

**‘Theory is always for someone and for some purpose’:  
Thinking through post-structuralism and cognitivism**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This essay explores the historical socio-cultural contexts that determine the contending epistemologies of post-structuralism and cognitivism. Debates between these paradigms have focused on *a-priori* philosophical premises. Synthesis between these premises has not materialised because each paradigm valorises a form of knowledge which its rival cannot match. This essay attempts to position these contested premises within a diachronic background in which theoretical claims can be tested, not merely against fixed deductive positions, but against specific socio-cultural contexts that manifest themselves in epistemology. Post-structuralism and cognitivism can then be thought of as aggregates of thought reflecting broad political, social, philosophical and cultural contexts.

**KEYWORDS:**

Ideology, epistemology, discourse analysis, post-structuralism, cognitivism.

To say that film studies' methodological protocols are highly contested would be an understatement. Reasons given for the lack of consensus range from John Mullarkey's assertion that '[a]s a consequence of its infancy no doubt, film-philosophy has been unable to avoid being highly partisan thus far: [...] film being understood entirely through one paradigm, cognitive science, cultural studies, Freudian psychodynamics, rhizomatic materialism, and so on' (2009, 6), to Casey Haskin's contextualisation of film theory's contested 'meta-orthodoxy [as] hardly unique to film theory. Its bipolar pattern is a staple of endless histories of intellectual conflict, in philosophy, religion, and elsewhere' (2009, 36). These divisions are most starkly delineated between both the *a-priori* philosophical foundations, and the interpretative conclusions derived therefrom, within two of the discipline's leading paradigms, post-structuralism and cognitivism. Given the veracity with which cognitivism challenged what it saw as post-structuralism's 'orthodoxy', there have been numerous studies which have attempted to account for rivalous epistemological claims, proselytise converts, negotiate synthesis and advocate further theoretical alternatives. This essay will trace the impact of some of those studies presently, but it will also attempt to position those studies within a diachronic background in which theoretical claims can be tested, not merely against fixed deductive positions, but against specific socio-cultural contexts which manifest themselves in epistemology. Post-structuralism and cognitivism can then be thought of as aggregates of thought reflecting broad political, social, philosophical and cultural contexts.

In elucidating the relationships between these contexts and the theoretical protocols they inspire, this historical approach can clarify the impact of ideology, which is the concept at the heart of the conflict between Haskin's bipolar paradigms. For political scientist Robert W. Cox '[t]heory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose. All theories have a perspective. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space' (1996, 87, original emphasis). Debates between post-structuralism and cognitivism have frequently foregrounded their differences within an ideological context, but they have not adequately addressed Cox's contention that their '[p]erspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space' (87). Analysing the relationships between these perspectives and their concomitant 'social and political time and space' can help

clarify the way in which their approaches to ideology operate ‘*for* someone and *for* some purpose’ (87).

### **The incommensurability of post-structuralism and cognitivism**

The historical development of the intellectual conflict between post-structuralism and cognitivism is the natural starting point for this analysis, not only because it clarifies areas of disagreement, but also because it demonstrates that this delineation of thought is both ideological and historically contingent. There are three primary areas of contention between these paradigms, the first of which is somewhat unintentional, so that part of the problem that the discipline has had in terms of clarifying and negotiating different positions has been down to the way that rivals have grouped together and classified studies according to criteria which their original authors do not necessarily accept. The notion of “Theory” or “Grand Theory”, as critiqued by cognitivism, is particularly prone to such generalisations. Research which might more accurately be labelled structuralism, auteur-structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalytic theory or apparatus theory have frequently been grouped together under such generalising rubrics as SLAB (Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, Barthes) theory (Bordwell 1989a), subject-position theory (Bordwell 1996), Grand Theory (Bordwell and Carroll 1996) and, with a capital “T”, Theory (Bordwell and Carroll 1996). Cognitivism itself has been conceived more systematically, defining itself as a rejection of “Theory’s” totalising tendencies (Bordwell 1989b, 261). It proposes, instead, explanations focusing on rationality rather than suppressed pleasure principles (Carroll 1996, 65), and the application of piecemeal theorising (Carroll 1996, 58).

This generalisation about rivals has not helped the discipline to negotiate its present situation, and it characterises critiques of rival epistemologies, particularly in regards to the second area of contention; underlying *a-priori* philosophical premises. Rejecting what Malcom Turvey refers to as the “fashionable nonsense” and dogma of psychoanalytical-semiotic film theory’ (2007, 116), the cognitivist ‘regards the spectator to be a unified, rational agent *at the outset*, an agent who consciously, and actively, processes the stimuli manifest on the movie screen’ (Buckland 1989, 82, original emphasis). For the post-structuralist, this development is not only philosophically unsound, since ‘cognitivists are attempting to position film studies somewhere between language and its objects, and in doing so they are forced to rely upon a set

of anti-holistic philosophical views' (Vescio 2001, 580), but also, since it 'presents itself as objective, rather than acknowledging itself to be relatively autonomous, it is open to the charge of scientific imperialism, for its own norms and values are presented as the absolute standard against which to interpret the norms and values of other paradigms' (Buckland 1989, 81).

This scientific imperialism not only inhibits debate between paradigms, as cognitivism valorises a form of knowledge which its rival cannot match, and indeed has no interest in matching, but it also leads into a third area of contention; the issue of ideology. Because of both its attempted objective methodology and its rejection of post-structuralism's "fashionable nonsense" and dogma of psychoanalytical-semiotic film theory' (Turvey 2007, 116) cognitivism has problematized the notion of ideology's impact. The influence and centrality of ideology to the difference between these paradigms is demonstrated in their understandings of the relationships between the academic and the studies (s)he undertakes. These deductive differences are demonstrated by David Bordwell's personal website's response to Slavoj Žižek's accusation that cognitivism fails to account for ideology because it does not address the author's own act of enunciation (Žižek 2001, 15-6): 'Žižek uses enunciation theory for the basis of his objection. If you don't accept a theory of enunciation [...] the objection fails' (Bordwell 2005). Bordwell does not accept that his studies contain the inevitable bias of any partial observer because, as Warren Buckland argues, cognitivism's 'scientific discourse sees itself fit to criticise systematically the unscientific basis of other discourses without justifying its own premises. It regards itself as the only legitimate discourse because it is based on the "intrinsic" laws of reasoning' (1989, 87). This difference in conceptualising the ideological role of the academic demonstrates the tight bundling of epistemological and ideological differences between paradigms, and the ways in which cognitivism's approach to meaning-making refutes that which post-structuralism understands as inherently ideological. Bordwell rejects both the substance and the logic of Žižek's argument, and can deny but not debate the relationship between academic enunciation and ideology.

These different conceptions of the academic subject go so far as to characterise the ways that the paradigms understand their locations within the discipline. The post-structuralist position acknowledges the impact of academic enunciation on intellectual discourse, with these divisions representing, for Žižek,

a whole set of dilemmas, from the purely epistemological to politico-ideological ones: [...] the antagonism between Theory and Post-Theory is a particular case of the global battle for intellectual hegemony and visibility between exponents of post-modern/deconstructionist cultural studies and [...] cognitivists and popularisers of hard sciences. (Žižek 2001, 2)

He links these antagonisms to a series of intellectual scandals, such as the de Man and Sokal affairs, with antecedents going back through Freud, Darwin and German Idealism down to Socrates (2-5). Bordwell, conversely, downplays or even disavows the influence of cognitivism upon intellectual trends, asking ‘[w]hy do Žižek and MacCabe<sup>1</sup> elevate a single anthology (*Post-Theory*)<sup>2</sup> into a movement (Post-Theory)? The book has won little attention, and no one else has built it into a mighty opposite to Lacanian theory’ (2005). Film philosopher Mullarkey, a relatively impartial observer in the debate, remarks that ‘[w]ithout a doubt, the research paradigm of Bordwell and his associates [...] has been extremely influential [...] in the decline of “Grand Theory”. [...] Indeed, with the increasingly empirical bent of the post-Bordwellian era, it is arguable that film *theory* has been transformed back into the film *studies* from which it emerged’ (2009, 31-2, original emphasis). As such, competing claims as to the importance of intellectual activity in influencing cultural discourse reflect deductive epistemological premises.

That is not to say that attempts have not been made to synthesise these paradigms, or to at least build methodologies for studies that might be improved by mixing together elements of both. The broad failures of these studies, at least in the respect of their influence on the discipline’s negotiations between the paradigms, if not on the specific subjects to which they have been applied, demonstrates one principle area of consistency; an attempt to incorporate cognitivism’s scientific objectivity into post-structuralism’s elaboration of ideology. In the wake of cognitivism’s offensive, this was post-structuralism’s attempted compromise; as Richard Lapsley and Michael Westlake argue, paraphrasing Lacan, ‘although there is no metalanguage, we cannot but search for one’ (2006, xvi), so that questions about ideology, and attempts to understand its operations theoretically, have always remained pertinent.<sup>3</sup> There were therefore, in

the 1990s, from both paradigms, calls for refinement, engagement and debate to transcend the accusations that each side fails to engage with the other's criticisms.

From the psychoanalytic perspective, for example, Judith Mayne argued that '[t]he study of spectatorship in film theory has always involved some complicated negotiations of "subjects" and "viewers," despite claims that the two are incompatible terms' (1993, 9), and Jackie Stacey attempted to construct a

dialectical relationship [...] between the material studied and the theory which is used to analyse it. Female spectators' accounts of the cinema are used to criticise or confirm existing film theory, and indeed produce new or refined categories which could usefully add to our understanding of how audiences watch films. (Stacey 1994, 72)

From the cognitivist position, Stephen Prince similarly saw potential synthesis in an empirical dimension to the construction of theory: 'Research on real viewers will need to be placed within a theoretical framework, but any theory of spectatorship which fails to deal at some level with the empirical evidence on spectatorship should be suspected of being insufficiently grounded' (1996, 72).

This emphasis on potential synthesis led Torben Grodal, in a conference paper delivered in the last month of the decade, to argue that cognitivist criticisms, when tempered, might provide the grounds to rectify theoretical deficiencies:

The problem with Bordwell's argument is that he confuses a critique of bad theories and bad applications of deductive reasoning and unconvincing exemplifications, with a critique of a theory-driven procedure as such. From my point of view grand theories are necessary, not only in themselves, but also as guide-lines for middle-level research. [...] A wrong grand theory provides a massive series of false insights in a series of levels and fields. The antidote for this danger is however not to shun grand theories, but to replace bad grand theories with better ones. (Grodal in Ravindran 2007, 5)

As already mentioned, however, cognitivism did not challenge post-structuralism only on the grounds of the lack of evidence for its claims. Implicit in such a critique was a rejection of post-structuralism's subjective relation to its studies, and the recognition of ideology inherent in that relationship. It is therefore not only a stubborn refusal to engage with the other's criticisms which prevents progress, but the fact that potentially incommensurate epistemologies prevent meaningful dialogue. Each paradigm can only answer the other through an internal logic which carries no legitimate weight for the rival paradigm. For Mullarkey, the fact that 'Bordwell is coming from a position that *sees itself* as so different from Žižek that even where a dialogue of sorts might begin, it amounts to nothing' leads him to ask, '[i]s this a question, therefore, of different, incommensurate axioms, [...] adversaries using language rules from one "phrase regimen" and applying them to another?' (2009, 60, original emphasis). Thus, Bordwell argues that Žižek's critique of his own earlier work 'instantiates all the conceptual commitments and rhetorical habits I criticize' (2005) and that it is 'more than a little surprising to find that at nearly every opportunity Žižek doesn't engage with the substantive arguments of *Post-Theory* at all' (2005).

### **Epistemology as historical construct**

If synthesis or even compromise is so problematic, then it is important to establish the ways in which scholars are persuaded to pledge themselves to one cause or the other. Each paradigm wields a self-contained logic that the other cannot penetrate, and each is therefore, ostensibly, as persuasive as the other. The way in which the paradigms mischaracterise one another is an important element of this. In the wake of cognitivism's first wave, Buckland was confident enough, in critiquing its misguided interpretation of post-structuralism 'as a scientific discourse', which leads cognitivism to 'condemn [post-structuralism] for not strictly adhering to scientific standards' (1989, 81), to claim that 'we must be wary of the non-believer's representation of the fundamental concepts that constitute that theory, for no matter how urgent the demystification an established theory may command, misrepresentation will simply leave that theory intact' (103). The subsequent development of film studies did not develop in this way, however, and for Haskins at least, '[i]t bespeaks at least incremental progress in film theory since cognitivist

critiques began to appear that most scholars in the field generally agree that [film studies'] lack of a grand unifying theory or method is a good thing' (2009, 33). Cognitivism's 'misrepresentation' of post-structuralism did not 'leave that theory intact' (Buckland 1989, 103).

It is this element of the unfolding nature of film studies that perhaps offers insight into the ways in which different epistemologies persuade and develop. Carroll understands the impact of his work in starkly rigid terms: 'I have little or no expectation about changing the hearts and minds of advocates of the Theory. There are sound sociological reasons for believing that scholars who are already deeply invested in a paradigm are unlikely to surrender it. Careers, tenures, promotions, publications, and reputations have been and continue to be built by espousing the Theory' (1996, 68). He does not expect to convert his rivals, in fact he has his mind set on a different target for proselytization, although his disavowal of his intentions in this regard borders on the passive aggressive: 'And, in any case, most academics remain locked in the paradigm they learned in graduate school' (68). However, if it is reasonable to accept that the academic will not become an apostate, it is also reasonable to accept that the graduate student, or anyone else not yet pledged to one paradigm or the other, is not necessarily a *tabula rasa*. And, if the post-structuralist was moulded by overdetermined socio-cultural contexts that culminated in the student protests in Paris in 1968, as so many film theory introductions and readers claim, and if advocacy of one or another paradigm cannot be explained by one or the other having 'won' the objective intellectual argument, then an analysis of diachronic socio-cultural developments might help explain academics' subsequent epistemological allegiances.

The failed attempts of both paradigms to critique one another, within an environment in which both have an internal logic impervious to its rival's arguments, can thereby be placed within an historical, socially- and culturally-informed context. Academics can then be understood as being persuaded, not by the efficacy of one or other mutually exclusive form of argumentation in and of itself, but by the existence of those mutually exclusive forms of argumentations within complex and developing socio-cultural contexts.

I have already mentioned the conventionalised link drawn between Paris '68 and post-structuralism, but I want to expand upon that before making some comments about the socio-cultural background that might inform cognitivism. An appropriate academic framework to apply here can be found in historical sociology. Duncan Kelly explains that 'historical sociology tries



to make explicit the relationship between social theory and historical change; that is, historical sociology uses social theory in a self-conscious way to outline general propositions about the nature of historical development' (2003, 11). For John Hobson it is 'a critical approach which refuses to treat the present as an autonomous entity outside of history' (2002, 13). The extent to which film studies' rival epistemologies 'treat the present as an autonomous entity outside of history' (13) is perhaps open to debate; they certainly analyse film texts in a historicised context.

Yet if they do not quite employ what Hobson calls 'chronofetishism, the assumption that the present can be explained only by examining the present (thereby bracketing or ignoring the past)' (2002, 6) in regard to film texts, they do so more in regard to epistemology. In focusing on defending the deductive philosophical suppositions of one epistemology and critiquing another, both paradigms apply their theories to historically wide sets of film texts without detailed accounts of the relationships between diachronically-specific epistemologies relating to diachronically-specific texts. Even if film texts themselves are understood as being informed by historical contexts, both paradigms' theoretical positions on objectivity, scientific imperialism and ideology are understood as applying to the films and audiences they study within a chronofetishistic context. Films are understood as being historically contingent, the ideas used to comprehend them are not. It may be, then, that Hobson's accusation of chronofetishism is something more like 'epistochronofetishism' when applied to contending film theories. Critiques are more likely to detail the incompatibility of the rival paradigm's underlying assumptions with its own than attempt to explain those assumptions as overdetermined reflections of particular socio-cultural aggregations, perhaps because such an attack would render the similarly-contingent assumptions of the critic open to the same attack.

For Philip Abrams, what historical sociology 'is ultimately about is the relation of the individual as an agent with purposes, expectations and motives to society as a constraining environment of institutions, values and norms – and [...] that relationship is one which has its real existence not in some abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon but in the immediate world of history, of sequences of action and reaction in time' (1982, 7-8). Historical sociology can thereby demonstrate that it is not only filmmaking that should be thought of in diachronic terms, but that academics' understandings of films, and the deductive philosophical suppositions that they employ to make those understandings, are historically and socially dependent.

The study of film epistemologies as historical manifestations of socio-cultural contexts requires a more detailed account than is provided by Abrams' somewhat linear relationship between 'the immediate world of history' and the 'abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon' (1982, 7-8). This is potentially provided by another historical sociological study, relating to the processes by which revolutionary ideas and concepts are made manifest in the social world. Immanuel Wallerstein understands political revolution within the context of Marx's superstructure/base relationship. Underlying social, economic and international developments make transformations within civil society, that is, within the base. It is only after these developments have already happened that political and ideological revolution occurs to legitimate those developments, that is, within the superstructure. Thus, for Wallerstein, 'the French Revolution was [...] the moment when the ideological superstructure finally caught up with the economic base. It was the consequence of the transition, not its cause nor the moment of its occurrence' (1989, 52). Abram's 'abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon' is therefore a manifestation of transformations within the 'immediate world of history, of sequences of action and reaction in time' (1982, 7-8).

Since Althusser problematized Marx's claim that '[t]he mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general' (1970, 20-21) by arguing that the economic and the political each have their own determinants, which may interact, but have their own internal dynamism, so that there is a 'relative autonomy of the superstructure with respect to the base' (Althusser 1971, 130), the rigidity of Wallerstein's base/superstructure model may be questionable. But with an Althusserian revision, so that the relationship between socio-cultural, economic and political backgrounds is understood as relatively autonomous to the superstructural ideologies with which they intersect, Wallerstein's model can demonstrate that intellectual ideas are influenced by developing socio-cultural phenomena. Within the Althusserian milieu, these relationships are necessarily hugely complex, and clearly can exist simultaneously, since post-structuralism and cognitivism overlap historically. However, certain socio-cultural contexts are more conducive to the efficacy of certain paradigms, as I will now briefly explore.

Given post-structuralism's close alignment to Marx's claim that 'philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (1975, 423) it is little surprise that the paradigm constantly, perhaps fetishistically, recounts Paris '68 as its founding moment. Bordwell's critique of post-structuralism has also constructed a convincing argument linking the historical failures of feminism and neo-Marxism with post-structuralism's inherent biases, claiming that in the 1970s '[f]eminists were encouraged to adopt the sexists Freud and Lacan strategically, as analysts of patriarchy. This theory, articulated in the wake of lost battles of the 1960s, was more diagnostic than prescriptive. It arose at a period when explaining why revolutions fail had a higher priority than showing how successful rebellion might occur' (1996, 11). Such an analysis might seem to offer the kind of historically informed account of the relatively autonomous relationships between socio-cultural base and epistemological superstructure that I am advocating here, but it is more the exception that proves the rule, however. Bordwell's statement is part of an argument that film theory's specific development occurred because of sporadic translations of French texts into English, that is to say, through interactions within the superstructure rather than within the base. Indeed, his claim about the feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis is used as the opening salvo of an argument concerning the reasons why post-structuralism began to convert to what he calls "culturalism" in the 1980s. The reasons given are all epistochronofetistic; *a-priori* philosophical critiques of post-structuralism (8-9), more French translations (10-11), a heuristic exhaustion with post-structuralism's pessimism (11-12) and its repetition (12). There is no suggestion that Abrams' 'immediate world of history, of sequences of action and reaction in time' relates to post-structuralism's 'abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon' (7-8).

### **Post-theory and the *End of History***

Althusser's complex understanding of the relative autonomy of superstructure and base suggests the importance of an analysis of both the superstructural influences on epistemological development (that is the kind of argument laid out by Bordwell, or the specific philosophical defences of paradigm suppositions I discussed earlier) and of the influences from the base (from 'the immediate world of history, of sequences of action and reaction in time' (Abrams 7-8)). If this has already been done, to an extent, in terms of post-structuralism's avowed origins in the

overdetermined world of political praxis, then cognitivism should be put to the same test. The absence of cognitivist accounts linking the paradigm with socio-cultural contexts is perhaps symptomatic of its disavowal of the impact of the academic subject on that which (s)he studies, which Žižek characterised as an ‘apparently modest position [which] involves a much more immoderate position of enunciation of the Post-Theorist himself/herself as the observer exempted from the object of his/her study’ (2001, 16). This disavowal turns, once again, on the fundamental issue which, for cognitivism, invalidates both the methodological and the intentional premises of post-structuralism; ideology. For, if post-structuralism locates itself in the heady ideological context of Paris ‘68 and its aftermath, cognitivism’s disavowal of its own enunciative position prevents it from situating itself within any socio-cultural, economic or political framework. Because of its ostensible objectivity, just as cognitivism sees itself as non-ideological, so too it sees itself as being non-historical. The cognitivist’s ‘immoderate position of enunciation’ extends beyond being an ‘observer exempted from the object of his/her study’ (Žižek 2001, 16) to being an observer exempted from any form of historical determination.

Moreover, the enunciative disavowal which prevents this contextualisation is purposive. In arguing that ‘[t]heory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose. All theories have a perspective. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space’ (1996, 87, original emphasis) Cox claims that ‘[t]here is, accordingly, no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from a standpoint in time and space. When any theory so represents itself, it is the more important to examine it as ideology, and to lay bare its concealed perspective’ (87). Cognitivism’s ‘concealed perspective’ has been laid bare in terms of its ostensible objectivity and its mischaracterisation of post-structuralism, as this essay has already demonstrated. Such arguments address cognitivism as ‘theory in itself’ but not as ‘theory in itself, *divorced from a standpoint in time and space*’ (87, my emphasis). And, given the logical impenetrability of rival *a-priori* premises, the critique of cognitivism as ‘theory in itself’ without the context of its ‘standpoint in time and space’ is itself only logical to post-structuralism, an example of Mullarkey’s ‘adversaries using language rules from one “phrase regimen” and applying them to another’ (2009, 60). Cognitivism in fact will only countenance critique from post-structuralism if it adopts a dehistoricised approach that addresses its own internal logic. Bordwell argues that:

Being sceptical about weak theories isn't a return to innocence. It's an advance; it can cast out error. The task is not to call us naïve but rather that to show that the unconscious, the overdetermination of so on and so forth remain valid ideas. The way to show this is not by waxing nostalgic for the days when everyone read Althusser, but by overcoming our criticisms. (Bordwell 2005)

Therefore, if it is important to find an anti-ideological historical context to which cognitivism might have a relatively autonomous relationship, and to which cognitivism might be something like 'the moment when the ideological superstructure finally caught up with the economic base. It was the consequence of the transition, not its cause nor the moment of its occurrence' (Wallerstein 1989, 52), then the era in which Post-Theory seemed to win some kind of de-historicised victory over its rival perhaps offers one such context. One need not even seek for that socio-cultural context without a superstructural guide from within a related ostensibly objective and non-ideological academic account. Francis Fukuyama's infamous *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) is a celebration of the democratic West's victory over communism, and is described by Jacques Derrida as the 'finest ideological showcase of victorious capitalism in a liberal democracy which has finally arrived at the plenitude of its ideal' (1994, 56). It is understood by the editors of Derrida's defence of Marx after the Cold War as part of 'the orgy of self-congratulation which followed the 1989 crumbling of the Berlin Wall [and] the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union' whose 'contagious optimism was best exemplified by the confidence and popularity of Francis Fukuyama's claim that [...] the future was to become the global triumph of free market economics' (1994, vii).

Fukuyama borrows from Hegel an eschatology which 'did not mean that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end, that important events would no longer happen. [...] It meant, rather, that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled' (1992, xii). Fukuyama's bundling of 'principles and institutions' here is somewhat vaguer than that elaborated by Wallerstein or Althusser, perhaps not unsurprisingly, given his rejection of Marx. But his contention does demonstrate that democracy's triumph in its ideological conflict with

communism is understood as a matter for both the base and the superstructure. And his account of democracy's triumph is indicative of the way in which he thinks of ideas acting as Abrams' 'abstract world of concepts' (7-8): 'What is emerging victorious [...] is not so much liberal practice, as the liberal *idea*. That is to say, for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy' (Fukuyama 1992, 45, original emphasis). Although they share a common etymology, and Fukuyama is happy to use the terms in connected sentences, he makes a sharp distinction here between ideology, which might challenge liberal democracy, and the liberal *idea*, which he puts in italics, but distinguishes from ideology.

Like the cognitivist, Fukuyama 'posit[s] knowledge as the key to the directionality of history – in particular, knowledge about the natural universe that we can obtain through science' (1992, 72). As such, like the cognitivist, he makes a truth claim based upon ostensibly objective scientific imperialism. His own enunciative act is disavowed, so that, like the cognitivist, he adopts what Žižek calls an 'apparently modest position [that] involves a much more immoderate position of enunciation of the Post-Theorist himself/herself as the observer exempted from the object of his/her study' (2001, 16).

The specific parallel, however, in Fukuyama's and cognitivism's epistemologies, is not the principle point. Although Fukuyama denies his own epistemology's status as ideology he does specifically locate his argument within a particular socio-cultural context. His discipline relates directly to these contexts in a way in which film studies does not. Indeed, this is where his work is a useful example for the historical sociological analysis of cognitivism. His related form of scientific imperialism demonstrates clear links between socio-cultural contexts and the victorious *ideas*, to use Fukuyama's italics, that emerge from them. Cognitivism's almost identical and almost identically coterminous non-ideological truth claims can be understood as a similar manifestation of 'the orgy of self-congratulation which followed the 1989 crumbling of the Berlin Wall [and] the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union' (Derrida 1994, vii). And, since cognitivism's origins began before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and its victories over post-structuralism came after that fall, the relationship between the end of the Cold War and the rise of cognitivism is akin to Wallerstein's understanding of the temporal lags relating to the French Revolution. Thus, cognitivism is 'the moment when the ideological superstructure finally caught

up with the economic base. It was the consequence of the transition, not its cause nor the moment of its occurrence' (1989, 52).

Cognitivism is potentially more ideological than Fukuyama's thesis, however. Since Fukuyama's subject matter is inter-state relations he has no choice but to address the relationships between Abrams' 'immediate world of history' and the 'abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon' (1982, 7-8). Cognitivism, on the other hand, can deny all relations to the overdetermining hand of the material world, and debate with its rival on its chosen, superstructural, ground, upon which it has constructed its own irrefutable internal logic. In relation to Cox's claim that '[t]here is [...] no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from a standpoint in time and space' (1996, 87), Fukuyama's work attempts to transcend 'theory in itself' by grounding its argument in 'a standpoint in time and space' (Cox 1996, 87). The contestation of *ideas*/ideology can be ended by democratic victories in the empirical world. Cognitivism, however, attempts to disavow both elements of Cox's claim. It sees itself as above and beyond theory, and as existing outside time and space. In so doing it demonstrates its ideological purpose, or as Cox puts it, '[w]hen any theory so represents itself, it is the more important to examine it as ideology, and to lay bare its concealed perspective' (1996, 87). This historical context further distances cognitivism from its ostensible objective position. Its methods, its conclusions, and even its ostensible objectivity are all historically and culturally conditioned.

## **Conclusion**

It is worth noting, in conclusion, that this bundling of cognitivism and Fukuyama's *End of History* with victory in the Cold War suggests not only historical determinants but also historical culminations. History did not end in the 1990s, nor did the development of *ideas*/ideology relating to History's Continuation. One might think of the terrorist attacks on New York in 2001 in similar terms to Paris '68 and Berlin '89, invalidating Fukuyama's claim that 'there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy' (1992, 45). Similarly, Fukuyama's proclaimed 'global triumph of free market economics' (Derrida 1994, vii) delivering 'victorious capitalism in a liberal democracy which has finally arrived at the plenitude of its ideal' (56) might be challenged by a reminder, via the Global

Financial Crisis of 2007-8, that Marx's oscillating economic base has the potential to produce *ideas/ideology* that critique hegemony as well as legitimate hegemony.

Accordingly, Fukuyama's and cognitivism's ostensible objective optimism seems more historically contingent than ever. Paraphrasing Trotsky, the cognitivist may not be interested in history/dialectic/ideology<sup>4</sup>, but history/dialectic/ideology is interested in the cognitivist. The Continuation of History demonstrates that Abrams' diachronic relationship between 'the immediate world of history' and the 'abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon' (1982, 7-8) goes on. And, if the relationship of the latter to the former is massively overdetermined and somewhat delayed, so that, as Wallerstein claims, the shift in intellectual activity is 'the moment when the ideological superstructure finally caught up with the economic base. It was the consequence of the transition, not its cause nor the moment of its occurrence' (1989, 52), then perhaps one should expect another shift to reflect history's recent challenges to Fukuyama's optimism. Given the resurgence of competitive ideology and of economic crisis, perhaps one should expect a resurgence of post-structuralism, or at least some form of theorising that accepts ideology, and the academic's inherent enunciative position within discourse, as integral parts of any meaning-making. At the least the Continuation of History demonstrates that claims to empirical observation of human activity are the product of a specific socio-cultural context that may already have passed, or that has at least come under serious question, in both 'the immediate world of history' and the 'abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon' (Abrams 1982, 7-8). Michel Foucault has argued that '[e]ach society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is the types of discourse that it accepts and makes function as true' (1980, 131). If such "general politics" are currently undecided, given the incommensurability of competing epistemologies, then film studies has a responsibility to analyse the relationships between these regimes of truth and their underlying material determinants.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin MacCabe wrote the preface to Žižek's *The Fright of Real Tears* (2001).

<sup>2</sup> *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Bordwell and Carroll 1996).

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps significant that philosophical studies which claim to exist outside the historic boundaries of film theory, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard's postmodernism (1990, 26), or Gilles Deleuze's distinction between the movement-image and the time-image (1989, 1992), maintain something akin to post-structuralism's binary distinction between realist film and the *avant-garde*.

<sup>4</sup> However you wish to translate this quasi-apocryphal statement.