative spectacle controlling the aesthetic choices made by the film.

Formative spectacle cannot, of course, last indefinitely. It will alter as its novelty ceases to be a selling point, as the technology from which it derives becomes less novel. The second stage is then reached when the technology

develops to a stage where it becomes invisible. Often this stage is reached not only because the spectator is now used to that technology and is looking for something new to arouse interest and excitement, but because the problems that characterised the early use of that technology have been solved. So, for example, the problems of colour saturation, frame distortion and shallow focal length that beset early widescreen films were subsequently resolved, making the technology involved less obtrusive and hence less visible through being less restrictive in terms of the aesthetic choices open to the filmmakers. A similar developmental path was followed by CGI as it became possible to integrate a CGI-created object into an optical background. Consequently, the restrictions placed on the makers of *Tron*, who were obliged to situate optically filmed characters into an environment that was obviously computer generated, disappeared enabling the makers of *The Matrix* (1999), which has the same plot device of “reality” as experienced inside a computer, to present that world as if it was an exact simulacrum of the real world and to seamlessly blend CGI and optically-created elements into the same frame. (As discussed later in this chapter, *The Matrix* in fact contained formalist spectacle in its bullet time sequences, but these were set against a background of otherwise realistic CGI effects.)

Thus, the presentation of new technology moves away from being spectacular in itself and, driven by the realist aesthetic, the technology begins to contribute towards an enhanced sense of perceptual realism or, to be more precise, begins to be accepted as part of the realist aesthetic that is current at that time. In these circumstances, spectacle associated with technology ceases as the technology is assimilated and comes under the controlling influence of the realist aesthetic and consequently subject to the dictates of the film’s diegesis rather than being the driving force behind the film itself.

4.3 Assimilated technology and formalist spectacle

It can be argued that once technology has become assimilated, spectacle associated with that technology by definition ceases to exist since the technology is no longer presented as a spectacle in its own right. Instead, it

contributes towards the creation of spectacle rather than creating it in and of itself. As a consequence, technology comes to serve the film rather than dominate it. The assimilation of technology is a matter of the control of technology. This method of control and consequent assimilation can be seen in the context of the three technologies under consideration in this Chapter.

Colour had always been seen as a source of spectacle from the early days of cinema, as Bordwell has pointed out (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985, p.353). Neale also observes that the need to control the colour process in the 1940s and 50s outside the “artistic canvas” (that is, in more mainstream productions) was in reality a balancing act between what he sees as spectacle and narrative “since what colour tended to provide, above all else, was spectacle” (1985, p.148).

As mentioned above, colour as a technology has existed for almost as long as cinema itself but was initially identified with genres associated with spectacle and fantasy and with animated features. To this extent *Becky Sharp* was not a significant departure: it was an historical costume drama, not a film attempting to wrestle with gritty realism or pressing everyday issues. Neale suggests that colour was confined to these categories because colour was considered to be something of a distraction from the narrative element of the film and hence had to be confined to those sections of the film in which reality counted for less or (as Neale puts it) those points at which the narrative “comes to a halt and spectacle takes over” (1985, pp.146 to 148). Whilst clearly the notion that narrative actually halts while spectacle takes over does not accord with the transmission model, the position of colour in relation to the realist/spectacle issue foreshadows similar issues with widescreen and CGI. The confining of colour to non-realistic elements of film is thus a method of control, albeit one predicated upon a series of false distinctions which are undermined by the transmission model. Colour was to be subordinated to the dictates of the (narrative-driven) film so as not to disrupt the perceptual realism of the cinematic experience (Neale 1985, p.148).

This division between realism and fantasy is clearly visible in, for example, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), where the realistic scenes in Kansas are shot in black and white and the fantastic scenes in Oz in colour. It was not until the advent of mass produced colour television in the 1960s and full time colour television broadcasting at the end of that decade that it became the case that colour was identified as the most realistic medium and the choice of black and white became an artistic statement, neatly reversing the position up to that point (Neale, 2006, p.15). Neale points out that in fact after its introduction in the 1930s colour did gradually become more extensively used and the range of genres in which it appeared began to expand (Neale, 1985, pp.146 to 147) so that, to take just one example of many, *This Happy Breed* (1944), an attempt at the realistic depiction of family life between the wars, was filmed in Technicolor.

This process is a demonstration of the gradual absorption of colour technology into the accepted realist aesthetic over a period of time. Subsequent uses of the Technicolor process after *Becky Sharp* such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) use colour in a more considered way or it is motivated as an artistic statement, as in *Henry V* (1944) where the colour scheme is intended to echo that of mediaeval paintings (Neale, 1985, p.148). As this technology develops, however, and is disseminated widely after the advent of mass produced colour television, the technology is no longer presented as a source of spectacle in its own right. It is also the case, of course, that developments in colour technology make the colours used in the film capable of looking less saturated, a process aided by the eventual replacement of Technicolor by Eastman as the primary colour process in the industry. Spectacle directly associated with colour technology thus ceases as the technology becomes assimilated within the films' diegesis in that it no longer controls the film itself but has to function within the parameters established by the diegesis.

In the context of widescreen, whilst the heyday of its presentational aspect was the 1950s, its cinematic image aspect, being the use of the 70 mm format, has persevered and indeed, as mentioned above, this format is now regularly

used in virtually every major blockbuster released by the studios. For some time prior to the advent of large screen home televisions capable of catering for the 70 mm format, there was a tendency for filmmakers to group the action in the centre of the screen to avoid losing anything vital in the cropping process that takes place in the transfer from cinema to television, perhaps unconsciously echoing the measures taken by earlier filmmakers such as Herbert Lightman, who shot *Oklahoma!* (1955) in Todd-AO and tried to concentrate spectators' attention on the action in the centre of the screen by using static objects in the foreground or filling in the side areas with shadows (Macgowan, 1956/7, pp.236 to 237). As is evidenced by the decision of the makers of *The Dark Knight* to use Imax cameras to create an impact, the use of the widescreen format no longer of itself creates a spectacular effect although again it will contribute invisibly to the impact that spectacle will have on the spectator often by utilising the full width of the screen to emphasise the scale of the event, such as the Civil War battlefield in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), the space battles in *Star Wars* and the battlefield sequences in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy or *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962).

In terms of the assimilation of spectacle and the change from visible to invisible technology, CGI has progressed slightly differently to colour and widescreen since it has followed parallel tracks in its development: one track has been the extensive use of CGI intended to blend seamlessly into a scene so that the spectator does not know it is there (such as the augmentation of features of the landscape or the removal of roads and powerlines in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy) whilst the other is the photorealistic incorporation of what is evidently an unreal or impossible image into an existing optical image, such as the robots in *Transformers* (2007) or the Hulk in *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), to take just two recent examples. Pierson uses the terms "simulationist" for CGI which presents things which could actually exist, and "technofuturist" to categorize the photorealistic presentation of the fantastic or the impossible, equating broadly to invisible and visible or prominent technology respectively (2002, p.101).

The aim of simulationist CGI (which accounts for the bulk of CGI work in the cinema) is willed invisibility (Buckland, 1999, p.184). It does not contribute overtly towards a spectacular event because it does not draw attention to itself. In contrast, technofuturist CGI aims to draw attention to itself, to maintain its visibility whilst at the same time ensuring that the obviously artificial CGI creations interact as seamlessly as possible with the optically filmed real world. This includes ensuring that surface reflections, shadows and perspective are accurate and exact and that the CGI creation moves as close to what would be expected of something of that nature should it actually exist, in short that the CGI-created images are perceptually realistic. This can be achieved by motion capture techniques but even where this was not possible, an approximation to real creatures is often sought: so for example the creators of the Wargs, large wolf-like creatures that appear in *The Two Towers* (2002), studied the movements of real dogs in order to understand how these creatures would run (Details available on DVD). In fact, Pierson's definition of this visible CGI and her subsequent restriction of it to science fiction films perhaps highlights that at the time she was writing most visible CGI was indeed used in the science fiction film genre whereas the examples cited above from the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy together with its use in otherwise realistic films such as *Buffalo Soldiers* (2001) (a CGI-assisted invisible edit pushing the camera through a solid window) or *Panic Room* (2002) (numerous examples of impossible camera movements through the handles of pots, into keyholes and so on) indicate that visible CGI is relatively unconfined by genre today.

The feature that characterises both visible and invisible CGI is the achievement of a compositional interaction with the optical image which, as Buckland points out achieves all three types of realism identified by Bazin: ontological realism, in that the elements appear to have equal weight and density to the indexically-based elements; dramatic realism, in that they are seamlessly blended into and interact with the indexically-based elements; and psychological realism, in that they are all seen to occupy the same diegetic space as the indexically-based elements (Buckland, 1999, p.189).

Consequently, in the case of CGI whilst we can say that the technology remains both visible and invisible depending upon its context, it is still correct to characterise the spectacle generated from the use of this technology as assimilated rather than formative. Even visible CGI serves the realist aesthetic established by the film's diegesis so that whether we are viewing a giant robot, a man wearing an iron suit or the Hulk they still confirm to the physical laws and parameters established by the film. The spectacle therefore establishes its relationship with the spectator simultaneously in the context of the diegesis and outside that diegesis by presenting an object which is perceptually realistic but obviously not observable in the veridical world.

The establishment of an invisible and assimilated technology may mark the end of that particular development. A film may of course contain many spectacular sequences, but they will not include spectacle that arises from the presentation of the technology itself. This is not, however, always the case. Occasionally, a film will draw attention to the technology employed in its creation, making the technology prominent. As stated above, this development may follow on chronologically from assimilated technology or it may occur simultaneously. As discussed above, technology tends to reinforce the perceptual realism of a film once it becomes invisible. This is the result of the effect of the realist aesthetic. Given, however, the constant need to provide novelty in the service of spectacle, when technology becomes prominent it tends to be presented in an abstract or formalist manner, as described in Brown's article mentioned at the start of this chapter, so as to draw attention to itself. This results in what I have called formalist spectacle.

Formalist spectacle, a deliberate distortion or exaggeration of a particular film's realist aesthetic, thus draws attention to the technology once again. Formalist spectacle is thus different from formative spectacle because the former is not uncontrolled and does not dictate the aesthetic choices made by the film. Formalist spectacle deliberately foregrounds itself, drawing attention to the technology in question, but the film does not exist solely to present the technology as spectacle.

So, for example, in *Hero* (2002), each segment of the film is colour coded, employing a very distinctive overall colour scheme which orchestrates many scenes in one dominant colour, largely through costume and production design, although saturated colour effects are also employed together with slow motion camerawork to heighten the stylised nature of many of the sequences. In a more subtle fashion, *Three Colours Blue* (1993) draws attention to the central character's relationship with music and death through the repeated use of the colour blue, which appears and reappears throughout the film as a lighting effect, a blue room, the blue of the water in a swimming pool, blue glass beads, music contained in a blue folder. Whilst the majority of these effects remain within the diegesis, their repetition alerts us to their significance. Taking this process a stage further, in *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) colour is used not only realistically but also in an excessive, unrealistic fashion to emphasise and heighten the effects of the melodramatic storyline, from the rich, startling reds of the autumn leaves and the sky blue car in the opening sequence through Cary's red dress and the spectacular colours of nature, seen through the large window (screen-like in its appearance) which Ron builds into the wall of the old mill. As Haralovich observes, *All That Heaven Allows* "...uses the ability of colour to function as an emphasis in itself: as spectacle, as excess, and as potentially distractive of the primacy of narrative" (2006, p.152). The use of spectacle in the context of Sirk's films will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Finally, colour may also draw attention to itself by being used in an entirely abstract fashion, such as the broad bands of colour which punctuate *Punch Drunk Love* (2002), the "star gate" episode in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) or the internal, drug-fuelled odyssey undertaken by Jessup in *Altered States* (1980).

Formalist spectacle in the context of widescreen technology in relation to its cinematic image may occur when, for example, characters are placed, sometimes singly, at extreme edges of the frame, as in *The Last Emperor* (1987), or where the film presents a sequence in which the spectator will have to traverse the entire width of the screen to understand the information being

transmitted in full, as occurs in the parley scene in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) or the restaurant scene in *Play Time* (1967). The most significant recent use of formalist spectacle arising out of prominent technology is the Imax sequences in *The Dark Knight* in which the screen actually changes shape for the relevant sections of the film, consciously directing the spectator's attention to the technology involved whilst operating within the realist aesthetic of the film in the same way, for example, that the colour coding in *Hero* draws our attention to the use of colour whilst still operating within the parameters of that film's realist aesthetic.

Perhaps because of its relatively greater degree of flexibility within the confines of the cinematic image, CGI has developed more significantly along the formalist path than either colour or widescreen. In particular, in the case of CGI, this appears to have been influenced by its tendency towards hyperrealism as the yardstick of the realist aesthetic prevalent in films which rely on such effects.

For example, the use of the Massive flocking programme to create the ten thousand-strong army that attacks the fortress of Helm's Deep in *The Two Towers*, allied with carefully crafted compositional shots utilising miniatures and partial full scale sets, creates a very detailed shot, in fact more detailed than would actually be possible using solely indexically-based elements. This extends not only to the huge amount of activity that is evident in crisp and clear detail, even across huge, long range shots, but also the use and distribution of light evenly across a scene that appears to take place at night in the rain.

This excessively detailed hyperrealistic approach is common in the use of CGI, whether visible or invisible. As an artistic process, however, it is not new. The same tendency can be identified in super- or hyper-realist painting, which emerged in the 1960s in the United States, a process involving the meticulous copying of a photographic image (which the painter may or may not have taken). As Darley has pointed out, this results in an excessive imagery, an intensification and exaggeration and therefore a kind of

foregrounding of the realistic/analogical character of its model: the photographic medium (Darley, 1997, p.20; Darley, 2000, p.86; Sobchack, 1987, p.256). Super-realist painting therefore involves a conscious form of artifice, given that the paintings themselves are usually much bigger than the photographs from which they are copied. Purely at the level of image, super-realist paintings and hyperrealist CGI seek to achieve the same ends and both involve the transposition of aesthetic codes from one medium (the photographic, whether that is a still or moving image) to another (painting or CGI) notwithstanding the fact that some CGI, particularly technofuturist CGI, may not involve direct copying at all. Perhaps the major philosophical difference between the two is that CGI strives towards representations which are indistinguishable from their model whereas super-realist painting does not.

Cinematic hyperrealism achieved through purely optical and mechanical effects perhaps achieved its apotheosis in *Blade Runner* (1982), involving a seamless blend of miniatures of varying scales, computer-controlled camerawork and multiple layers of travelling mattes (Bukatman, 1993, p.132). The result is, as Bukatman suggests, “an impossible clarity through the perception of detailed space in which everything is nevertheless visible”. Sobchack criticizes what she describes as this “excess scenography” for inflating the value of the space that contains the objects in the shot, eroticising and fetishizing material culture (1987, p.261). Cubitt also suggests that the detailed representation of the spatial, the imaginary worlds created by CGI and other mechanical and optical effects, is now of more importance than the narrative drive, as witnessed by the paucity of narrative coherence in many modern blockbusters (2002, p.26). Thus the hyperrealistic, CGI created world contains more incidental material than the formulaic, under-developed narrative. From the transmission model perspective, we may see this is a shifting of the overall balance between narrational and non-narrational transmission. Cubitt’s observations, however, may also raise an issue about how narrative should be defined in this context and whether the incidental material created by a hyperrealistic CGI image

may also be part of the overall narrative at a thematic level rather than as part of the narrative arc of the classical Hollywood film.

This tendency towards the acceptance of hyperrealism is increasingly evident in films which are, as mentioned above, well outside the genres such as science fiction or fantasy that might be expected to contain such imagery. In the same way that colour was initially confined to fantasy or action/adventure films but then became common in films of any genre, so CGI has moved beyond similar limitations in the early 1990s to its present extensive use in a wide variety of films that might not be expected to utilise it at all. So, for example, a shot of a large number of monks in *Kundun* (1997), a film which is concerned to establish a realistic world within which to tell the story of the Dalai Lama, was enhanced by CGI, which was also used to add features to the landscape such as distant mountain ranges.

Arguably, hyperrealism began as an attempt to provide an impression of verisimilitude through the use of extraneous detail, a tendency apparent not only in the visual arts but also in the novel as it developed in the nineteenth century. Andrew points out that realism in the cinema depends amongst other things on the use of a number of codes intended to promote the experience of realism. One of these is the code of extraneous detail, common to literature as well as the cinema (1984, pp.64 and 65). This code is a “profligate rendering of too many items and actions” intended originally to draw the spectator’s attention to everyday objects which would enable the spectator to ground the drama in the banality of everyday life. This eventually leads to an assumption on the spectator’s part that the excessively detailed reality depicted on the screen is the starting point from which, in the search for further novelty, an ever more excessive cinematic image develops. Again this points towards the differences between perceptual realism and the empirical world and the spectator’s acceptance of that reality also dramatically illustrated by the use of black and white photography as the medium of realism until the late 1960s, discussed above.

The establishment of this hyperrealist tendency in films sets the basic realist aesthetic against which CGI operates and against which any formalist spectacle will work. In the context of CGI, Cubitt suggests that in order for the technology to become prominent, to become a special effect, there will have to be a significant technological development: it will have to become cutting edge again (2002, p.25). This observation is borne out by, for example, the introduction of bullet time sequences in *The Matrix*, sequences which exist in the film alongside other spectacular sequences employing CGI and stunt work but which are showcased from a relatively early point in the film (the fight towards the beginning of the film where Trinity leaps into the air and freezes while the camera pivots around her). This is a sequence that operates outside even the flexible realist aesthetic operating in the film and whilst the spectator eventually understands the particular realist aesthetic of the computer-generated world depicted in the film, the presence of these sequences is never explained as a consequence of that world: in other words they remain an extra-diegetic effect communicated directly to the spectator by the film and which is available to the spectator but not the characters.

Films such as *Wanted* (2008), utilizing kinetic editing and extreme distortions of time and space via bullet time sequences, “impossible” camera shots and hyperrealistic, excessive use of CGI thus foreground the technology through the use of formalist spectacle. Other examples include the bullet time explosion in *Swordfish* (2001), the stylized blood letting in *Zatoichi* (2004), the horse drawn carriage leaping over the gorge in *Van Helsing* (2004) and the presentation of the Hulk in *Hulk* (2003) (the last example also being noted by Brown, 2004). In each case the film establishes a set of parameters that defines its realist aesthetic and then distorts or exaggerates that aesthetic.

Although the use of CGI continues to develop it is interesting to see that the constant demand for novelty in the presentation of spectacle may be taking its toll on purely CGI-driven spectacle, whether assimilated or formalist. There are indications that the use of CGI in itself is now not a selling point for a film, given its widespread usage and that, on the contrary, the absence of CGI in achieving a certain effect is seen as a selling point. So, for example, the

makers of *Troy* (2004) were at pains to point out that their horse was real, not a CGI creation; the director of *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002) dwells in the documentary accompanying the film release on DVD on the fact that the effects in the film were achieved in the camera through the use of rapidly demountable sets and other essentially mechanical devices, and the makers of *Die Hard 4* (2007) emphasised that many of the stunts in the film were real and were not CGI-assisted. The success of the Bourne films, with their emphasis on actual stunts rather than CGI-assisted action, have had a significant effect on action films recently, evident in the revised approach taken by the Bond franchise and in films such as *Salt* (2010), which consciously set out to add “a bit of Bourne” to the action sequences (Details available on DVD). A significant amount of the publicity surrounding the release of the James Bond film *Quantum of Solace* (2008) focussed on the fact that Daniel Craig, playing Bond, performed his own stunts and highlighted other films in which this had also happened. This is perhaps an extension of the notion that the risk inherent in the physical stunt, extending to the actual participation by the actors themselves, is sufficiently novel to enhance the spectacular elements of these films.

Again, the comments of the creators of *The Dark Knight* are revealing in relation to the relatively sparing use of CGI on that film. Many of the spectacular crashes seen in the film were real and CGI was used only to remove cameras or other equipment which would otherwise intrude into the shot or, in one case, to add windows that were missing from a building that was then actually demolished. In addition, apart from the restrictions imposed on the number of edits by the use of Imax cameras, referred to above, there was a deliberate move away from the extending of an action sequence through the use of multiple-angle edits in favour of an approach which tended to show the action in real time. These approaches were adopted because the filmmakers knew that sequences filmed using extensive CGI and multiple edits now look “unreal”. In other words, the parameters of the realist aesthetic governing such films has moved away from that established by films such as *The Matrix* towards an aesthetic which connects more obviously and directly with what is perceived to be the real world. It is interesting to consider what

will happen next. Will the use of Imax cameras in *The Dark Knight*, essentially an optical effect, mark a return to the sort of special effects used in films such as *Blade Runner* and the resurgence of the huge screen as a presentational spectacle or will it remain an interesting curiosity, overtaken by the relentless development of CGI?

These developments demonstrate that formalist spectacle, like formative spectacle, in fact has a relatively short shelf-life before the need for novelty drives the process forward. Technology-as-spectacle is therefore of quite limited duration. It exists alongside other categories of spectacle as a novelty in its own right but the twin pressures of familiarisation and the tendency towards a realist aesthetic mean that it will not exist as a spectacle in its own right for any substantial length of time.

4.4 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that it is possible to construct a model of the historical development of spectacle and its relationship with technology and to use this to trace the development of spectacle in its historical context. Whilst there are obvious differences between the three types of technologies examined, there are also clear continuities in the way in which the formative and formalist spectacle associated with these technologies has developed. An examination of the development of the three technologies outlined above allows us to see that they share a common trajectory, one which is also apparent in the development of the original cinematic apparatus. Initially technology is presented as a spectacle in its own right, a source of amazement and astonishment, and is used by filmmakers to lure spectators to the cinema. Films are constructed to showcase this technology as spectacle. In time, the technology becomes incorporated into the cinematic experience and ceases to be a spectacle in itself. In the formulation I have proposed above, it begins by being visible and becomes invisible. It may continue to contribute to a spectacular sequence but will not of itself be seen as source of spectacle. The presentation of visible technology as spectacle is communicated directly and

exhibitionistically by the filmmakers to the spectator to create a sense of excitement and astonishment.

Invisible technology may become prominent by drawing attention to itself. So for example, a colour scheme may be patently artificial or may border on the abstract. Although the widescreen format is now often used, occasionally a filmmaker will draw attention to the width of the screen by utilising it fully rather than placing the characters in the middle of the screen to take account of the cropping that occurs for television release. The use of Imax sequences in *The Dark Knight* represents a particularly interesting recent development in the re-emergence of widescreen technology in a new format. Increasingly, films are being shown on limited Imax release and it may be that this marks the beginning of a resurgence of interest in this technology. The use of bullet time sequences in films such as *The Matrix* provides an example of CGI becoming more visible through the introduction of a technological advance. Films such as *Wanted* make CGI visible by virtue of it becoming more abstract, drawing attention to itself through excessive or hyperrealistic sequences which advertise its existence.

The relationship between spectacle and technology, and an element of the way that the aesthetics of spectacle manifests itself in this context, therefore lies in the manner in which film presents visible or prominent technology to the spectator as a spectacle in its own right. This is done in a direct, exhibitionistic way to achieve the ends identified in previous chapters: principally the emotional engagement of the spectator in the cinematic experience.

The spectacle linked to the development of technology through the phases identified above has been characterised as formative and formalist. In the formative phase the spectacle is generated from and reflects the technology around which the film is based. As such, the technology as spectacle tends to dominate if not overwhelm the film in which it appears; it sits outside the realist aesthetic to which mainstream films tend to gravitate, although the parameters of this realism exist primarily in the context of the film in

question, which I have characterised as perceptual realism, developing upon a concept originally proposed by Prince in the context of CGI. The confines of the genre in which a film operates will tend to dictate a number of common parameters governing the film's measure of what is and is not perceptually realistic.

After the technology has been assimilated into the film's realist aesthetic and therefore has become invisible, spectacle associated with that technology ceases and the technology instead works within the parameters established by the film. Given this tendency towards realism, technology subsequently presented as spectacle must then deliberately distort or exaggerate the realist aesthetic established by the film, making this technology visible (or prominent) once again. This abstract or formalist spectacle may be driven by aesthetic choice on the part of the filmmakers rather than necessarily a new technological development which the film seeks to advertise.

Technology is always marketed initially as spectacle rather than as a device to enhance the realism of the cinematic image because of its intrinsic novelty. Novelty is a way of attracting audiences, feeding the economic imperative of revenue for the cinema. Once the novelty wears off, it is necessary to find something else to attract the crowds. The brake on the introduction of new technology in this way is the equally important cost imperative: that the new technology is capable of being introduced as cost effectively as reasonably possible into cinemas.

If film is an emotion machine, spectacle helps to generate that emotion and when working with the narrative as described in Chapter Two, enhances that emotion through its effective amplification of emotional response. Technology is used to enhance the effect of spectacle through first its novelty and then through the effective use of technology to amplify the impact of the spectacle. Narrative is also used to enhance emotional response, as discussed in Chapter Three, but this is linked symbiotically to spectacle in terms of emotional effect and, as predicated by the transmission model, narrative and spectacle in any event coexist simultaneously as points along the same

information transmission spectrum. Visible or prominent technology is readily presented as spectacle because it is exhibitionistic in effect, communicating directly with the spectator outside the film's diegesis rather than directing its energy inwards towards the film, as narrative does.

This need constantly to find the next attraction, and the fact that technology will almost inevitably become invisible, draws attention to another facet of spectacle which has become apparent during this review: the need to provide novelty. Whilst it is not inevitably the case that the novel must be spectacular, the familiar is rarely of itself spectacular. The intrinsic interest in the potential of the new and therefore unknown is married to and balanced by the presentation of the familiar through existing genre conventions so that the tendency is towards the provision of spectacle through presenting what has been done before only faster, higher, louder and so on. Thus novelty exists within the constraints of genre and technological development.

Chapter Five

Events and Objects: Spectacle and Mise-en-scene

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine spectacle as a manipulation of narrational and non-narrational transmission via the mise-en-scene to achieve the ends identified in the first three chapters of this thesis. This will allow new perspectives on both spectacle and mise-en-scene and their interaction as elements of the cinematic image. It will also permit us to differentiate spectacle from the broader and perhaps more amorphous concept of mise-en-scene. This is important since an understanding of the differences between spectacle and mise-en-scene will permit a more precise and nuanced analysis of spectacle in itself and will avoid the implication that spectacle is everything in the film other than narrative. An understanding of the operation of spectacle in its various forms in the context of the mise-en-scene also reveals more about the characteristics of the mise-en-scene itself and the way it is used by the film to communicate with the spectator. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, what is revealed is a relationship with the spectator which operates holistically to provide an emotional experience to the spectator through the intertwining of narrational and non-narrational transmission in a flexible and shifting relationship as the film progresses.

Whilst, as discussed below, the precise ambit of mise-en-scene is a matter of debate, generally it can be described as the director's control over what is seen in the film frame (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010, p.118). As such it is a concept which not only goes to the heart of the spectator's experience when watching a film but is also a mechanism for assessing the operation of the cinematic image in its entirety, encompassing everything which the spectator sees on the screen and arguably everything they hear as well. This chapter will examine the manner in which spectacle, as a manipulation of narrational and non-narrational transmission through the mise-en-scene, achieves its aims. It will be demonstrated that in fact this manipulation takes two primary

forms, which I have called “event spectacle” and “object spectacle”. These will be defined in further detail below. A consideration of these two primary forms of spectacle provides not only a more precise and nuanced understanding of how spectacle operates in this context but also reveals how the spectator is emotionally aligned by a spectacular sequence or moment to create empathy between the spectator and the characters on the screen or at least an understanding of the characters’ emotional predicaments.

5.2 Spectacle and mise-en-scene

The purpose of this section is to examine the concept of mise-en-scene, its links with spectacle and what this reveals about the inadequate treatment of spectacle in the context of narrative-driven models of the mise-en-scene. Consequently, I will begin with a more detailed examination of the definition of mise-en-scene before examining how this is treated by Neoformalism. I will show that the Neoformalist model seeks to narrativise mise-en-scene but that this inevitably leads to problems with material that does not fall within the unifying force of the narrative. Given that films contain material that cannot be categorised as narrative, the problem arises as to what to do with this material. This leads to the concept of excess, although it is equally pertinent to the issue of spectacle, as discussed in Chapter One.

This section will demonstrate that the correct approach to an understanding of this area is not to adopt the Neoformalist model but instead to use the more inclusive transmission model. From this perspective I suggest that the mise-en-scene can be seen as the vehicle for organising the narrational and non-narrational transmission which is then communicated to the spectator. Spectacle is the result of a manipulation of narrational and non-narrational transmission (organised by the mise-en-scene) to achieve the characteristics described in Chapters One to Three of this thesis and which manifest themselves in the two forms of spectacle which I have called event and object spectacle. The following section will go on to examine these manifestations in more detail.

Somewhat like “spectacle”, “mise-en-scene” is a term often used but rarely precisely defined. The standard definition is that advanced by Bordwell and Thompson in *Film Art*, referred to above, as being the director’s control over what appears in the film frame. This is perfectly adequate as a broad definition but it obviously begs a number of questions, principally about the nature of that control, precisely what appears in the film frame and, more importantly, the way in which that is used by the filmmakers to achieve their desired ends. Consequently, mise-en-scene is most often defined by reference to what it contains, and here there are disagreements amongst commentators.

Bordwell and Thompson review the elements that constitute mise-en-scene in *Film Art*. They list setting, costume and make-up, lighting and staging (which includes movement and performance), emphasising that these elements overlap with the art of the theatre. As such, in controlling the mise-en-scene the director stages the event for the camera. This is a useful formulation, emphasising that each element of the mise-en-scene is carefully chosen and controlled and that the mise-en-scene is required to conform to the idea of realism as defined by that particular film rather than attempting to reproduce the veridical world. Gibbs criticises this definition for being too restrictive and for leaving out important elements such as framing or camera movement although in fact Bordwell and Thompson deal with these elements in separate chapters of *Film Art* since for them mise-en-scene is part of a larger formal system which they designate as “style” (Gibbs, 2002, pp.53 and 54). This will be discussed in further detail below.

Gibbs suggests that mise-en-scene “refers to many of the major elements of communication in the cinema, and the combinations through which they operate expressively” (2002, p.5). Gibbs lists these elements as encompassing lighting, costume, colour, props, décor, action and performance, space, the position of the camera, framing and the interaction of elements. As suggested by his definition, it is this last characteristic that it most important: “...it is terribly difficult to make claims for an individual element or moment without considering it within the context provided by the rest of the film” (2002, p.39).

The one element missing from this list is sound. Whilst Gibbs suggests that this may not form part of the mise-en-scene, he does admit that to think about mise-en-scene without sound is “rather limiting”. Bordwell and Thompson include a chapter on sound in their section on style in *Film Art* before drawing together all of the aspects of style that they have considered in a concluding chapter examining style as a formal system. Situating sound within the larger formal system of style therefore allows Bordwell and Thompson to deal with the issue of sound without the difficulties that Gibbs encounters. Seen from this perspective, there may be less difference between Bordwell and Thompson and Gibbs than at first appears since both posit a concept that deals with much the same set of characteristics and which emphasises that those characteristics interact with each other, whether this be Gibbs’ expanded definition of mise-en-scene or Bordwell and Thompson’s style.

In summary, mise-en-scene is therefore the manipulation of visual and aural elements of the film in the service of the drama. It may act almost subliminally, reinforcing a mood or atmosphere or providing thematic information about plot or characters. It may also, for example, be used to articulate characters’ predicaments non-verbally, contrasting their socially-constrained verbal articulations with their unspoken emotional responses, an observation also made by Elsaesser (1987, p.52).

If the use of mise-en-scene can provide a method of non-verbal communication, what is being communicated? This would seem to go beyond narrative in the Neoformalist sense of classical narrative-based Hollywood cinema. There is a distinction to be drawn here between form and content or, to use the terms adopted by Bordwell and Thompson, style and meaning. Gibbs is of the view that ultimately style determines meaning and refers to Place and Burton, who wrote in *Movie* in 1976:

...critics who confine themselves to chronicling changes in narrative content throughout the history of the cinema, ignoring the fact that the

mediation of form is the final arbiter of a particular film's effect on the viewer, can never achieve more than an incomplete understanding of specific films and of the medium itself (p.59).

This echoes Elsaesser's comments that mise-en-scene in the family melodrama became "functional and integral elements in the construction of meaning", communicating the emotional conflicts of the story other than through dialogue (1987, p.52).

Whilst this might seem a reasonable view, the issue to be addressed in the context of the Neoformalist position that was subsequently articulated in 1985 is what the term narrative actually means and the extent to which that definition would accommodate the communication of narrational transmission suggested by Elsaesser. If we consider the approach to mise-en-scene taken in *Film Art* together with Bordwell's formulation of Neoformalism in *Narration in the Fiction Film* it becomes apparent that the Neoformalist approach seeks to "narrativize" mise-en-scene, subordinating it to the Neoformalist definition of narration.

Mise-en-scene is analysed in *Film Art* in narrative terms but style is seen overall as shaping meaning (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010, p.316). Style is defined as "the patterned use of techniques across the film" (p.314). The precise techniques used and the patterns in which they are employed by the filmmakers will vary widely depending upon the technology available, the artistic choices made by the filmmakers and any constraints, self-imposed or otherwise, under which they will be operating. In analysing film style it is necessary to determine the film's organisational structure, identify the salient techniques used by the filmmakers in terms of colour, sound, lighting, editing and so on, trace the patterns that these techniques make and finally propose functions for those techniques and patterns. In mainstream cinema the organisational structure of the film will be determined by its narrative content.

Consequently, for Bordwell and Thompson, mise-en-scene is part of a film's style which itself is connected to the narration through the structuring of the

film. Style is therefore not independent of this structuring process, but is used to elaborate upon the underlying narrative structure. In *Narration in the Fiction Film* Bordwell suggests that plot (being in this context the governing narrative structure of the film) and style coexist in a narrative film each “treating different aspects of the phenomenal process. The syuzhet [plot] embodies the film as a ‘dramaturgical’ process; style embodies it as a technical one” (1985, p.50). In fact, style serves a narrative purpose:

In the fiction film, narration is the process whereby the film’s syuzhet and the style interact in the course of cueing and channelling the spectator’s construction of the fabula [story]. Thus it is not only when the syuzhet arranges fabula information that the film narrates. Narration also includes stylistic processes (Bordwell, 1985, p.53).

Although the organising principle behind a mainstream film will be its narrative structure, style and hence mise-en-scene is not just an elaboration upon that structure, a way of drawing the spectator’s attention to aspects of the narration that the filmmakers wish to emphasise; it can also serve a narrative function in itself. The issue then becomes precisely what that narration is thought to include, which returns us to the enquiries made in earlier chapters about the inadequacy of Neoformalism to deal with the concept of spectacle and the consequent relegation of spectacle to the margins as a dangerous concept which appears to undermine the Neoformalist model. Whilst it is therefore correct to say that mise-en-scene as an aspect of a film’s style may assist in communicating the narration, there are other elements of the cinematic experience which escape the constraints of the Neoformalist model and which may also be communicated through the mise-en-scene. One of these elements is spectacle. Another one, as discussed in Chapter One, is excess material.

Arguably, seen from the perspective of the transmission model, if mise-en-scene as described above is the organisation of visual and aural elements of the film in the service of the drama, we can more properly see mise-en-scene as the vehicle for organising the narrational and non-narrational transmission that is communicated to the spectator. This process of organising may give

rise to particular balances of narrational and non-narrational transmission that can be characterised as spectacle if they are intended to achieve the direct, exhibitionistic communication described in previous chapters. An examination of the way in which narrational and non-narrational transmission is organised through the mise-en-scene in these circumstances reveals the two forms of spectacle that I have called event and object spectacle. The formulation of these two types of spectacle clarifies the way in which spectacle operates in the context of mainstream cinema with more precision than has been the case so far. Event spectacle is tied more closely to narrative structure, or narrational transmission, whilst object spectacle reflects a particular type of manipulation of the mise-en-scene, therefore primarily non-narrational transmission.

Thus, using the transmission model, we understand more clearly the relationship between mise-en-scene and spectacle, seeing spectacle as a particular manipulation of narrational and non-narrational transmission which has been organised via the mise-en-scene. This manipulation takes two particular forms, which will be examined in more detail in the following section to allow a more precise understanding of the characteristics of spectacle in this context and what these reveal about the aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema.

5.3 Event and object spectacle

5.3.1 General characteristics and emotional alignment

In this section I shall examine the characteristics of what I have called event and object spectacle. I shall consider the general characteristics of these types of spectacle and will then consider the use of spectacle as a way of emotionally aligning the spectator with the characters on the screen. I will then move on to consider first event and then object spectacle in more detail. Finally, I will conclude with a detailed consideration of the parachute stunt sequence from *The Tarnished Angels* (1957) to demonstrate the simultaneous use of event and object spectacle and their essential characteristics.

As mentioned in the previous section, the formulation of event and object spectacle arises out of a consideration of mise-en-scene in the context of the transmission model and the clarification of the function of mise-en-scene that the use of this model provides. If we examine films looking for examples of particular formulations of narrational and non-narrational transmission shaped or manipulated through the vehicle of the mise-en-scene that achieve a direct and exhibitionistic communication with the spectator intended to amplify the emotional impact of the film, it becomes apparent that two particular forms emerge. Assessing films in this way is important because not only does it allow for a more precise understanding of what has traditionally been thought of as a spectacular sequence, here identified as event spectacle, it also clarifies that in fact there are other examples of spectacle, known as object spectacle, that may up until now have gone largely unremarked or may not have been considered to have been spectacle at all. The identification of object spectacle shows that spectacle is more pervasive and fundamental to the cinematic experience than simply the isolated event spectacle.

Event spectacle is that type of sequence most commonly thought of as spectacle in the accepted sense of the word. In it, things happen to the characters, often putting them at risk of death or serious injury, and it is thus intended to work with the narrative, as discussed in Chapter Two, and to increase the emotional impact of the film. Event spectacle is cued strongly within the film's narrative architecture. The impact of an event spectacle may be heightened by the sense of anticipation which the film instils into the spectator through the narrative development. So, for example, the chariot race in *Ben-Hur* (1959) is within the film itself the central focus of much of the second part of the film (quite apart from being the main image for its advertising campaign). Thus the film builds up to the race and then indulges in a lengthy pre-race sequence to increase the tension further. The final attack on the Death Star in *Star Wars* (1977) is prefigured by several scenes dealing with the preparations for the attack, as is the climatic attack on SkyNet headquarters in *Terminator Salvation* (2009). In *The Wild Bunch* (1969) the final shoot out in the Mexican town is preceded by the characters walking

slowly through the town to the main square accompanied by a musical soundtrack increasing in intensity as they approach their destination. Much of the last third of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) consists of the build up to the destruction of the bridge at the end of the film. In innumerable blockbuster films the central character or characters “tool up”, arming themselves to the teeth before setting out to face the enemy in a sequence designed to increase the tension before the cathartic showdown.

The above examples also show that whilst event spectacle is incorporated in the narrative architecture of the film, it is also cued within the film itself so that the spectator is aware that something is about to happen. Rarely does event spectacle erupt out of nowhere since the cueing within the film heightens its impact. In *Gladiator* (2000), a film partly concerned with the use and effect of spectacle as mass entertainment, each gladiatorial contest is preceded by some form of build-up, none more so than the first in the arena in Africa when the experience will be new to both the spectator and the central character.

Object spectacle arises in that moment when the film asks the spectator to look at a particular object as a spectacle *in itself*. This will be related to the narrative in broad, often thematic terms, such as establishing the status of the hero or the spectacular backdrop to the action, so that the spectator’s emotional alignment with certain narrative concerns which the film is advancing is reinforced. So, for example, the first few shots of the desert in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) help to emphasize the size and beauty of the landscape which will form the backdrop to much of the remaining action in the film and partly helps the spectator to understand Lawrence’s attraction to the desert. Or in the opening moments of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) the camera holds back from showing us the full view of Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones for which we have been waiting until after he has disarmed an attacker with his bullwhip. He then steps forward into the light, finally revealing his face. This revelation of the central character is a common moment of object spectacle. Other examples of this process would include the gradual revealing of Blondy in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) and the first appearance

of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) from behind one of the Tarleton brothers, who moves aside to reveal her as the camera zooms in on her face (an example cited by Brown (2008, p. 170)). It is also the case that the object spectacle here is as much about Harrison Ford, Clint Eastwood and Vivien Leigh as it is about Indiana Jones, Blondy and Scarlett O'Hara: in such moments the object on display is a complex layering of star and character. These examples emphasise that the focus of object spectacle is often the body, as will be discussed further below.

As is apparent from these examples, object spectacle results from the film treating a particular object in a particular way so as to draw that object to the spectator's attention as a site of spectacle in its own right. Again, the effect is of a direct, exhibitionistic communication with the spectator outside the film's diegesis. The purpose is to amplify the spectator's emotional response to the object on display and, as suggested above, in the larger context of the thematic concerns of the film, to reinforce the spectator's involvement or empathy with the narrative. Whereas event spectacle tends towards producing feelings of awe, excitement, astonishment, fear and so on, object spectacle may also seek to elicit an erotic response if the object in question is physically attractive. The use of cueing within the film's diegesis helps to reinforce the link between the spectator and the spectacle, essentially bridging the transition from voyeuristic narrative to exhibitionistic spectacle.

Object spectacle can also be cued within the film and often is if the object is a body. Neale discusses this phenomenon, which he refers to as "looking" in the context of his examination of the use of spectacle and looking in *The Triumph of the Will* (1935). He identifies that the act of looking at an object by those in the film when that object is as yet unseen by the spectator establishes the object as a spectacle in itself through the anticipation generated by the withheld object: "It is at this point that the activity of looking is inscribed into the diegesis itself, and that its privileged object begins to be established" (Neale, 1979, p.69). The cue or look (to use Neale's term) therefore functions as a device to align the spectator with the characters on the screen, anticipating a similar emotional response. Neale suggests, in

the context of *The Triumph of the Will*, which is structured as a series of staged event spectacles through which the object spectacle of Hitler moves, that looking “...is not only the foundation of spectacle in its relations with the spectating subject, it is also the means by which the film coheres as a film – linking the images together and to a large extent specifying their meaning” (1979, p.76). This observation may apply particularly to *The Triumph of the Will* by virtue of its structure, but it is certainly true to say that cueing has a central role as a way of advertising the occurrence of an event or object spectacle and beginning the process of alignment of the spectator’s emotional response with those of the characters on the screen.

This process of emotional alignment has been examined by Carroll in the context of the horror film (Carroll, 1990). He is dealing principally with object spectacle, being the spectator’s emotional identification with the characters’ feelings of fear and disgust at the monster (whatever form that may take) which confronts them:

In horror fictions, the emotions of the audience are supposed to mirror those of the positive human characters in certain, but not all, respects...Our responses are meant, ideally, to parallel those of characters (Carroll, 1990, p.18).

The evaluative response of the character to the monster is meant to be shared by the spectator even though the spectator knows (but the character usually does not) that the monster does not exist. Carroll is of the view that whilst this emotional alignment is a central feature in the horror film, it is not the case for every genre. This may be true, but the position may be different in the context of spectacle. It is certainly the case that the spectator is unlikely to mirror all of the emotions experienced by characters involved in an event spectacle since these may often include fear, terror and horror whereas the spectator may feel excitement, astonishment and so on. Object spectacle, however, may rely more on alignment of emotion so that the characters’ reactions to the object viewed are understood and shared by the spectator. It may be that object spectacle therefore rests to a greater extent than event

spectacle upon the generation of an empathic response through alignment as part of its emotional amplification.

5.3.2 Event spectacle and narrative

Event spectacle tends to generate excitement, astonishment, awe, possibly fear, arising out of the spectator's identification not only with the characters' predicament but also the event in itself. It operates within the generic confines of the film so that, for example, we would not expect to see the characters break into a spectacular musical number in the middle of a war film. Traditional criticism of spectacle tends to focus on the extent to which event spectacle interferes with the narrative flow. This criticism is of course belied by the transmission model, and as King has pointed out:

Narrative is far from being eclipsed, even in the most spectacular and effect-oriented of today's blockbuster attractions. These films still tell reasonably coherent stories, even if they may sometimes be looser and less well-integrated than some classical models (King, 2000, p.2).

King suggests that the notion of the complete homogeneity of the classical film was probably first proposed by Heath and continued thereafter by the Neoformalist approach and the concept of excess material. It is the case that not all products of the classical Hollywood cinema actually conformed to the tidy Neoformalist model, neither is it necessary to argue that films can or should be as homogenous as Heath proposes. As King observes, profitability was (and is) more important than unity or homogeneity and in fact the desire to appeal to a mass market may result in an inbuilt incoherence arising out of conflicting demands: "Spectacle is often just as much a core aspect of Hollywood cinema as coherent narrative and should not necessarily be seen as a disruptive intrusion from some place outside" (2000, p.4). In fact, King recognises that, in accordance with the transmission model, spectacular sequences do actually contain narrative elements: "In some cases spectacle reinforces, rather than interferes with, the narrative. Moments of spectacle sometimes help to move the plot significantly forward" (2000, p.4 and 5).

The classical Hollywood narrative structures usually involve a tight narrative closure (as much the case for the B movie-type narrative structures employed by modern blockbusters as it was during the classical Hollywood era). It may well be the case that this narrative closure is effected through a spectacular sequence. A well-known example of this would be the gunfight at the end of the western, or the final assault on the enemy stronghold in the war film or the historical epic.

It is notable that one of the most influential recent books in terms of scriptwriting is Vogler's *The Writer's Journey*, which explores the use of mythic structures, particularly the quest myth, in Hollywood films. This allows for an episodic structure capable of incorporating spectacle into its architecture without disrupting the forward progress of the narrative. King suggests that "Formal closures at the level of mise-en-scene and editing tend to tie the viewer tightly into driving narratives that offer big emotional pay offs as a reward" (2000, p.29). The narrative may therefore, it is suggested, operate at a more thematic level, concerned less with the psychological development of characters than with establishing a set of conditions that allows for an enhanced emotional impact. It is also the case that narrative itself is not the sum total of the cinematic experience, as Tasker observes:

...spectacle is not necessarily best understood as devoid of narrative content. As in melodrama, narrative themes and concerns can be developed as much through visual and aural spectacle (and indeed other aspects of the screen image) as through characterisation or dialogue. We might even argue that such visual elements are more, rather than less, cinematic. In the process this may remind us of something important about popular cinema: its meaning and its pleasures are unlikely to be accessed simply through narrative exegesis (Tasker, 2004, p.3).

Tasker's comments highlight a significant similarity between films as diverse as the family melodrama and the blockbuster: in both cases themes and concerns relating to the narrative can be developed through visual or aural spectacle rather than the narrative as understood in the more traditional sense. An issue which this passage raises is whether in the case of the blockbuster

and the family melodrama the spectacle in question is the same. The answer is that generally it is not. As will be discussed in more detail below, family melodrama tends to employ object spectacle more than event spectacle whereas blockbusters tend to be the other way round. This is by no means always the case: the opening speed boat sequence in *Magnificent Obsession* (1954) and the races round the pylons in *The Tarnished Angels* are examples of event spectacle. Blockbusters often use object spectacle, utilising the human physique as much as the gun or car or space ship for spectacular effect, often as a precursor to an event spectacle.

In the context of its place within the narrative architecture, event spectacle operates as a self-contained sequence in terms of its exhibitionistic communication with the spectator whilst at the same time being linked into the narrative through its incorporation within the structure of the film itself and its emotional linkage to the narrative through the involvement of the characters in the spectacle. The extent to which we may regard event spectacle as being “good” or “bad” may therefore arise from the extent to which we are emotionally involved in the sequence and this may in turn arise from the effectiveness with which the sequence is incorporated into the narrative as a whole. King highlights *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) as having a “finely-tuned narrative structure” in which the action sequences “do not occur randomly but within a structured pattern” (2000, p.113). It is interesting to note that the scriptwriter of that film, Shane Black, when asked to list the ingredients of a good action film listed as number one “an action-driven plot”:

The action should always go hand in hand with the story so it’s all invisibly interconnected. Take the original Star Wars movies: every action sequence is perfectly timed and is designed not just to excite the audience on a visceral level but also to reveal crucial elements of the plot and characters (Black, 2009).

Event spectacle functions as a display within the larger display of the film itself. One of the identifying characteristics of spectacle often remarked upon by commentators is that it is something that is both display and on display

and this may be seen as an acknowledgement of the exhibitionistic nature of spectacle, a concept that applies equally to event spectacle and object spectacle, though commentators rarely make the distinction between the two. As stated above, spectacle is a shaping or manipulation of narrational and non-narrational transmission through the mise-en-scene. Whilst prompted by the narrative, event spectacle also reflects this manipulation through devices such as slow motion and, more recently, through extreme distortions of time to accentuate physical action in films such as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998), *Watchmen* (2009) and *Sherlock Homes* (2009), through the speed of the editing from shot to shot and through sound distortion and amplification (a practise parodied in *Hot Fuzz* (2007)) (Rossaak and Sobchak, 2006). These manipulations can perhaps best be described as exaggerations of elements of the mise-en-scene intended to heighten the impact of the event spectacle.

5.3.3 Object spectacle – the body

Object spectacle relies on this manipulation process to a greater extent than event spectacle but relies less on narrative cueing. It is a more purely stylistic adjustment to achieve an emotional effect. This leads us to consider the nature of the object which is the focus of object spectacle. The primary and most obvious object is the body. Neale has pointed out that a great deal of discussion during the Technicolor era from the 1930s through to the 1950s focussed on the generally beneficial effect that colour film would have on the female form. The presence of the female form, however, had a particular purpose:

The role of the female body within the regime of representation inaugurated by the introduction of Technicolor was one both of focusing and motivating a set of colour effects within a system dependent upon plot and narration, thus providing a form of spectacle compatible with that system, and of marking and containing the erotic component involved in the desire to look at the coloured image (Neale, 1985, p.147).

Here we see, formulated in different terms, object spectacle, described as being a form of (undefined) spectacle capable of coexisting with a narrative-driven cinema. Klinger makes a similar point in relation to the use of Technicolor in Sirk's films:

The industry perceived the visual pleasure inherent in Technicolor as being inextricably tied to the female image and its ability to sell films (Klinger, 1994, p.62).

Klinger's use of the term "visual pleasure", which may have been borrowed from Mulvey, is in fact a reference to spectacle, as it is in Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Here we see also the underlying purpose for the deployment of any form of spectacle in the cinema: ultimately it is to draw spectators to the cinema, the economic driver behind the creation of the vast majority of mainstream films. Klinger goes on to point out that the use of spectacle in films such as *Written on the Wind* (1956) also served other purposes linked to economic imperatives, giving rise to a mode of viewing not necessarily linked to "analysis of narrative and style as intrinsic systems" but instead a consumer-based approach, seeing the display of upwardly mobile lifestyles and trappings as part of "the consumer glance" (a phrase borrowed from Mary Anne Doane) which is less concerned with the narrative and temporal dimensions of the film and more with the spaces occupied by rooms and bodies (Klinger, 1994, p.67). In such circumstances it is the luxury of the mise-en-scene (aided by the lush Technicolor treatment) that satisfies the consumerist aspirations of the spectator.

Perhaps the best known formulation of the female body as object spectacle, described this time from an ideological and psychoanalytical perspective, is Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey's approach was to look at the apparently gendered nature of the spectator's gaze in the context of classic Hollywood cinema. In her view the films of the classical period were organised around an active and central male presence given a position of mastery by the film. The woman interrupted the smooth coherence of the film's structure by serving as the spectacular object of the male gaze, a gaze that the spectator was invited to identify with and

participate in so that the implicit ideological viewpoint of such films was that of the male voyeur gazing at the female object of desire. The presence of the woman as object spectacle in this narrative context had a significant effect:

The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation (Mulvey, 2004, p.841).

Here again is the notion that in some way narrative is separate from spectacle and that narrative comes to a halt while a spectacular event occurs. This is not the case, either from a transmission model perspective or from the more expansive view of the development of narrative thematics suggested by King. Object spectacle of the sort that Mulvey considers operates simultaneously as a moment of enhanced emotional impact and to reinforce the alignment of empathic reactions between spectator and the characters on the screen. If we are, for example, invited to see Gilda as an object of erotic desire, we are being emotionally aligned with the male characters in the film that feel the same way. We may well describe this as advancing the plot in terms of the establishment of the emotional geography of the story, quite apart from any more overt narrative function that it may possess.

One of the criticisms of Mulvey's essay was that it suggested that the only gaze in the classical Hollywood cinema was that of the male at a female object whereas this was not the case. An early response on this issue was Neale's "Masculinity as Spectacle", which appeared in 1983. Here Neale sought to argue that in fact attention should also be paid to the representations of heterosexual masculinity in mainstream cinema. These often focussed around images of the male as powerful and omnipotent to an extraordinary degree and also sometimes as an object of erotic contemplation, leading to an unstable and sometimes fragmented representation of the male image. Often the inherent erotic element of contemplation of the male form was mitigated by the violence inflicted on the male body during the course of the film (Neale cites the Western and the epic as examples of this tendency). Neale and Mulvey then draw a distinction between voyeuristic and fetishistic

looking, the former identified more with the usual stance taken by the spectator of narrative cinema and the latter being the look directed at displays of spectacle.

It may be possible to draw broad parallels between the voyeuristic approach of narrative-based cinema and the exhibitionistic elements of spectacle and the voyeurism and fetishism of Neale and Mulvey's theories, but this would be to miss the central feature of the transmission model that in fact both of these approaches to viewing occur simultaneously since the transmission model does not draw the distinction between narrative and spectacle that Neale and Mulvey observe. Consequently, Neale cites Ellis' definition of fetishistic looking which, while it equates this type of looking with "display and the spectacular" also suggests that it "represents the opposite tendency to that of voyeurism" (Neale, 1983, p.13). As suggested in Chapter Two, the voyeuristic and exhibitionistic elements of the transmission model coexist. This approach avoids the necessity to choose between the two or to assume, as Neale does, that one element will operate in exclusion to the other: "...the look begins to oscillate between voyeurism and fetishism as the narrative starts to freeze and spectacle takes over" (1983, p.12). Neale does later acknowledge however, that things may not be that straightforward:

The shoot-outs are moments of spectacle, points at which the narrative hesitates, comes to a momentary halt, but they are also points at which the drama is finally resolved, a suspense in the culmination of the narrative drive. They thus involve an imbrication of both forms of looking, their intertwining designed to minimise and displace the eroticism they each tend to involve, to disavow any explicitly erotic look at the male body (1983, p.14).

Neale deals briefly with the presentation of Rock Hudson in Sirk's movies, noting that whilst he is the subject of an erotic gaze which is female, his body is feminised. Neale does not really explain what he means in this context, noting only that such feminisation takes place in the musical. It would seem that the process of feminising in this context is simply treating the male body in cinematic terms in the same way as a female body. As Tasker has pointed out, on Neale's formulation we find a female gaze being directed at a

feminised male, which would appear to make little sense (Tasker, 1993, p.115).

The location of the male body as object spectacle goes back at least as far as Valentino. Hansen, writing on Valentino's appeal, noted: "The star's performance weakens the diegetic spell in favor of a string of spectacular moments that display the essence of the star", another example, albeit formulated in different terms, of object spectacle (Hansen, 1991, p.246). Klinger notes, in the context of a discussion of Rock Hudson's star persona both on and off the screen, that: "...the extra-filmic presentations of the star's body, background, personality, etc. inspire a rapture with the image that takes the viewer beyond the horizons of the narrative, encouraging a spectacle-driven sensibility that derives pleasure in a sporadic, alinear, anarrative manner" (1994, p.118). We are a long way from Mulvey's narrative-driven, male-oriented view of classical cinema and instead see a more complex approach which recognises that narrative may not be the central prerequisite of the cinematic experience and that object spectacle may reside as much in the male as the female form. The publicity "torso shots" of Hudson reproduced in Klinger find their echo in the treatment of more modern actors such as Brad Pitt and Hugh Jackman in films such as *Fight Club* (1999) and *Troy* (2004) in Pitt's case and *Swordfish* (2001), *Australia* (2008) and *Wolverine* (2009) in Jackman's case, where the camera lingers over shots of their bodies with as much exhibitionistic fervour as any female object spectacle.

Sirk's films contain many examples of bodies as object spectacle, not all of them female. In *All that Heaven Allows* (1955) Ron Kirby is seen as the object of Cary's desires and indeed the film as a whole is seen "strictly from a woman's point of view" as Mulvey has pointed out (1987, p.78). In *Written on the Wind* Mitch is the object of Marylee's sexually aggressive attentions for most of the film. *Imitation of Life* (1959) is partly about the creation of Lora Meredith as public property, or the property of others, and as such as an object in her own right. As a result, there are many moments in which Meredith is seen as object spectacle. On several occasions Sirk frames her in

a long shot to allow a full view of the clothes she is wearing, and on other occasions she is shot in close up so her face is framed by her blonde hair and the large quantities of jewellery that she wears for most of the film. So for example, when she first appears at the agent's office in her black evening dress she is seen in long shot so that we can appreciate her outfit. Later, ironically after a speech she has made deplored the way in which she has become other people's property as a result of her success, she is shot full length as she puts on an extravagant and expensive outfit and the usual jewellery, balanced by Annie on one side and her husband on the other, her slightly off-centre position offset by a striking vase of red flowers to the left of the screen. The formal framing of the elements heightens the effect of Lora as an object around which the other characters revolve.

We may distinguish this moment of object spectacle from the mise-en-scene generally by seeing it as the moment when the film asks the spectator to look at a particular object, and then structures the image around that object. As discussed above, mise-en-scene may contribute either directly or indirectly to the narrative drive of the film, may contribute information of a more thematic nature or possibly to accentuate a mood or atmosphere in a particular scene through, for example, the use of a particular colour palette. These are all essentially moments during which the mise-en-scene operates within the film's diegesis, and examinations of the nature and function of the mise-en-scene have tended to see it as inward-looking, concerned with the diegetic aspects of the film. During moments of spectacle, however, the film manipulates the mise-en-scene so that it focuses out towards the spectator as part of the direct exhibitionistic communication between the film and the spectator that is one of the defining characteristics of spectacle. Neoformalism may see such moments as the stylistic flourishes of excess material or the non-narrative aspects of parametric narration, but in fact they should really be seen as part of the communication between film and spectator that occurs during spectacular sequences.

In the context of blockbuster films, both male and female bodies have been treated as object spectacles. Whilst the passive female body may remain in

certain circumstances the object of the male gaze, as Mulvey suggests, it is interesting to note the rise of the male object spectacle, the continuation of the elements identified by Neale in his article on masculinity as spectacle. In retrospect, Neale was writing just at the time that a new trend in blockbuster movies was emerging: the rise of the heavily-muscled action hero, exemplified by Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Films starring Stallone and Schwarzenegger invite the spectator to see their bodies as object spectacle and will construct opportunities for a display of their physique:

As with the figure of the showgirl that Laura Mulvey refers to in classic Hollywood films, contemporary American action movies work hard, and often at the expense of narrative development, to contrive situations for the display of the hero's body (Tasker, 1993, p.79).

The purpose of the object spectacle in this case is not necessarily to promote erotic contemplation but instead as a display of power or prowess: very often the body is displayed in combat situations, perhaps as Neale has suggested to deflect any suggestion of homoerotic contemplation but also to link the prowess of the individual body with the excitement generated by the event spectacle in which that body is involved. So, for example, in the opening scenes in both *Commando* (1985) and *Red Heat* (1988) we are afforded a few moments to contemplate Schwarzenegger's muscles before he starts killing people in the event spectacles that follow.

The body as object spectacle can therefore be treated as a site of erotic contemplation or to generate excitement or awe through the display of physical prowess or power. The muscular movies of the 1980s gave way to the display of power by the male hero that might not be based on just his physical strength alone but also on his wits (such as Bruce Willis' character John McClane in the *Die Hard* films) or through the exercise by him of some form of superhuman power, such as Neo in the *Matrix* trilogy. In the context of the blockbuster there are a notable number of female stars who exercise this level of power. These would include Sarah Connor in the *Terminator* films, Ripley in the *Alien* series, Mace in *Strange Days* (1995) and Lara Croft in the *Tomb Raider* films. These are what O'Day refers to as "action babes",

arguably a sub-group of their own, in his view, and an example of where Mulvey's original thesis breaks down (O'Day, 2004).

A particular configuration of the cinematic treatment of bodies as object spectacle in blockbusters is something of a cliché given that it occurs so often. It may be convenient shorthand to refer to it hereafter (using a well-known but largely undefined term) as the "hero shot", a specific dwelling upon the object as a site of spectacle and power. Often, the shot will start near the feet of the person and track upwards so that the person towers over the spectator. This sequence can be seen for example in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) when Indiana comes to rescue the boys trapped in the mine, and in *Terminator 2* (1991), just after the terminator has acquired new clothes and the requisite sunglasses. In *Gladiator* Maximus is treated to the hero shot, but its placement in the film is worth noting: it occurs not the first time we see him but after he has become a hero to the crowd at the arena. Once again the object spectacle serves to align the spectator emotionally with the characters in the film. They now see Maximus as a hero and not just another slave to be killed for entertainment. The film sees him the same way too. The lighting, editing, framing, camera angles and other aspects of the mise-en-scene are used to project the body as object directly out towards the spectator, distinct for a moment from the diegesis of the film, inviting the spectator's contemplation and amplifying the emotional effect being generated by the film.

Objects are also treated to the hero shot, showing that object spectacle can extend not only to bodies (human or otherwise) but also to objects. For example, in *Star Trek* (2009) the USS Enterprise is shot on several occasions as an object spectacle, perhaps most obviously when it is first seen by the crew (and the spectator) emerging from behind another craft and also when it is seen rising out of the rings of Saturn rather like a submarine surfacing. In *Titanic* (1997) the ship itself is subject to a number of CGI-enhanced sweeping shots travelling the length of the ship to emphasise its size and magnificence. The submarine in *The Hunt for Red October* (1990) is treated in much the same way. In the *Transformers* films people, cars and robots are

all treated to a hero shot almost indiscriminately. The camera circles lovingly around the machinery in the same way that it dwells upon Megan Fox, and from much the same set of angles.

As discussed above, the revelation of a body as object spectacle can often be a complex layering of star and character so that the spectator is intended to see both simultaneously and the film communicates the star as object spectacle as much as the character they are playing. So for example the physiques of Schwarzenegger and Stallone and the opportunity to display those physiques in moments of object spectacle determine the narrative construction of the film. The opening sequence in *Cliffhanger* (1993) has Stallone wearing shorts and a sleeveless top climbing up a precipitous rock face and dangling above a huge drop. Not only are we supposed to be impressed by his character's climbing skills, we are also intended to notice his physique as emphasised by his clothing and the activities he is undertaking. Similarly, the opening sequence of *Red Heat* takes place inside a gymnasium, requiring Schwarzenegger to walk through the gym wearing only a small towel as a loincloth, allowing plenty of opportunity for the spectator to consider his gleaming torso. In *Imitation of Life* Lora Meredith as played by Lana Turner wears extravagant outfits and jewellery, accoutrements identified as much with Turner herself as the character she is playing, as Dyer has pointed out (Dyer, 1992, p.91). The physique, identified with Schwarzenegger or Stallone more than their characters, thus belongs to them as stars and is a constant feature in their films. The jewellery and elaborate costumes are identified with Lana Turner as much if not more than they are with Lora Meredith.

The use of the body as object spectacle can be found in films in which little or no event spectacle occurs. In *Rear Window* (1954), extensively analysed by Bordwell in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, a number of instances of object spectacle occur, centred around the depiction of Grace Kelly, both as Grace Kelly the film star and as Lisa Fremont, the character she is playing in the film.

Her character is cued within the narrative as an object spectacle prior to her appearance in the discussion between Jeff and Stella which dwells upon her beauty and desirability, her “perfection”. Her first appearance is carefully constructed to maximise its impact: as Jeff awakes from a dream she appears (unannounced by the narrative) and bends over him to kiss him. This movement is shown in close up and is split into two sequences by an intervening shot of her shadow falling over Jeff’s face so that the spectator is treated to not one but two close ups of her face, the edit serving to emphasise this moment of contemplation. The next shot, another close up, shows them both in profile, her moving in from left of screen to kiss Jeff on the lips. This movement is slowed down significantly. The overall effect of this sequence is to give her appearance and beauty a oneiric quality, as if she is something Jeff is dreaming rather than a real person, but it also allows the spectator to contemplate her physical beauty in a moment of object spectacle. This sequence is structured around the presentation of Grace Kelly as object spectacle, a direct exhibitionistic communication with the spectator utilising a manipulation of the mise-en-scene through editing, lighting and camera positioning. This sequence not only communicates something of Jeff’s feelings for her, hence aligning the spectator emotionally with Jeff, it is also and primarily aimed at the spectator: the majority of this sequence occurs whilst Jeff is asleep hence he is in one sense expressly excluded from the encounter between the spectator and Grace Kelly.

Lisa has some connection with the fashion world which allows her to wear a number of elegant costumes throughout the film, again emphasising her as object spectacle and, like Sirk, Hitchcock displays these outfits in a number of full length shots as she draws attention to what she is wearing, seeking Jeff’s approval. In one sequence, after she enters his apartment she moves around the room turning on the lights, illuminating the frame in which she is appearing so that she can be appreciated more fully by the spectator.

As a final example, during one sequence Jeff is listening to a song being played by a musician in an adjacent flat and Lisa enters wearing another new outfit and lies down on the couch in front of Jeff so that he is in the

background of the shot to the left whereas she occupies the foreground in the centre and right of the shot. He is partially obscured by her whereas she is entirely in shot, dominating the frame. The staging of this sequence serves no particular narrative purpose: the conversation that takes place could have occurred in any number of other settings. The purpose of the shot is to create a moment of object spectacle centred on Lisa/Grace Kelly. The lighting and staging of the scene are clearly created to focus the object spectacle out towards the spectator rather than in towards Jeff: indeed, Lisa is actually turned away from Jeff and towards the camera, propped up on her left elbow. Again, reading this sequence as object spectacle allows us to see that there is more happening here than just the mise-en-scene communicating diegetic information about the film: we can see that the sequence is actually spectacle structured to communicate directly with the spectator, intended to amplify an emotional effect, in this case lust, wonder, astonishment or other emotions generated by the physical beauty of Grace Kelly.

5.3.4 Object spectacle – the background

It is not the case that only bodies or other objects such as guns or cars or spaceships can be the subject of object spectacle. The same technique is applied to elements which usually form the background to a sequence, such as the physical setting in which a sequence occurs. Very commonly, particularly at the opening of a sequence or when the audience sees a certain location for the first time, the film will allow that location to be seen as an object of spectacle in its own right. Helen Phillips' garden and the lakeside scenery in *Magnificent Obsession* and the Hadley mansion in *Written on the Wind* are examples of backgrounds which are presented as object spectacles. In the opening sequence of *Written on the Wind* the camera follows Kyle Hadley into the mansion, shooting the entrance hall with its impressive sweeping staircase from a low angle to emphasise its size and splendour. The staircase itself features centrally in a number of shots, often as a prop for Marylee Hadley and in a central sequence Jasper Hadley suffers a fatal heart attack and falls down the staircase, his death cross cut with a sequence in which

Marylee dances in a revealing pink negligee in her bedroom upstairs, a fine example of object spectacle in itself.

A common theme in the use of backgrounds as object spectacle is to emphasize either sheer size or profligacy of detail or sometimes both. In *Lawrence of Arabia* the match cut from the flame to the sun heralds a sequence where the immensity of the desert, seen for the first time, is presented as object spectacle. A similar match cut from an object seen in close up to an immense vista occurs in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) in the famous cut from the bone to the space ship. In *Gladiator* the first shot of Rome is from high above the city, the clouds parting to reveal its size and grandeur, remarkably similar to the parting of the clouds noted by Neale in the opening section of *The Triumph of the Will* (1979, p.68). Many westerns use the familiar geography of Utah and Arizona not only to establish the context of the film but also as object spectacle. The immensity of the landscape is often emphasised in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy through the use of a mobile camera that sweeps along and around the landscape, often following figures moving across the land and dwarfed by its size.

Neale points out in his study of *The Triumph of the Will* that clouds may themselves be object spectacle:

In offering to the spectator's gaze a set of forms which mask and fill an otherwise empty and potentially infinite space (the sky) while simultaneously signifying the very emptiness and infinity that they mask, clouds have come to function, in a sense, to signify spectacle itself (1979, p.67).

Similarly, in *Miami Vice* (2006) while sequences shot in the urban environment use high definition video equipment, certain aerial sequences employ a deeper and richer image to emphasise the immensity and beauty of the cloud formations, presenting them as object spectacle in a sequence which otherwise serves only to show that the characters are moving from one location to another in a plane.

Profligacy of detail as object spectacle is a feature of the hyperrealist tendency in CGI sequences, discussed in the previous chapter. This is evident in sequences such as the siege of Minas Tirith in *The Return of the King* (2003), the initial attack upon the city walls in *Troy* (2004) and the battle between the ice giants and the Asgardians in *Thor* (2011). It also regularly occurs in science fiction films such as the second three films in the *Star Wars* saga and in the depiction of the urban landscape in *The Fifth Element* (1997). These sequences utilise multiplanar activity and a depth of field offering multiple layers of detail. Whilst CGI-created hyperreality lends itself to this sort of composition, the use of profligacy of detail as object spectacle is considerably older, going back at least to the massive sets and huge crowd sequences in *Intolerance* (1916) and encompassing the biblical epics of the 1950s. The enormous crowded stadium which forms the backdrop to the chariot race in both the 1925 and the 1959 versions of *Ben-Hur* is an obvious example of this tendency.

Brown suggests that profligacy of detail therefore functions as spectacle when it is excessive to the requirements of historical verisimilitude (2008, p.159). Brown's comments arise in the context of his study of spectacle in historical films, particularly *Gone with the Wind*. As such his definitions of spectacle are confined (by him) to the context of historical drama. He identifies two types of spectacle arising from his consideration of this film: the "décor of history" and the "spectacular vista". The former relates to what is here described as an element of object spectacle relating specifically to the presentation of background elements as spectacle in their own right. Brown includes costume in this definition, which is included in any event as part of the more expansive definition of object spectacle adopted here.

The "spectacular vista" in Brown's formulation is an "excess of action: excessive in scale and qualitatively excessive". This latter category would equate to event spectacle, though again event spectacle encompasses a more expansive definition. More importantly, perhaps, spectacle as defined here does not rely upon the notion that it is in any case excessive. Brown's formulation also does not link the purpose of spectacle to its emotional

function. The notion that spectacle is excess to the requirements of verisimilitude also seems to suggest that it is in some way extraneous or akin to excess material in the Neoformalist sense or that the achievement of verisimilitude is an end in itself. As suggested here, spectacle is in fact an end to a means, the aim being the amplification of emotional impact. Far from being extraneous or excessive spectacle is thus central to the fundamental cinematic experience.

Brown acknowledges that an element of spectacle is its exhibitionistic quality: "...it is worth emphasising that it is potentially problematic to discuss actions and objects as necessarily in and of themselves spectacular; they only become so when filmed in particular ways" (2008, p.160). Sequences are not spectacular if "the filmmaker chose to abstract their qualities of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'". As noted above, this quality of spectacle as being display and on display which is often identified as being one of its essential elements is really an acknowledgement that spectacle is exhibitionistic in nature, projecting itself out towards the spectator in a direct relationship with the spectator outside the voyeuristic confines of the narrative. A potentially spectacular sequence can thus be deliberately rendered "unspectacular" by the techniques used by the filmmakers. For example, in one sequence in *Le Samourai* (1967) (a film which dwells on Alain Delon as object spectacle (Neale, 1983, pp.6 and 7)) two characters fight near a railway line, but instead of cutting to close ups or subjective views of the action to draw the spectator in, the camera cuts away to a long shot taken from a passing train and the entire fight sequence lasts no more than a few seconds. Another example in the context of object spectacle is the first full view of John Merrick in *The Elephant Man* (1980). Up to this point in the film, the director has employed the traditional tactic of withholding a first complete view of the deformed Elephant Man but instead dwelling on reaction shots, cueing in relation to the horrific extent of his deformities and so on. When he is finally revealed, however, the film does not employ any cueing devices such as reaction shots or musical cues but instead simply cuts to a shot of him sitting in the corner of a room in an unthreatening posture. The camera looks slightly down on him, diminishing his figure. This tactic, intended to make him a sympathetic

rather than a frightening character, has the effect of preventing him from becoming an object spectacle intended to evoke fear or horror in the spectator.

Clearly the use of background as object spectacle can be by definition only temporary. It therefore needs to be drawn to the spectator's attention and this is done through the process of "foregrounding": that is, the use of techniques to focus the spectator's attention on the object as spectacle for a brief period of time. The most obvious technique employed is to dwell upon the background at the beginning of a sequence when it is new to the spectator and as such object spectacle may often appear as part of a series of establishing shots. A similar effect may be achieved by the use of saturated colour effects, such as those employed by Sirk in *All That Heaven Allows* and *Written on the Wind* or in stylised films such as *Hero* (2002) and *The House of Flying Daggers* (2004). The colour effects allow the background to be seen as an object spectacle in its own right, foregrounding the background or clothes that the characters wear.

Foregrounding will apply equally to bodies as object spectacle. Again, often the appearance of the person in question is cued within the narrative, as occurs with Rock Hudson's first appearance in *All That Heaven Allows*, where we first glimpse him with his back to the camera on the left of the screen as Agnes Moorhead walks past but then she pointedly looks back at him and he is the subject of a brief discussion between her and Jane Wyman.

Object spectacle thus represents a more subtle shaping or manipulation of the transmission than event spectacle. It may, like event spectacle, employ cueing to create an alignment of the spectator's emotions with the characters on the screen, but often it is not overtly part of the narrative structure of the film. Instead it represents a temporary foregrounding of certain elements of the mise-en-scene through the use of colour, camera angles, certain temporal distortions such as the brief slow motion movement, lighting and so on. If event spectacle represents an exaggeration of elements of the mise-en-scene, object spectacle is more of an emphasis of those elements.

It is in the nature of such effects that they are temporary: the spectator becomes used to the unusual colour scheme or the action of the film now takes over from a contemplation of the setting itself. Similarly, bodies as object spectacle may intrude at any point during the film but the effect is temporary. This is part of the necessary temporal limitations of spectacle. Event spectacle is temporally limited by the duration of the event. Object spectacle is temporally limited by the novelty value of the object. Whilst we may initially pause to contemplate the physical beauty of Grace Kelly or Dorothy Malone, or Rock Hudson or Brad Pitt, we will not do so continuously for the rest of the film. Spectacle relies upon impact and novelty: the impact of the event spectacle which comes and goes and the impact of the object spectacle which wears off with familiarity.

5.3.5 Case study - the parachute jump

It will be helpful to place these proposals in context by examining their use in a particular sequence. The example chosen is LaVerne Shumann's parachute stunt in *The Tarnished Angels*. This particular example has been selected because it is both slightly unusual in the context of the use of event and object spectacle, involving as it does both types of spectacle appearing in a family melodrama rather than a blockbuster, but also because in many other ways it provides a good example of the common strategies used in both structuring an event spectacle within the narrative framework and using object spectacle within the context of that event spectacle.

The Tarnished Angels was shot in black and white, allowing Sirk to make the most of Dorothy Malone's height and blonde hair by dressing her in white for much of the first half of the film and contrasting her against the grey or black of the air strips and rooms which form much of the background to the film's action. Malone as LaVerne is thus treated as an object spectacle by the film virtually from the beginning, the centre of the largely male-dominated world which she inhabits and an object of attraction to the three male leads in the film.

LaVerne's husband, Captain Roger Shumann, is a former First World War flying hero now reduced to stunt flying in the travelling air shows held across America during the Depression. The centrepiece of these shows is a dangerous circuit race around pylons, a competition which often results in serious injury or death. LaVerne's parachute stunt acts as a precursor to the first significant race in the film, which occurs nearly halfway through the story. The sequence in which it occurs begins with a shot of a plane crossing the sky trailing a banner on which the word "Welcome" has been printed. There is a cut to an apparently blind organ player, whose fairground music then underscores the next few moments of the sequence as a series of establishing shots show the crowd arriving at the carnival and taking their places in a stand to watch the show. Burke Devlin, the journalist involved with the Shumanns, is standing next to their young son when the tannoy announces the added attraction of a daredevil parachute jump by LaVerne. The fairground music stops. Startled, Devlin and others around him look up at something the spectator cannot at this point see. The Shumann's son, who has clearly seen all this before, ignores what is going on and concentrates on his ice-cream.

Having been cued by the narrative and the preceding shot to expect to see what Devlin and the others are looking at, the sequence cuts to a long shot of a biplane in the sky and then cuts again to a shot close to the cockpit to reveal the pilot in the rear seat and LaVerne in the front. She clammers out of the seat and crouches on the wing of the plane. She is wearing a white dress, white pumps and elbow-length white gloves and has a parachute strapped to her back. As she jumps off the wing, the tannoy announces "There she goes" and there is a cut to a long shot of her parachute opening as she falls away from the plane, accompanied by dramatic music intended to underscore the danger of the stunt.

The sequence then cuts to a medium shot of LaVerne descending on the parachute, her white dress now billowing up to reveal her legs and white panties. At this point her harness apparently fails and she drops in free fall

away from the parachute. The sequence cuts to reaction shots from the crowd, women screaming, horrified, their hands raised to their mouths, and Devlin looking worried. LaVerne then opens a second parachute and the tannoy announces “How’s that for thrills”, referring to her death defying free fall. Cut to reaction shots of men smiling admiringly as she descends. Whether they are smiling at the stunt or at her or both is difficult to tell.

The stunt is not over however: at this point, as the tannoy observes, she undoes her harness and holds on to a crossbar on the chute with her “bare” (actually gloved) hands. Again, there is a cut to a reaction shot of Devlin looking horrified and her son ignoring what is happening, clearly indicating that, contrary to what the tannoy is proclaiming, this is not the first time that this stunt has ever been performed by a woman. “Looks like she’s going to make it” the tannoy observes, and there are smiles and applause all round. She lands and acknowledges the applause. Afterwards, when talking to Devlin, she is dismissive of the stunt, noting only that “the boys” were disappointed that the wind hadn’t ripped her skirt off.

The event spectacle that is the parachute stunt can be seen to be cued within and contained by the narrative sequence described above, starting with the plane flying the “Welcome” banner and proceeding through a series of establishing shots to set the context of the carnival. Whilst the race involving Roger Shumann has been prefigured by the narrative, the stunt is unexpected. The spectator is however guided by the reaction shots from Devlin and others throughout the course of the stunt and also by the tannoy, which acts as a commentator on the event as it unfolds. The event spectacle itself contains a number of narrative developments and is effectively worked into the narrative structure, telling the spectator more about LaVerne’s strength of character, her relationship with her husband and Devlin’s growing infatuation with her. The structuring of the event and the use of the dramatic music, editing speed and cueing show that the sequence is intended to communicate directly with the spectator by creating an exciting sequence involving placing one of the central characters in a dangerous position and manipulating the spectator’s response through the visual and aural devices detailed above to create an

emotional effect which amplifies the emotional impact the film is seeking to communicate.

Throughout the sequence, LaVerne is seen as an object spectacle, continuing the film's treatment of her in this manner up to this point. This is both narratively-motivated but also clearly a direct communication with the spectator through the repeated and unrealistic use of LaVerne's white costumes, which would be wholly impractical for everyday use in such circumstances even if the dress and gloves she wears for the stunt could be seen as part of the stunt itself. During the stunt sequence the film exploits a complex layering of imagery not uncommon in such moments: LaVerne as object spectacle exciting lust in the male spectator, as a site of lust and desire for the male characters within the film's diegesis and playing on Malone's height and blonde hair, at that time well-known characteristics of the actress herself (a natural brunette, she had in fact become a blonde for *Written on the Wind*, the film which had made her famous). The spectacle aligns the emotional response of the audience with the characters on the screen and heightens the emotional charge created by the film which has already been established by the narrative. The event and object spectacle coincide perfectly as LaVerne descends on the parachute in her improbable white dress and white gloves, her skirt billowing up to reveal her legs and white panties. This image in itself can serve as emblematic of the intertwining of event and object spectacle in the cinematic image.

Traditional readings of mise-en-scene allow for an understanding of the strategies employed by films to communicate with the spectator, often at an almost subconscious level, in connection with narrative or other information about the film and its characters. This communication is diegetic: it is about what is happening in the film, the mood that the film creates and the world which its characters inhabit. In Bordwell and Thompson's formulation, it is about how the director stages the film for the spectator. This definition in itself implies the establishment of the diegesis, the closed text which the film represents. Reading these films for examples of event or object spectacle, however, requires a different approach to the nature of the mise-en-scene.

This approach is driven by the reframing of the film through the transmission model, so that we can see the mise-en-scene as the vehicle through which the narrational and non-narrational transmission is organised to achieve the film's ends. It is then clear that there are sequences in these films where the films will use the mise-en-scene and the narrative structure to construct sequences which speak directly and exhibitionistically to the spectator outside the diegesis of the film to achieve an emotional impact, to amplify the affect that the film is seeking to engender in the spectator. Mise-en-scene is thus not solely concerned with the establishment of the diegesis: it may also be used to communicate with the spectator outside the diegesis. This is often through spectacular sequences, be this event or object spectacle. Adopting this approach allows us to clarify the nature of spectacle in the context of mise-en-scene and to differentiate between spectacle and mise-en-scene and their different contributions to the cinematic image.

5.4 Conclusion

The concept of mise-en-scene examined in this chapter has long been in need of clarification in terms of its relationship to spectacle. This clarification is important to achieve a more precise understanding of the aesthetics of spectacle in this context. This approach also allows us to understand the role that mise-en-scene plays and its relationship to spectacle. In the context of the transmission model, it is clear that the mise-en-scene is the vehicle for the organisation of the narrational and non-narrational transmission that is communicated to the spectator. Whilst the traditional approach to mise-en-scene is therefore to see it as wholly focussed in towards the film's diegesis, an examination of its operation from this perspective shows this not to be the case. The mise-en-scene shapes both narrational and non-narrational transmission and can equally be involved in the creation of a spectacular sequence which communicates directly and exhibitionistically with the spectator. This understanding is important because it clarifies the role of mise-en-scene and differentiates it from spectacle, which can now be seen as a particular device for achieving specific aims, as explored in Chapters One to Three, which arises through the vehicle of mise-en-scene.

Object and event spectacle may be seen as a temporary rupture of the diegesis which momentarily reverses the energy of the sequences to create the exhibitionistic display characteristic of spectacle. If therefore we are to see mise-en-scene as relating *solely* to the creation of the film's diegesis then spectacle must be a phenomenon that exists entirely outside the mise-en-scene, elements of which it appropriates when it is occurring. If however, we see mise-en-scene as whatever occurs within the frame of the screen, which would be consistent with the transmission model approach, then it can incorporate those moments when spectacle occurs as simply being another part of the overall cinematic experience, which will include both exhibitionistic and voyeuristic elements, narrative and spectacle. The former approach would seem to be unnecessarily reductive: given that as Gibbs and Bordwell and Thompson suggest the true impact and meaning of mise-en-scene lies in the interaction of elements it should follow that this would include those sequences which are spectacular since these all contribute to the film's overall effect. It would seem rather strange to suggest that spectacle can somehow fundamentally alter the nature of the mise-en-scene to such a degree that it cannot be said to operate when a spectacular sequence occurs.

Is it possible to evaluate what constitutes good or bad (or effective) spectacle? Whilst in certain circles the term has always been pejorative, whether for ideological reasons or simply out of a misplaced identification with narrative-centred classical Hollywood cinema, it is possible to consider whether spectacle succeeds on its own terms as accomplishing what it is supposed to do. If its purpose is to amplify the spectator's emotional response to a film, then it is good (or effective) if it succeeds and bad (or ineffective) if it does not. There is obviously a degree of subjectivity in such an assessment, as there is in any consideration of whether any film is good or bad.

One indicator in the case of event spectacle may be the extent to which the spectacle is effectively tied into the narrative structure so that it is not only motivated by the narrative but also that the spectator has sufficient emotional involvement with the characters to care what happens to them during the

spectacular sequence. Paradoxically, from this perspective what makes a spectacle good may therefore depend on how good the narrative is at engaging the spectator's empathy with the characters. This reinforces the point made in Chapter Two that spectacle and narrative are intertwined so that one should reinforce the other. Given that spectacle also contains a narrative element, good event spectacle will, as Shane Black suggests, reveal something about the character of those participating. In fact it may be more revealing than conversation. As Seraph says to Neo in *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), you never truly know someone until you fight them.

In the same way we may judge the effectiveness of object spectacle by the success with which it conjures up the requisite emotional response. If we feel awe and wonder at the desert landscape in *Lawrence of Arabia* or the majestic cloudscape in *Miami Vice* or a surge of excitement as the USS *Enterprise* rises up through the rings of Saturn or an erotic response to Dorothy Malone in *Written on the Wind* or *The Tarnished Angels* then the spectacle has achieved its desired effect. Object spectacle depends less on the context of its narrative structure and more directly on the presentation of the object as spectacle in itself. This is not necessarily the object as a site of desire (in the psychoanalytical sense) or lust since this category goes beyond just people or things, but an element of the mise-en-scene presented directly to the spectator in a way calculated to arouse the spectator's emotions. Unlike event spectacle, which may accomplish narrative closure, object spectacle serves a supporting role, for example by heightening the effect of the event spectacle which follows in the blockbuster or the repressed emotional conflict in the family melodrama.

Is it possible at this stage to draw any conclusions about the types of spectacle considered in this chapter and in Chapter Four? Is there any feature that is common to all of them outside the general characteristics that they all share which identify them as spectacle in the first place? Upon examination it is clear that all these forms of spectacle display power, whether this is physical or sexual prowess, the hyperrealism of CGI or the excessive detail or opulence of object spectacle, the exuberance and energy of event spectacle or

the technological prowess of formative or formalist spectacle. Spectacle is at least in part the display of the power of the cinematic image. To this extent Neale is right to characterise spectacle as “presentational prowess”, although this definition is perhaps partial given that any such definition should encompass the purpose of spectacle and not just its broad characteristics (Neale, 2003, p.54). It may also be more accurate to say, given that spectacle has been shown in this thesis to be central to the direct, visceral and emotional encounter that is the cinematic experience, that spectacle is the display of the power of the sensual image.

Conclusions: The aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema

In Chapter One of this thesis the following research questions were posed:

- How can spectacle in mainstream cinema be defined rigorously?
- How does spectacle operate in and contribute to the cinematic experience such that it is possible to sketch an outline of the aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema?

These fundamental questions gave rise to a number of subsidiary issues:

- Is it possible to construct a model of spectatorship which will accommodate the presence of both spectacle and narrative?
- To what extent can existing cognitive theories accommodate the presence of spectacle and is it necessary to go beyond these theories in order to do so?
- What is the relationship between spectacle and technology, using technological developments as a way of historicising spectacle, and what does this relationship tell us about spectacle and about the use of technology in mainstream cinema?
- What is the relationship between spectacle and mise-en-scene and how can we characterise spectacle in the context of the manipulation of the cinematic image that mise-en-scene represents?

In order to address these questions it has been necessary to step back and strip away preconceptions about narrative and spectacle. This has entailed proposing a model to account for the process of watching a film at its most basic, which I have called the transmission model. The use of the transmission model, with its division of all information transmitted by the film to the spectator into narrational and non-narrational transmission, provides a more flexible and inclusive approach capable of accommodating the revised definition of spectacle which this thesis proposes. Considering these questions also leads to an acknowledgement of the emotional power of the cinematic image, recognised by early theorists but never fully developed. The sensual image, derived from Eisenstein's concept of "sensuous thinking" underlies the affective power of the cinematic experience.

This thesis has shown that the model of spectatorship necessary to accommodate spectacle and the idea of transmission needs to be reformulated by re-examining early cinema and those early film theories that concentrated upon the power of the cinematic image. In these cases narrative was not considered to be central to the cinematic experience. Instead, the emotionally involved, actively engaged spectator interacted with an exhibitionistic display which was intended to communicate directly with the spectator outside the diegesis of the film. This thesis has shown that allowing spectacle its proper place in the cinematic experience requires a model of spectatorship which accords this relationship a central place rather than relying upon the detached and distant observer of more traditional approaches which were themselves predicated upon voyeuristic, narrative-centred models.

This thesis has also demonstrated that a similar reformulation needs to occur in the context of existing cognitively-based models. Whilst cognitive film theory has done much to strip away the accumulated layers of ideologically and psychoanalytically based approaches and to recognise the importance of the spectator's emotional involvement, the increasingly detailed examinations of the spectator's mental activity when viewing a film risks becoming abstract and distanced from the lived experience itself. In this respect at least, cognitive theory has reached something of a dead end. A more radical approach is needed to embrace the inclusive approach predicated by the revised definition of spectacle and the idea of transmission. That can be found in Frampton's *Filmosophy*, which straddles the boundary between criticism and philosophy to provide a more flexible approach to the cinematic experience.

The case studies undertaken in Chapters Four and Five have shown how spectacle manifests itself on the screen. Chapter Four shows how technology can be presented as a spectacle in itself and how the relationship between the use of technology and film develops over a period of time so that what is and is not considered to be spectacle shifts according to the twin dictates of novelty and the way that the presentation of spectacle is structured within the film. Chapter Five shows how spectacle manifests itself as a manipulation of

the mise-en-scene as event and object spectacle. Event spectacle demonstrates the interaction between spectacle and narrative, how one reinforces the other in the delivery of the film's emotional impact. Object spectacle shows how the film manipulates its mise-en-scene to draw a particular object to the spectator's attention and to present it as spectacle in itself.

This thesis has therefore addressed and answered the questions posed in Chapter One and in doing so has shown that it is possible both to define spectacle and to describe the outline of an aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema. This exercise has also demonstrated that a number of fundamental pre-conceptions about the spectator's cinematic experience need to be reconsidered. Primarily, this thesis has shown that spectacle is in fact central to the spectator's relationship with the film. The narrative-centred view of the cinematic experience obscures the fact that the primary characteristic of this cinematic experience is its emotional core, that films are emotion machines and that spectacle is central to the provision of the emotional charge which the spectator seeks when they go to the cinema. The spectator's relationship to the film is not primarily that of the distanced, voyeuristic observer predicated by more traditional narrative-centred models of spectatorship. It is an affective and visceral relationship which is fundamentally exhibitionistic in nature, a direct communication between the spectator and the film via the medium of spectacle. The transmission model demonstrates that it is in any event reductive to try to separate elements of the cinematic experience into categories such as spectacle, narrative, voyeuristic and exhibitionistic and instead it is more helpful to understand the process as one of transmission of information comprised of a balance of narrational and non-narrational transmission in a constantly fluctuating balance such that any given sequence will contain elements of both which will interact with and reinforce each other as part of the spectator's cinematic experience.

Given the time and space constraints of this thesis it is clearly not possible to provide an exhaustive survey of the aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema but I believe that this thesis provides the groundwork for further research in this area. The definition of spectacle presented in this thesis and

the use of the transmission approach is flexible enough to allow the scope of this enquiry to be extended in a number of directions, some of which are reviewed briefly below.

A significant topic which there has been no space to consider is sound, and particularly music. Superficially at least, music would appear to be closely related to spectacle in that, other than for relatively limited instances of diegetic music, it communicates directly with the spectator outside the film's diegesis and seeks to enhance the film's emotional impact. Does this make music spectacular in itself? If so, this runs the risk of falling into the trap of suggesting that every sequence containing a non-diegetic musical accompaniment is spectacle. On the basis of the conclusions reached in this thesis that does not seem to be correct. Clearly, a more nuanced approach to this issue is required. Sound effects appear to contribute to the establishment of the film's diegesis but non-diegetic music clearly has a role to play in reinforcing and indeed amplifying the emotional content of the sequence in which it is used. The interaction between spectacle and sound could shed light not only on the aural aspects of spectacle but also on the part that sound and particularly music plays in the spectator's direct, emotionally-based engagement with the film. An issue to consider is whether, in certain circumstances, music's function of reinforcing and amplifying the spectator's emotional response to the film becomes so prominent that it can be described as spectacle *in itself*. If that is the case, then this will add a further dimension to our understanding of how spectacle manifests itself in film and will also clarify further the function that music plays as part of the cinematic experience.

For reasons that are explained in the Introduction, this thesis has been limited to a consideration of the aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema, primarily that form of mass entertainment film produced by Hollywood or conforming to Hollywood-style film characteristics. Whilst such films are not necessarily all by definition blockbusters - and a significant number of examples reviewed in this thesis do not fall into that category - nevertheless it would be fair to say that the majority of films reviewed subscribe to certain

stylistic values which bracket them together as mainstream Hollywood-style cinema. Perhaps the most obvious extension of the exercise undertaken in this thesis would therefore be to extend the aesthetics of spectacle to other national cinemas and also beyond mainstream film. A fruitful area of enquiry, as briefly referred to in the Introduction, would be to consider the extent to which the characteristics of spectacle and its aesthetics are altered by the social and cultural characteristics of other national cinemas. The technology of the cinema was clearly imported from Europe and the United States, but the development of cinemas in the non-Western world equally clearly cannot be judged by Eurocentric paradigms. Is there a difference between spectacular sequences in films from, for example, India, China, Japan, Africa and South America and those from the West? If so, what are these differences and how do they effect and broaden our understanding of spectacle? Is spectacle entirely a creation of social and cultural contexts or are there certain characteristics which transcend national boundaries and which therefore point to the fundamental nature of cinema itself?

Similarly, what of films which fall outside the mainstream category, such as avant-garde productions that have traditionally placed less, if any, emphasis on narrative as an essential structural element of the film? Is it possible to have, as Simon West suggested in the context of *Tomb Raider* (2001) as referred to in Chapter One, a non-narrative cinema? If that is the case, what happens to spectacle? This issue is in reality as aspect of a related question which inevitably arises when considering the redefinition of spectacle undertaken in this thesis: having transformed spectacle from a marginalised Other to a dominant position in the cinema of the sensual image, and having shown that narrative-centred cinema is not the pre-eminent cinematic form which it has been perceived to have been, do we need to reconsider exactly what narrative now means? As Lavik noted and as recorded in Chapter One, exactly what constitutes advancement of the plot is still somewhat “mystical” notwithstanding Bordwell’s work and that of many other narrative theorists. King has suggested a form of thematic narrative, as discussed in Chapter Four, which does not derive directly from the narrative progression of the classical Hollywood cinema, and as noted in Chapter Five the way that a

film's transmission is organised by the mise-en-scene may itself communicate information about the characters and their predicament which cannot otherwise be articulated, certainly not through dialogue or action. The tendency of CGI towards the excessively-detailed, hyperrealistic image has led to criticism that this wealth of extraneous detail is mirrored by a decline in the complexity and psychological depth of the plot, to the film's overall detriment. Is this really the case, or is this in fact simply additional narrative detail (that is, detail about the characters and the spaces they inhabit) which does not bear directly upon the progress of the plot but which does nevertheless provide the spectator with useful information about those characters and their world? These are all examples of narrational transmission which does not conform to the traditional idea of classic narrative progression.

The working definition of spectacle advanced in this thesis could also usefully be applied to other specific genres of film such as the musical or the comedy to consider how and to what extent these films use spectacle and what this may reveal about the way it manifests itself across various types of film. Is it the case that a spectacle in, say, a Western is intrinsically the same as in a musical or a Biblical epic? Whilst clearly the detailed nature of each spectacle will be dictated by genre constraints, to what extent do the basic characteristics remain the same? Do generic constraints affect only the surface detail of spectacle or is their influence more fundamental? In the case of the musical there may be interesting links between the staged musical number within the film's narrative structure and the notion of music as spectacle in itself referred to above. For example, when does a sequence involving characters singing within a film become a staged musical number? Does this make any difference to the spectacular nature of that sequence? Whilst clearly *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933) is a film incorporating spectacular musical sequences and could reasonably be described as a musical, amongst other things, can the same be said for *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), during which on a number of occasions the cast sing directly to the camera? How do we analyse, in terms of spectacle, the sequence in *Magnolia* (1999) when a number of the cast in different locations, all sing

along to a song that is clearly non-diegetic? A consideration of the intended effect of such sequences in terms of event and object spectacle and their exhibitionistic, affective communication with the spectator could reveal much about spectacle and the nature of these sequences themselves.

Finally, on a broader issue, the role of spectacle in the presentation of the film to the prospective audience is also of interest, the part that the spectacular sequences in a film play in the advertising of the film and the spectator's pre-knowledge of the film, what Ellis calls the film's "narrative image" (Ellis, 1982, p.30). A consideration of the way the narrative image incorporates the spectacular elements of a film may reveal another aspect of the use and presence of spectacle in film and the central part that spectacle plays not only in the film's structure but in the *idea of the film* sold to the potential spectator through the film's narrative image. It may well be that the term "narrative image" is in fact misleading: it is not the narrative elements of the film that are most clearly expressed in the idea of the film that draws the spectator to the cinema, but the more directly emotive, spectacular elements. The narrative image functions to offer a broad thematic concept of the film through emotionally-directed, genre-keyed images which provide a preponderance of non-narrational transmission. Obviously, blockbusters will trade on this approach but other films which fall well outside this category will promote themselves through a publicity campaign based around images aimed at providing a direct, emotional approach to the potential spectator rather than any attempt to communicate much, if any, of the narrative content.

The redefinition of spectacle and the preliminary work on establishing an aesthetics of spectacle in mainstream cinema opens up possibilities for further research in a wide variety of areas. There is still much to be learned from a more extensive and wide-ranging investigation, and this investigation will have implications not only for our understanding of spectacle itself but also the cinematic experience as a whole. Whatever shape this investigation may take, it is hoped that these and other issues can form the basis of further study of the concept of spectacle so that a more complete understanding of the aesthetics of spectacle can be achieved and spectacle can be accorded its

rightful place as one of the key elements, if not the key element, of the spectator's cinematic experience.

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Filmography

All that Heaven allows (1955) Douglas Sirk USA

Altered States (1980) Ken Russell USA

Australia (2008) Baz Luhrmann Australia/USA/UK

Becky Sharp (1935) Rouben Mamoulian USA

Ben-Hur (1959) William Wyler USA

Blade Runner (1982) Ridley Scott USA/Hong Kong

Buffalo Soldiers (2001) Gregor Jordan UK/Germany

Chariots of Fire (1981) Hugh Hudson UK

Cliffhanger (1993) Renny Harlin Italy/France/USA

Commando (1985) Mark Lester USA

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind (2002) George Clooney USA/UK/Germany

Die Hard 4.0 (2007) Len Wiseman USA/UK

Distant Voices, Still Lives (1988) Terence Davies UK

Fight Club (1999) David Fincher USA/Germany

Gladiator (2000) Ridley Scott USA/UK

Gold Diggers of 1933 (1933) Mervyn Le Roy USA

Gone with the Wind (1939) Victor Fleming/George Cukor/Sam Wood USA

Henley Regatta (1897) Birt Acres UK

Henry V (1944) Laurence Olivier UK

Hero (2002) Yimou Zhang Hong Kong/China

Hot Fuzz (2007) Edgar Wright UK/France/USA

House of Flying Daggers (2004) Yimou Zhang China/Hong Kong

Hulk (2003) Ang Lee USA

Imitation of Life (1959) Douglas Sirk USA

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984) Steven Spielberg USA

Intolerance (1916) DW Griffith USA

Jaws (1975) Steven Spielberg USA

Kundun (1997) Martin Scorsese USA

La sortie des Uisines Lumiere (1895) Louis Lumiere France

Lawrence of Arabia (1962) David Lean UK

Le Samourai (1967) Jean-Pierre Melville France/Italy

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998) Guy Ritchie UK

Magnificent Obsession (1954) Douglas Sirk USA

Magnolia (1999) Paul Thomas Anderson USA

Miami Vice (2006) Michael Mann USA/Germany/Paraguay/Uruguay

Oklahoma! (1955) Fred Zinneman USA

Once upon a time in the West (1969) Sergio Leone Italy/USA

Panic Room (2002) David Fincher USA

Punch Drunk Love (2002) Paul Thomas Anderson USA

Quantum of Solace (2008) Marc Forster UK/USA

Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) Steven Spielberg USA

Rear Window (1954) Alfred Hitchcock USA

Red Heat (1988) Walter Hill USA

Salt (2010) Philip Noyce USA

Sherlock Holmes (2009) Guy Ritchie USA/Germany /UK

Star Trek (2009) JJ Abrams USA/Germany

Star Wars (1977) George Lucas USA

Strange Days (1995) Kathryn Bigelow USA

Swordfish (2001) Dominic Sena USA/Australia

Terminator Salvation (2009) McG USA/Germany/UK/Italy

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991) James Cameron USA

The Abyss (1989) James Cameron USA

The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938) Michael Curtiz/William Keighley USA

The Black Pirate (1926) Albert Parker USA

The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957) David Lean UK/USA

The Dark Knight (2008) Christopher Nolan USA/UK

The Elephant Man (1980) David Lynch USA

The Fellowship of the Ring (2001) Peter Jackson New Zealand/USA

The Fifth Element (1997) Luc Besson France

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966) Sergio Leone Italy/Spain/West Germany

The Hunt for Red October (1990) John McTiernan USA

The Incredible Hulk (2008) Louis Letterier USA

The Last Emperor (1987) Bernardo Bertolucci China/Italy/UK/France

The Last of the Mohicans (1992) Michael Mann USA

The Long Kiss Goodnight (1996) Renny Harlin USA

The Long Strike (1911) Director unknown USA

The Matrix (1999) The Wachowski Brothers USA

The Matrix Reloaded (2003) The Wachowski Brothers USA/Australia

The Return of the King (2003) Peter Jackson New Zealand/USA

The Robe (1953) Henry Koster USA

The Tarnished Angels (1957) Douglas Sirk USA

The Two Towers (2002) Peter Jackson New Zealand/USA

The Wild Bunch (1969) Sam Peckinpah USA

The Wizard of Oz (1939) Victor Fleming/Mervyn Le Roy/King Vidor USA

This Happy Breed (1944) David Lean UK

Three Colours: Blue (1993) Krzysztof Kieslowski France/Poland/Switzerland

Titanic (1997) James Cameron USA

Tomb Raider (2001) Simon West USA

Touch of Evil (1958) Orson Welles USA

Transformers (2007) Michael Bay USA

Triumph of the Will (1935) Leni Riefenstahl Germany

Tron (1982) Steven Lisberger USA

Troy (2004) Wolfgang Peterson USA

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) Stanley Kubrick UK/USA

Van Helsing (2004) Stephen Somers USA/Czech Republic

Wanted (2008) Timur Bekmambetov USA/Germany

Watchmen (2009) Zack Snyder USA

Written on the Wind (1956) Douglas Sirk USA

X Men Origins: Wolverine (2009) Gavin Hood USA

Zatoichi (2003) Takeshi Kitano Japan