

Passionate Detachment

This book is about feminism and cinema: it assumes, therefore, a relationship of some kind between two sets of practices, and explores various points of overlap and intersection between them. The linking of feminism with cinema in itself raises a series of questions, some of them analytical or theoretical, others more obviously political. Feminism is a political practice, or set of practices, with its own history and forms of organisation, with its own bodies of theory constructed in and through that history and organisation. And it is not a monolith; it comes in different varieties, offers a range of analyses of the position of women, and different strategies for social change. Because of the forms of organisation it has adopted and developed over the years, and also perhaps because of its current cultural and political marginality, feminism presents itself very clearly as a process, and is therefore hard to pin down. This can be both a strength and a weakness. Cinema, on the other hand, which also has its own history, appears at first sight more concrete. Everyday understandings of it have had more than eighty years to become solidified and institutionalised. But for this very reason, our understandings of what cinema is or ought to be are perhaps all the more impenetrable.

For the purposes of this book, it is easier initially to pose a working definition of what I want to include within the term 'cinema' than of what I understand by 'feminism'. 'Cinema' is understood here in its broadest sense to embrace the various aspects of the institutions historically surrounding the production, distribution and exhibition of films of different types, from the commercial cinema exemplified at its most elaborate by the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s and 1940s,

to the varieties of independent and avant-garde cinema which have been developing their own forms and institutions over the years since the 1920s. This definition also takes in the actual products of the institutions – the films themselves – and, very importantly, the conditions and character of the production and reception of films. At this point, I will define 'feminism' very broadly as a set of political practices founded in analyses of the social/historical position of women as subordinated, oppressed or exploited either within dominant modes of production (such as capitalism) and/or by the social relations of patriarchy or male domination. Given that feminism is itself many-sided, the possible dimensions and permutations of interrelations between it and cinema become enormous.

The central question addressed by this book is: what is, can be, or should be, the relationship between feminism and cinema? In even posing such a question I am, of course, assuming that a relationship of some kind is there to be explored, explicated, or constructed. This assumption in turn implies the acceptance of some form of cultural politics; in other words, that the 'cultural' (images, representations, meanings, ideologies) is a legitimate and important area of analysis and intervention for feminists. This argument might be considered in some quarters as contentious, in particular because of its implied assumption that economic factors may not always be paramount in shaping or determining the social and historical position of women. However, it seems to me that one of the major theoretical contributions of the women's movement has been its insistence on the significance of cultural factors, in particular in the form of socially dominant representations of women and the ideological character of such representations, both in constituting the category 'woman' and in delimiting and defining what has been called the 'sex/gender system', 'the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied' (Rubin, 1975, p. 159).

To put forward the case for a feminist cultural politics, then, is to hold to a notion that ideology has its own effectivity both in general within social formations, and in particular with regard to sex/gender systems. In other words, everything that might come under the heading of the ideological – a society's representations of itself within and for itself and the ways in which people both live out and produce those representations – may be seen as a vital, pervasive and active element in the constitution of social structures and formations. As

regards the sex/gender system as a specific social formation, Rubin's definition may be read as suggesting that it is in some measure an ideological construct. A Marxist-feminist perspective on this issue would focus on the relationship between sex/gender systems and their ideological character in relation to the economic conditions of their existence, perhaps by accepting that the autonomy of the ideological is relative, or operates in interaction with economic conditions. Such a perspective would suggest that cultural factors do not in general act alone or have their effects in isolation from other factors, such as class or the sexual division of labour, in shaping sex/gender systems. It would also suggest that the interaction of the ideological with the economic and other instances of the social formation is historically specific, so that the state of the sex/gender system varies historically.

If it is accepted that 'the cultural' may be subsumed within ideology and thus be considered as having effects in the constitution of the sex/gender system at any moment in history, then it becomes possible to argue that interventions within culture have some independent potential to transform sex/gender systems. In other words, 'cultural struggle' becomes a political possibility. To pose a relationship between feminism and cinema, as this book does, is therefore to suggest two things: one, that there are connections to be made on an analytical or theoretical level between the two sets of practices, and, two, that taken together feminism and cinema might provide a basis for certain types of intervention in culture. Although in specific cultural practices the distinction between analysis and intervention cannot easily be held to, it is in fact useful initially to make the distinction, if only for the sake of clarity of thought and exposition. And indeed although part of the structure of my argument in the main body of the book is founded on this conceptual separation of analysis and intervention, I shall in fact be arguing that they are but two sides of the same coin.

A recognition, implicit or explicit, of the relevance of cultural factors to a consideration of the sex/gender system has informed feminist thought in a variety of ways since the emergence, from the late 1960s on, of the 'second wave' women's movement. Arguments have been put forward regarding, for example, certain kinds of stereotypical images of women marketed via women's magazines, television advertisements, and other media. Here the cultural construction of an ideal female – young, shapely, carefully dressed and made up, fashionable, glamorous – may be considered in itself as 'oppressive' because it proffers an image which many women feel it is important to

live up to and yet is at the same time unattainable for most of us. Such images are also criticised by feminists on the grounds that they objectify women – that is to say, legitimate and constitute social support for an ideological construction of women as objects, in particular as objects of evaluation in terms of socially predefined visible criteria of beauty and attractiveness. This analysis of images of women as objects has led also to a consideration of the extent to which women are represented as object-victims, particularly in media addressed specifically to male audiences. The implication is that the distinction between the glamorous female image of 'mainstream' advertisements and the nude pin-ups in male-oriented 'soft-porn' publications such as *Playboy* is only a matter of degree, and that the depiction of women as objects of male sexual violence in certain forms of hard pornography is a final and logical outcome of the cultural dominance of other forms of objectification in representations of women. Further ramifications of this form of cultural analysis may be seen, for example, in critiques of recurrent representations of women within Western fine art traditions – in particular in depictions of the female nude, and the madonna/mother figure (Berger, 1972), and also within literature – where critical arguments tend to centre on the nature of roles played by female protagonists of novelistic narratives (Cornillon, 1972). From such theoretical beginnings, feminist response may begin to extend beyond a critique of mainstream or dominant representations and towards the construction of alternatives: the creation of new feminist fine art forms, for example, or of novels with 'strong' female characters.

Commentaries on and criticisms of films from various feminist standpoints have drawn upon all of these approaches, the initial thrust of which emerges from a combination of a critique of existing, culturally dominant, representations of women with a tendency to emphasise the concepts of image and role. Such analyses, when applied to cinema, are important both in creating awareness of the socially constructed nature of representations of women in films, and also in offering an impetus towards the creation of alternative representations. However, precisely because of its focus on images and roles, there are a number of questions that cannot readily be addressed within the terms of reference of this approach. It tends, for instance, to take readings (particularly readings by professional film critics) very much at face value, and to focus criticism based on such readings upon surface features of story and character, without considering either the operation of elements underlying the surface features of film narratives

or, perhaps more importantly, how the 'specifically cinematic' – formal characteristics peculiar to cinema: composition of the cinematic image, lighting, editing, camera movement and so on – operates in films either alone or in conjunction with stories or images and characters. Because of this, such an approach can easily bypass the question of how films make their own kinds of meanings, how they *signify*, in other words. These points are considered more fully in the main body of the book: they are raised here, however, because of the influence that the role/image approach has had, and still has, in feminist film criticism, and also in order to open up the question of what such an approach does not do, the issues to which it does not attend. This in itself raises questions central to my project. With this in mind, I set out with the assumptions not only that there is indeed a relationship fruitfully to be explored between feminism and cinema, but also that one possibly productive avenue of exploration lies in an examination of the operation of specifically cinematic signifiers, and also of elements of plot, characterisation and narrative structure which do not necessarily offer themselves to a 'surface' reading.

The question of feminist alternatives to culturally dominant representations of women is raised – sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly – by feminist critiques of such representations. Posing the possibility of alternatives may be allied with a critique of the dominance of males as producers of representations in general, and of representations of women in particular: for example, the advertising and TV industries are dominated by men in positions of authority, art history as an academic discipline has offered us few 'great' women artists, and the film industry has been dominated by male producers, directors and technicians. When the two critiques are put together – the notion of images of women as 'objects' and the observation that males are or have been largely responsible for producing such images – it can readily be concluded that a transformation in the area of representation might in some measure be brought about if there were greater numbers of women artists, advertising executives, film directors, and so on. For certain purposes, such an argument can be both useful and powerful. In relation to cinema, for example, there is no doubt that women have had fewer opportunities than men to involve themselves in film production, particularly in the commercial film industry, and where they have been employed in the industry, they have been overwhelmingly concentrated in jobs which involve relatively little prestige, power and reward (Association of Cinemato-

graph, *Television and Allied Technicians*, 1975). It is arguable that the obstacles women face in film production need to be dealt with to provide an opportunity to see what, if any, feminist interventions might be made in cinema. Another important condition for this clearing of the ground may be the rewriting of film history so that some awareness of the past contributions of women film makers, hitherto somewhat effaced, may be brought to light.¹ At the same time, however, it is essential to emphasise that the existence of more women film makers does not in itself guarantee more feminist films.

What then is the relationship between cultural interventions by women and feminist cultural interventions? Put this way, it is easy to see that the two things are not necessarily one and the same. Paintings, novels or films by women may or may not be feminist, and it is possible to argue, though some feminists will disagree, that feminist work may be produced by men. Disagreement on the latter point may in fact be regarded as symptomatic, in that it points up a further issue, one that is implicit in the very way in which the question is posed: the issue of authorship. Is the feminism of a piece of work there because of attributes of its author (cultural interventions by women), because of certain attributes of the work itself (feminist cultural interventions), or because of the way it is 'read'? The questions of authorship and text are central to any debate about the relationship between feminist cinema and women's cinema. The term 'text' refers to the structure and organisation of any one cultural product or set of representations: it may be applied, for instance, to a particular novel, painting, film, poem, advertisement. Its usage implies that works are the object of a certain type of analysis, involving 'an active reading in terms of the contradictions at work in them' (Cook, 1975, p. 9). Any single film may of course claim to be representative of both feminist cinema and women's cinema. What is being argued here, however, is not only that the one cannot unproblematically be reduced to the other, but also that a good deal of productive discussion about the relationship between feminism and cinema emerges through holding to the logical distinction between the two. This is because the very insistence on such a distinction is a necessary precondition of raising questions about the relationship between text and authorship in cinema: it also allows the question of the reception and reading of texts to be opened up. Before this argument is elaborated, however, it is perhaps important to reiterate that I am not suggesting that feminist efforts aimed at increasing the numbers of women 'cultural producers' are unimpor-

tant or irrelevant: on the contrary, it can certainly be argued that transformations in dominant modes of representation will not be brought about unless and until this happens. However, such transformations are neither a necessary nor an automatic outcome of such a strategy.

Unpacking the arguments around authorship and gender on the one hand and feminism and textual organisation on the other involves dealing with a number of fundamental issues. These centre around two questions: firstly that of authorship and intentionality, and secondly that of feminism in relation to female subjectivity and the latter in relation to the attributes of texts. The question of authorial intentions has informed debates in theories of art and literature for many years. What has been dubbed in such debates the 'intentionalist fallacy' argues that texts are reducible to the conscious intentions of their producers. That is to say, the meanings obtainable from or readable in texts of various kinds are, or ought to be, no more nor less than the meanings which authors or producers intended to put there. Arguments against authorial intentionality tend to stress either that an author may incorporate elements in texts unconsciously – that she or he may not be wholly aware of the implications of what is being written, or painted, or filmed. Or, as an extension of this argument, it might be suggested that texts can in some sense generate meanings on their own, or at least that meanings which go beyond authors' intentions may be generated in a dynamic moment of reading or reception. Balzac, for example, is often considered to be a novelist who 'knew more than he knew' – whose fictional works can yield textures and levels of meaning which clearly go beyond anything the writer himself could possibly have intended. The literary theorist Lukács, for instance, regarded Balzac's work as embodying the most progressive qualities possible in art produced in a bourgeois society, and this despite the novelist's personal politics, which were conservative in the extreme. To this extent, Balzac's works may be seen as in some way constituting their own meanings above and beyond conscious authorial input, and/or as constructing meanings uncontrolled by the author in the interaction of reader and text at the moment of reception.

Approaches to the question of authorship within film theory have advanced similar positions. 'Auteur theory' puts forward the notion that the primary creative responsibility for a film usually lies with its director (e.g. Sarris, 1968). That is to say, the notion of authorship on the literary model, despite very important differences between film

making and literary work in modes and relations of production, is relevant to an understanding of film, and that films by a single director may sometimes be considered and analysed as a body of work, an *oeuvre*. At this point auteur theory may or may not embrace intentionalism. To the extent that it does, it will suggest that films mean only what their directors intended them to mean. Certain forms of the auteur theory have attempted to deal with some of the problems raised by intentionalism by posing a notion of authorship in terms of textual structures. For example, in considering the mythic themes embodied in the films of John Ford, themes which may well have exceeded the conscious intentions of Ford himself (which in any case we are not in a position to know for sure), distinction may be made between John Ford the man and 'John Ford' as a convenient label or signature for a series of themes and structures recurrent in the *oeuvre* of the director (Russell, 1965). If this notion of film authorship is accepted, we cannot necessarily take a film maker's word about her or his films – even if we have it – at face value.

A similar argument may be advanced in relation to the question of feminism and textual organisation. If it is accepted that texts are not necessarily readable purely in terms of the intentions of their authors or producers, then it can be argued on the one hand that a non-feminist is capable of producing a feminist text, and on the other that a feminist is capable of producing a non-feminist text. (This, of course, is to bracket for the moment the question of what is to be understood by the term 'feminist text': it is this which is finally at issue in this whole debate and which – as I shall argue below – cannot be defined either *a priori* or universalistically). Opening up the more general issue of gender in relation to authorship and textual organisation adds a further dimension to the argument. What, if any, relationship can there be between a text produced by a woman and a feminist text? It is evident that not all women are consciously feminists, and not everyone consciously a feminist is a woman, so that even the intentionalist fallacy would reject any attempt to equate women's texts with feminist texts. At this point, a more nuanced and critical approach to intentionalism – one which, in focusing in the first instance on texts as bearers of meaning, begins to transcend the terms of the intentionalism debate – permits the consideration of some important questions centring around notions of, and distinctions between, 'feminine' and 'feminist' texts.

First of all, how might a 'feminine' text be defined, and if 'the

feminine' can be considered a principle of textual organisation, an attribute of the text itself, what is the connection between such a principle and 'woman': what possible link can there be between an attribute which informs the structure and organisation of texts, and gender? Even to suggest the possibility of a relationship between feminine-as-text and 'woman' is to pose some kind of connection between 'woman' and representation which, at least initially, side-steps the whole issue of feminism. What is at stake here then is the possibility of a feminine text as opposed to a feminist one: that is, that representations might be considered as either 'feminine' or 'masculine'. This question has been addressed under the rubric of feminine language or feminine writing by a number of theorists. Luce Irigaray, for example, argues on behalf of a feminine language which operates outside the bounds of an 'Aristotelian type of logic' (Irigaray, 1977, p. 64) which she sees as informing masculine language. In constructing this argument, Irigaray sets up a relationship of analogy between gender and language, so that Western discourse is seen as possessing the 'masculine' attributes of visibility, goal orientation, and so on. A feminine language, or a feminine relation to language, would on the other hand challenge and subvert this form of discourse by posing plurality over against unity, multitudes of meanings as against single, fixed meanings, diffuseness as against instrumentality. That is to say, whereas Western discourse – the 'masculine' – tends to limit meaning by operating a linear and instrumental syntax, a feminine language would be more open, would set up multiplicities of meanings.

In considering in this way the relationship between the feminine and signification, it is perhaps useful at this point to focus on signification. If signification and representation are seen as processes of meaning production, and if it is accepted that notions of feminine language and feminine writing may describe a specific relationship to representation, then the feminine can be seen as a subject position, a place which the user – or the subject – of language can occupy in relation to language. This first of all frees the argument from biologism, from any necessary equation of the feminine with woman as defined by bodily attributes, and second allows us to name the defining characteristics of a feminine relation to representation. Irigaray's argument suggests that the feminine describes a relationship to language and not a particular form of language, and also that this relationship is characterised by process and heterogeneity. To telescope a complex argument (Heath, 1978; Kuhn, 1979), 'the feminine' in this view may be regarded as an

attribute of textual organisation only in the sense that it poses a challenge to dominant forms of relationship between texts and recipients. This challenging relationship is one in which in the act of reading, meanings are grasped as shifting and constantly in process, and the reader-subject is placed in an active relationship to those meanings. A feminine text would in this way constitute a subversion of and challenge to a 'mainstream' text. By extension, this argument may be viewed as an explanation of and a justification for intervention at the level of signification, for 'radical signifying practice' – modes of representation which challenge dominant modes by placing subjectivity in process, making the moment of reading one in which meanings are set in play rather than consolidated or fixed (Cixous, 1980; Kristeva, 1975).

The notion of a feminine text therefore brings to the very centre of debate the consideration of texts as producers of meanings, as producing meanings in the moment of reading. Thus, meanings are produced for the 'subject' of the text – the reader is inserted into the meanings produced by the text and is thus in a sense produced by them. This dynamic notion of reading as a relationship between reader and text then implies that no texts, 'mainstream' or otherwise, bear specific *a priori* meanings in and for themselves. Although – and this is a different, if related, debate – texts may embody 'preferred' readings, a dynamic notion of texts as processes of signification or meaning production allows for a consideration of the possibility of interventions in cultural practice being generated elsewhere than solely in the consciousness of authors or producers. The theoretical groundings of the notion of a feminine text are complex and open to criticism, centring primarily on the fact that many of the arguments – Kristeva's in particular – seem to be suggesting that all radical signifying practice is, in some way, feminine. In spite of the difficulties, however, I believe it is vital at least to open up the question here, because its implications for feminist interventions in cultural practice are potentially very wide-ranging. What the notion of a feminine text, drawing as it does on theories of feminine language or feminine writing, achieves is to open up for consideration two productive sets of ideas. First of all, in addressing itself to the text, it puts forward arguments concerning the specific character of feminine language or feminine writing, and offers a theoretical justification for such arguments: the feminine text would disrupt, challenge, question and put its reader-subjects into process. In providing a challenge to situations in which the process of signification

is not foregrounded, as is the case – it is argued – in dominant texts, in masculine discourse, the feminine would be subversive of such discourse, would constitute a disturbance to dominant modes of representation, and thus to the dominant cultural order.

The argument at this point is still rather abstract, however. What, it might be asked, would a feminine text actually look like? Julia Kristeva, in putting forward her argument for radical signifying practice, introduces the notion of the poetic (Kristeva, 1976). A text may embody or produce the poetic to the degree that it brings to the fore the processes by which it constructs its own meanings. That is to say, a text is constituted as poetic in relation to its reading. Any text may qualify as poetic, as radical signifying practice, or as feminine only in the relations it poses between itself and its readers. Since such relationships are clearly context-bound in that they are likely to vary from place to place, from time to time, and from reader to reader, it is actually impossible to make any universal or absolute prescriptions as to formal characteristics, a point which needs to be borne in mind in considering the question of feminist cinema in relation to that of feminine writing. Kristeva's argument does perhaps constitute some kind of prescription for avant-garde signifying practices. But does this mean that avant-garde and feminine practices are necessarily the same?

A feminine text then has no fixed formal characteristics, precisely because it is a relationship: it becomes a feminine text in the moment of its reading. This conclusion leads to consideration of the second set of ideas generated by the notion of feminine writing: that the moment of reception is crucial. In concrete terms, it might be concluded from this that no intervention in culture can work at the level of the text alone. As far as a feminist intervention is concerned, therefore, it is not really a question of producing a 'feminist text'. In any case, if it is accepted that neither authorial intention nor the attributes of the text taken in isolation (if, indeed, that is ever possible) can always guarantee specific readings – even if they may limit the range of readings available – we are led to ask where feminism, as a set of meanings, enters a text. I have already advanced the argument that no set of meanings already inhabits a text, but rather that a text is, in some measure at least, created in its reading or reception. If this is the case, then the whole area of reception becomes a political issue in its own right. Given the distinct nature of the film-viewing situation, this has highly specific implications for cinema.

Nevertheless, to set aside completely both intention and textual organisation is perhaps too extreme a stance to adopt. It might usefully be stressed once more that feminine writing is not necessarily the same thing as feminist writing. For although it may be appropriate in certain circumstances to consider a text which constitutes a disturbance of, or a challenge to, dominant modes of representation as in some sense feminist, it can also be argued that such 'disturbance' is not a sufficient – even if it might be held to be a necessary – attribute of a feminist text. From this it may be concluded that a text is feminist to the extent that something is added to it – precisely some 'feminist' input. Debates on this issue are sometimes conducted in terms of a division of form and content, so that the question becomes: should we seek a specifically feminist form? Or, under what conditions should a feminist intervention in culture operate at the level of content? However, although it provides a useful point of entry to the complexities of the debate, I believe that the form/content distinction does not in the final instance permit a sufficiently nuanced argument: the point that feminine language is not a formal attribute of texts so much as a relationship of reader and text should demonstrate this. Debates which limit themselves to the form/content division end, ironically perhaps, by being overly formalist in that they do not allow consideration of the conditions surrounding the production and reception of texts. It seems important to emphasise that the text is but a single element in a series of social relations of cultural production, all of which need to be taken into account in any work on representation.

What, then, is a feminist text? In the light of this discussion, it would seem more apposite to rephrase the question, and ask: what is a feminist intervention in culture? For to the extent that both authorial intention and formal textual attributes are displaced or relativised as productive of meaning, the question of a feminist text becomes problematic. If a text may or may not be readable in terms of feminist intentions on the part of its author or producer, if it may or may not generate 'unconscious' feminist meanings, it would seem once again that the issue is decided at the moment of reading or reception. If primacy is thus transferred from author and text to reading, then the moment of reception itself becomes a feasible point of political intervention. One possible outcome of the notion of feminism as a property of textual reception is that 'feminist reading' becomes possible. This in fact has been a premiss of certain forms of feminist criticism, which may regard dominant texts as cultural bearers of ideologies which can be mined

and exposed – and the texts themselves transformed in retrospect – by readings ‘against the grain’. Some feminist readings of classic Hollywood films have in fact been undertaken along these lines, and indeed have been very important in the recent development of film theory.

But this by no means exhausts the debate, which at this point might easily be perceived as advancing a view of the text as nothing more than the site of struggle for the production of meanings. Although it may be true that all texts are indeed open to a range of readings, it is surely not often the case that they are open to any or all readings, depending only on the context and conditions of reception. To some extent, texts do tend to offer ‘preferred’ readings, so that, for example, a feminist reading of a dominant text might aim to challenge those very preferred readings by uncovering hidden structures and ideological operations, while other texts might not seem to call for such challenge, in that their preferred readings – the readings which they seem immediately to offer – may already appear as ‘feminist’.

At this point the somewhat vexed issue of tendentiousness raises itself. ‘Tendency’ in cultural production was in the forefront of debates about the social and political functions of art in the years immediately following the October Revolution in Russia. Tendentiousness, referring to the artist’s desire to take up a political stance, in its original context implied that no specific party loyalty was called for from an artist expressing tendency in her or his work. It did, however, suggest a conscious intent on the part of the artist to incorporate a particular political position or range of positions in that work. We are back, then, with the problem of intentionality, a problem which troubled discussions about the artist’s role in the revolution, about the distinction between ‘high’ art and agitational art, and was an important factor in a series of divisions which increasingly split Soviet artists and writers throughout the 1920s (Vaughan-James, 1973). In spite of the obvious differences in social, political and economic conditions, some of the problems surrounding tendentiousness in contemporary feminist cultural practice do seem somewhat similar. If we are perhaps more aware today that authorial intention does not and cannot necessarily circumscribe the range of meanings available from a work, we are still forced to ask the question: under what conditions are readings in fact determined or determinable by the intended inputs of authors or producers?

The problem with this question is that it cannot be answered in a

general way: there is no answer that will fit all possible cases of feminist cultural production. To find the reason for this, I need only reiterate the centrality of the moment of reception in the construction of meanings. Whatever the overt intentions of producers, in many cases readings of their works must often take place outside any control they may wish to exert. In other words, if it is accepted that meaning does not reside purely in the text itself, that it is not something locked within the text waiting for a reader in order to be liberated, but is itself to some degree an independent product or outcome of reading, then it becomes impossible to consider feminism in terms of fixed textual attributes, whether they be of 'form' or of 'content', let alone in terms of whether or not producers intended to put them there. A cultural producer who wishes to take up a feminist stance, therefore, has several options. One might be to continue doing whatever she thinks fit in terms of textual input, and simply hope that the work will be read as it was intended. Another might be to attempt more actively to limit the range of meanings available from the work, which may be accomplished in several ways. This might be by addressing a very specific audience and trying to ensure that the work reaches only that audience, or by dealing with a particular issue on which positions are already to some extent clear, and attempting to determine readings by taking up a very overt stance on that one issue, or by trying to limit readings in other – extra-textual – ways, through interviews, reviews and personal appearances, for example.

A point which should perhaps be emphasised here is that the thrust of tendentiousness is usually in some degree in the direction of closure, of restricting the range of meanings potentially available from a text. For certain purposes and under certain circumstances a cultural practice calling itself feminist may actually be characterised by some degree of closure: it is perhaps even a truism that tendency and closure go together, that a restricted range of possible readings is a defining characteristic of tendentiousness in texts. Posing the issue of feminist cultural practice in this way opens once more the question of a feminine as against a feminist text. One of the arguments on behalf of a feminine language is that it works against that very closure which, it is suggested, is a feature of dominant 'masculine' language, to the extent that such a language embodies a hierarchy of meanings and implies a subjection to, a completion and closure of, meaning.

It has been argued, too, that closure is a feature of certain types of textual organisation, such as that of 'classic' narratives. The structure

of classic narratives works in such a way that stories are opened by a disruption of some equilibrium (say a murder or a disappearance) and work towards a resolution of the initial disruption, so that the resolution coincides with the end of the story. Roland Barthes makes a distinction between the pleasure to be obtained from the closure or resolution of this classic form of narrative, and the 'bliss' (*jouissance*) of the text which challenges such closure. Both are clearly relationships of reading: the pleasure of the first is the satisfaction of completion, of having all the ends tied up, whereas the bliss of the second is the unsettling, the movement of the subject produced by the reading, which goes beyond, or is outside, the pleasure of the fixation of the subject-reader of the classic narrative (Barthes, 1975).

It is clear that openness as a defining characteristic of the feminine is something very different from the closure, fixation or limitation of meaning implied by the tendentious text. In this difference two distinct forms of cultural practice may in fact be at stake. And indeed it does actually underlie a series of strategic dissensions and contradictions within contemporary feminist cultural politics. Such dissensions may be summed up briefly by distinguishing between two extremes of oppositional cultural practice, one which tends to take processes of signification for granted and one which argues that the meaning production process is itself the site of struggle. The first would draw on dominant forms, such that the oppositional character of the representations produced is guaranteed by mobilising the signification process as a vehicle of already constituted meanings and by taking readers as also already formed (in this instance, in relation to certain political positions) prior to the moment of reception: thus meanings are seen, as it were, as being handed unchanged from source to recipient. Here it is meanings, rather than the process of their generation, which are constituted as in some sense oppositional. Such forms of cultural practice would therefore tend to operate within culturally dominant modes of representation, but would use those modes as a means to convey a 'message' constituted as culturally or politically oppositional.

The second form of oppositional cultural practice would take as its object the signification process itself, giving it a central place in the organisation of the work. Thus in this case meaning production would not be taken for granted, exactly because the ideological character of the signification process is regarded as itself something to be challenged. The argument here is that dominant modes of representation constitute forms of subjectivity – the subject fixed by closure, for

example – characteristic of a masculinist or patriarchal culture, and that to write 'in the feminine' is in itself to challenge the ideological constitution of dominant modes of representation. It is in this respect that such a cultural practice may be considered as feminist. The question of feminist interventions in culture, therefore, goes beyond – though of course it must include – considerations of tendentiousness, and involves a number of fundamental questions about the ways in which texts create meanings and define and constitute their reader-subjects.

Feminism, considered in relation to cultural practice, is perhaps even more complex and many-sided than might at first be imagined. My purpose in this book is to explore as many of the dimensions of the relationship between feminism and cinema as I can, and in as open a way as possible. At various points in this chapter, I have indicated that feminist cultural practice may take up various moments in the production of representations as legitimate points of intervention, if only because there are so many more dimensions to the situation than simply the text. If this argument is accepted, the relationship between feminism and cinema may usefully be explored in a variety of ways. It may be appropriate, for example, to include in the terms of the relationship not only forms of textual practice, and the production, distribution and exhibition practices surrounding texts, but also interventions at the level of reading, so that under the umbrella of feminist film practice may be sheltered not only feminist film production, work with audiences, conditions of reception, and textual organisation, but also feminist film analysis itself.