

CHAPTER FOUR

Marketing films and audiences

The marketing of film is often perceived to be the mediation of texts and audiences, products and consumers, the bridging function between the commodity and its destination. Conceived in this way as an interface, marketing can be read in one of two ways. First – the more benign model – marketing is the provision of information about film, an increasingly important communication function in a saturated marketplace. Here, marketing may be highly designed, competitively aimed, seductive in its appeal, but ‘underneath’ this appearance it serves a role as provider in the information economy. This approach is related to the conceptualization of contemporary cultural production as post-Fordist, a diversified market in terms of the fragmented range of audience tastes and preferences, and an eclectic spectrum of cultural products. The second reading of marketing renders it as a type of duplicity, always promising more and offering less than expectation. It masks the intention to sell with the promise of personal gain: marketing appeals to the nuanced differences of multicultural, plural societies, but this is no more than a veneer for a product which fails to speak to social diversity.

I want to suggest that marketing, more than a mediation between two preconstituted and distinct parties, is a production. It produces a concept of individualism as the exercising of free will, and brings film into being as an experiential culture of pure ‘choice’. The appeals to free will permeate advertising space, as Eve Sedgwick notes, advertising is a ‘landscape so rubbled and defeatured by the twin hurricanes named Just Do It and Just Say No’ (1994: 140).¹ The appeals to take action produce the individual as at once empowered and commanded. The emphatic appeal to human will, consumption as a conscious act of embrace or refusal, negates the socio-economic contexts in which choices are proposed, made available and taken up. How then does this debate of choice, of taste, manifest itself in relation to film?

This chapter approaches this question through two routes. The first is the model of genre, a concept that has been used variously to provide a link between production and consumption, the strategies of marketing with the knowledge of

audiences. Second, this chapter is concerned with epistemologies of the audience, the archaeology of audience habits, lifestyles, and spending power in market research. Empirical research of this kind is of course conditioned by the interests of the film marketing industry; as such, it illuminates the way that audiences are imaged and defined rather than simply providing material evidence of audience behaviour. At the heart of market research is a desire to maximize the life of a film in different markets. This cuts horizontally into the range of potential markets for any one film (defined in terms of age, social demographic and gender). It also conducts vertically in terms of identifying the various windows of release for a film over time (theatrical release, video/DVD release, satellite and terrestrial premiere). It provides insight into the types of information on consumer practices of use to the marketing industry. In the analysis of the material provided by market research, these twin features that I have referred to as the horizontal and vertical work to produce a pattern of consumption differentiated in terms of temporal moments of film consumption. Whilst the reception sites and practices of cinema, video and television viewing are acknowledged as specific cultures, social distinction underpins the differential temporal access to film, either as moments in the hub of public debate or significantly lagging behind public discourse.

genre: the perfect marriage?

77

One of the richest forms of enquiry into the marketing of film has taken genre as its point of focus. As Christine Gledhill, in a summative essay on the cyclical nature of genre's return in film studies, writes 'To understand exactly how the social and films interact we need a concept of genre capable of exploring the wider contextual culture in relation to, rather than as an originating source of, aesthetic mutations and textual complications' (2000: 221). The concept of genre lies at the cusp of discourses of production and institutions, of aesthetics and classification, of audiences and cultural value. At the centre of these divergent domains and spheres of expertise, genre provides a starting point for the unravelling of marketing and audiences.

If, on the one hand, marketing purports to offer a filmic experience that is innovative, genre has been read critically as the classifying principle that provides stability to the system. The central text in recent decades for the defense of on-going stability of the classical narrative form is Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985). The argument presented by Bordwell and Thompson depends on a reading of production processes and aesthetic practices as congruent, producing a mode of narrative film that is, according to their claims, enduring. Characterized by certain forms of script, narrative structure and camera

operation, the classical style creates a formal unity or equilibrium of these parts, which is read as the construction of an historically dominant concept of film. Despite its historical detail, the enduring nature of this mode of classicism tends to transcend the historical circumstances of its production, particularly where the authors argue that such a normative process continues through the decades of the latter part of the twentieth century. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* presents a type of modernist argument, whereby rules, modes of practice continue to carry authority beyond the studio system that initially provides the infrastructure for its development.

For some critics, the argument has been continued in terms of style, disputing the coherence of the classical period within the studio system itself (Alloway, 1971), or more recently arguing that the systems of production, distribution and consumption have radically affected the aesthetics and form of the film text. What is discernible in this debate is the persistent dialectic between stability and change, the endurance of certain modernist features of film and the practices of mixity, appropriation and bricolage of a more postmodernist account. The particular period of the late 1960s is cited as a critical point of eclipse of classicism, when Hollywood's appropriation of arthouse culture produced a less narratively driven and unified film text in the work of Altman, Scorsese and Lucas (Elsaesser, 1975). Yet for Thomas Schatz, this point of seeming rupture provides a starting point for a series of changes in a process of destabilization that has seen the return of genre and narrative at a hyperbolic level (Schatz, 1983a, 1983b). Schatz refers to film making from this time onwards as neoclassicism, characterized by a distinct break from European arthouse in the scale of budgets, the harnessing of new technologies to produce a spectacular form of visual display, and an increase in marketing budgets.

78

In Schatz's work marketing is seen to impact on the text itself; scale of finance in marketing is not simply an indicator of a proliferation of promotional materials but a shift in the terms of address to the audience. This in turn is inflected by the repositioning of the film text as one product among many ancillaries, with two consequences. First, film is recontextualized by its related products as a lifestyle choice. Second, the film text itself is related intertextually to its life forms in other media and merchandise, and thus is transformed through those relations. Justin Wyatt presents an argument more forcefully still that generic, large budget feature films have structurally changed as a result of the development of ancillary markets and the repositioning of the film text as one among multiple components (Wyatt, 1994). Wyatt describes a modular aesthetic, a fragmented sequential series of filmic moments as the result, bound together by the twin aspects of stylization and music. Here Wyatt locates the influences of MTV, advertising and celebrity on the structural properties of the text. The influences are both aesthetically determined

(audience expectation of sophisticated stylization borrowed from advertising and music video) and economically driven (the segmented film text facilitates a certain autonomy to its related products).

Within this reconfigured landscape, film emerges as a type of hypertext, narratively linked in sequence yet offering tangential paths, alleyways and flights of passage that will suture back into the main narrative at any point. The description of fragmentation endemic to the modular aesthetic points to a stability and necessity of narrative as a partially known format. Thus one of the the implications of Wyatt's reading, as for Schatz, is that genre continues to be a central feature of mainstream film production. The known properties of the text, situated in an evolving history of those constituent parts as a genre, are imperative to the success of the modular aesthetic. In effect, genre creates the unifying principle of the hyper-text, facilitating the role of marketing in pre-selling audiences to a film; genre presents overarching continuity for the audience and the historically proven formula for the production company.

This concept of genre is strongly contested by Altman in a recent historically informed study (Altman, 1999). For Altman, the wielding of the term 'genre' in film theory as a conscious, instrumental 'tool' appropriated to industry intention and audience taste denies the existence of genre as a discursive strategy. This reworking of an understanding of genre situates its meaning in the context of the utterance, thus the insistence on 'the discursive status of all generic claims'. Altman continues, 'Pronounced *by* someone and addressed *to* someone, statements about genre are always informed by the identity of the speaker and audience. Hollywood studios are not single entities, speaking a uniform discourse. On the contrary, studios speak with multiple voices' (1999: 102). In this work, four groups of speakers are primary users of the term: producers, exhibitors, viewers and critics. Each of these groups uses and understands the term differently, thus the context of use becomes a site of investigation. In the first instance Altman appears to be making an argument against the reductive concept of studios as determining film product through a successful formula, yet there is a twist in the narrative. In returning to promotional materials of films in the 1920s, Altman argues that production studios avoided the term genre, appealing instead to individualism. The advertising materials of this era focus on studio names for coherence and appeals to quality and type of product, and to stars and characters moving across various films. There are several points of suggestion to take here. The first is that studios as early as the 1920s were engaged in what is thought of as the contemporary practice of branding, emphasizing the signature of a studio across various types of film rather than particular generic features. The individual nature of the studio identity, over and above competitors, was paramount. Second, that studios sought to offer a range of film texts that were dissimilar, offering choice rather

than sameness. Third, the profitable enduring image of a studio and its products was founded on the continuity of specific characters, techniques, thematic and devices that have greater value than the particular films in which they appear. Fourth, the studios' relationship to genre was conditional on the access to distribution; studios with exhibition deals self-presented individualistically, whilst smaller production units with less secure access to exhibition presented films in terms of genre to clarify the film's meaning. Lacking a known brand, genre became a fall-back position, used unevenly across the film sector.

Whilst Altman's description of the facets of studio branding appear at moments to be poignantly similar to some critical understandings of genre, his central argument reverses the image of studios as complacent, and supports this theory with the issue of copyright. Whilst genres cannot be claimed, studio branding in the form of characters and serial films can. Thus, Altman moves from the early part of the century to the examples such as the James Bond series, where copyrighted characters provide continuity rather than generic formulas. Which leaves open the question of who deploys the term 'genre' if not the marketing executives. For Altman, genre is primarily a term used by critics and audiences, in relation to practices of archival organization and shared cultural communities respectively. As critical discourse is concerned with the broad historical overview of film, genre becomes a retrospective term that organizes film historically into segments, accessible for analysis. In audience use, genre is invoked by particular constellated communities sharing filmic tastes as a way of providing forms of commonality across disparate national spaces. Importantly for Altman, constellated communities emerge in shared response to the text, in opposition to the notion that the studio formulates the genre, which then constitutes a community of viewers.

80

A conceptualization of genre as a term produced within particular discursive formations usefully locates genre within specific sites of discourse. Yet, whilst Altman's account separates out the diverse parties and interests in each domain, the model disregards the reconnection of genre to broader narratives of production, consumption and the individual. To take the issue of consumption first, Altman's reading of genre theory and its attention to audiences is a shift from a neoclassical to a postmodern position. Wholly embracing the postmodernist concept of audience fragmentation as empowerment, theory, 'with support from a commodified culture', moves 'towards increased sensitivity to audience needs and influence'. What becomes apparent in this reading is that Altman perceives the 'problem' of genre, a narrowly conceived and homogenizing model, as an effect of criticism rather than a condition of commodification. Indeed, film theorists (as a generic group if you like) are the bad object of Altman's text; addressing the question of whether the notion of genre has changed over the centuries, he remarks the enormity and impossibility of the task of unravelling

this, adding testily ‘especially given the paucity of assistance provided by previous genre theorists’. If commodity culture has been framed by academic writing as the bad object, in Altman’s reading it is the theorists who have put it there.

For Altman, the diversified products and practices of commodity culture are presented as part of the solution to the (spectre of) homogenization; under post-modernism, the audience is now conceived as a wide range of narrowly defined target groups, in turn pressurizing demand for more nuanced films. This paves the way for Altman’s claim that there is a larger social function at the centre of newly constituted niche audiences; culturally specific debate as emergent public spheres. Disseminated audiences, facilitated by the Internet, are making ‘genres and genre texts essential to communication among members of constellated communities’. The claim here is of a grand order. In discussion of Hegel’s newspaper and Habermasian thinking on the public sphere, Altman proposes that the critical discursive role of the public sphere is no longer contained by national affiliations or singular texts such as newspapers.² In its place, thematic clusters, imaged as ‘scores of separate rubrics, separate styles and separate genres’ will be the vehicles of discursive formations. He goes on to claim ‘genres are simply the heirs apparent of the public sphere and imagined communities, the next in a logical series’. Yet, there is a fundamental problem with this evocation of discursive domains, such as fan sites and chat rooms, as a public sphere. For Habermas’s model of publicness depends not only on the independence of reasoned debate from the influences of state and commerce, but on a forum in which the effects of such debate are brought into play with other interests and positions; the outcome of this presentation of conflicting ideas produces the situation of democracy. The concept of the public sphere cannot be applied to spaces of discussion that have no connection to the infrastructure of social and political power. Indeed, I would argue that Altman’s constellated communities function as subcultures, satellites to the centres of power, with no obvious mode of correspondence.³

The second point of difficulty with Altman’s account refers to the relationship of marketing to production. Building on the argument that studios have historically avoided marketing films in terms of genre, Altman argues that the current concept of niche markets forces producers to think of films as a multiplicity of genres. The marketing of film is currently characterized by the concept of the multivalent text. Thus, in a reading of the marketing strategy for the film *Cocktail*, the genre of the film can be framed differently according to perceived market segments. According to Altman, strategists drew up four alternative conceptualizations of the film, emphasizing different aspects of the narrative: romantic story, boy in the city, conflict of love and financial success, sibling/mentor story. A variety of marketing campaigns placed the emphasis differently, targeting the specific segments of the audience in a range of media forums associated with

particular audience tastes. To this end, the multivalent text becomes the exemplar of a more sophisticated knowledge of audiences, reflected in the multiple strategies of marketing a film at diverse audience strains.

However, what remains unclear in Altman's account is whether the film product itself is transformed by the concept of multivalence (in the stages of conceptualization and development), or merely the final presentation (marketing) of the film. Certainly, the description of marketing traces an historical shift: 'When cinema was born, products determined publicity strategy; a century later, publicity determines product design' (1999: 132). The crucial word here is 'design', which retains a level of ambivalence – do we read this as design of the product from its moment of inception, or design as the packaging? Altman cites four techniques of production that facilitate the multivalent text: the processes of multifocalization, fertile juxtaposition, excess material and multiple framings. It would appear from this taxonomy of multivalent signifiers that the production process is a significant facilitator of diverse readings. Yet Altman stops short of the claims made by Wyatt that the mainstream commercial film has been fundamentally altered in terms of narrative structure, as it has become embedded in a culture of ancillary products and displaced or extended across various media formats. For Altman, the multivalent text and the practice of genre mixing are not new (clearly a reasonable claim), but have shifted in degree. The factors motivating this shift in degree are perceptions of the audience, the purported complexifying of demographic measurement: in a summative statement he states, 'Recent stylistic developments – connected to changes in the conception and measurement of audience demographics – have led to still greater dependence on and self-consciousness about genre mixing.' The difference between the perceptions of Wyatt and Altman is not then an argument concerning change, but a disagreement about where pressure for change originates. For Altman it is the field of demographics, a shifting perception of audiences; for Wyatt, the heightened economic imperatives of a system of production, which situates film within a paradigm of related products.

82

If Altman's re-reading of marketing strategies in diverse historical contexts foregrounds the openness of the text to different audiences, the logic of this reading suggests that marketing discourse has come to imagine the audience in all of their complex diversity. Yet this account omits to take into account the shift from marketing the film text as singular form, to the current practice of marketing film as the primary product in a range of related commodities. Here, genre might be rethought as the cohering factor in a range of lifestyle products; and whilst a film may exist as a multivalent text for different audience segments, such fragmentation is recuperated at the level of lifestyle marketing. A new coherence exists in the clustering of taste formations for related products rather than clusters

of audiences for filmic genres. I turn in the next section to the strategies of market research, which trawls a range of cultural forms and practices and cross-references this information to social demographics. This analysis will suggest that the shift to lifestyle marketing, identified in various accounts of contemporary marketing as a complexifying of identity obfuscating social difference, in fact reinvokes social distinction. I will argue that distinction emerges through the marketing of film as a marked temporal effect, segregating audiences through lifestyle practices of film consumption conducted at different times and connecting audiences to different discursive circuits. Where, in the previous chapter, the emphasis on spatial practices of consumption traced socially demarcated spaces, through diversified marketing practices related to windows of release, the temporal crosses the axis of the spatial.

epistemologies of the audience

Marketing and promotional activities are underpinned by forms of knowledge about audiences, extracted from empirical research of a qualitative and quantitative nature. The activity of research, as academic analysis has ruminated widely in methodological debate, is implicated in the construction of knowledge rather than the reporting of it. Market research generates its own systems of classification, priorities, emphases, so that any sojourn into the findings of market research are also an exercise in how marketing executives are framing audiences. Part of Altman's polemic against the ahistorical understandings of 'genre' challenges the determining dynamic of research. Multiple choice questions enquiring why a particular film has been chosen readily supply 'genre' as a possible response. 'Suppose', he asks us, 'a survey were to be conducted in a more open-ended manner, asking such questions as "What effect does genre have on your choice of movies?" "Would such a study produce different results?" Such self-reflexivity about the research process is not, however, limited to academic ruminations. The research company Dodona in the introduction to their report *Cinemagoing 9* remark:

83

Cinema audience research data is, however, notoriously unreliable. Over-claiming of visits by interviewees wishing to give the impression of a more lively social and cultural life than they actually lead is more or less universal. For example, if the 24% of the population in 1999 who claimed to visit the cinema once a month or more had actually done so, total admissions for that year would have been a minimum of 170 million rather less than the 140 million actually recorded. (Dodona, 2001: 35)

Market research entails its own level of fictionalization, constructed through the situation of the interview and the narrative of the questionnaire. What is of interest here is not a purported 'truth' about cinema audiences so much as the image of the

audience constructed through this encounter. How does market research on cinema audiences elucidate the issue of niche markets versus homogeneity?

Recent academic writing on market research as a general practice traces the shift from the apparent postmodern segmentation of audience in a number of ways, but predominantly by considering shifts in advertising towards more emotive and design-led forms, supported by the results of market research into the fragmented nature of the population of consumers. In the text book, *The Production of Culture/ Cultures of Production*, Sean Nixon argues that advertising has been marked by a shift away from utility-based, rational explication of products towards the construction of an elaborate imaginary landscape into which consumers are invited. Nixon points to the complexity of consumer identification. No longer dependent on class-based allegiances, consumers are encouraged to think of themselves as individuals inhabiting a particularly nuanced symbolic, ethical and social world, the micro detail of which is lifestyle. Complicit with shifts in advertising is the practice of market research; no longer confined to demographics (favouring class-based classifications), research utilizes 'psychographics', to account for 'the most pertinent differences between groups of consumers which cut across social class' (Nixon, 1997: 203).

84

Nixon's account of lifestyle and psychographic marketing draws attention to two fundamental shifts in emphasis from demographics. First is the attempt to classify taste clusters according to a range of what are perceived to be personal attributes rather than the consumer's occupation. Second, the means of defining the self according to research is through cultural rather than economic or vocational definitions. Thus, Nixon argues, 'lifestyles and psychographics tended to produce both a more intense individualization of consumers than demographics and emphasized the differences between groups of consumers in more explicitly cultural terms' (1997: 203). In drawing on a lifestyle study of women conducted by a marketing company 'McCanns', Nixon suggests that the results, producing a profile of eight different female consumers, offers a more complex picture of consumer identity. Yet, on closer inspection, the study clusters the information into a set of new stereotypes as limited in scope as those of demographics. The survey, based on a range of attitude questions, is written up as a series of characters, illustrated as animals. Thus, for example, the 'Lady Righteous' appears as a horse, drawing on the cultural associations of the bourgeoisie, the 'Down-Trodden' as a rabbit, confined to an underground warren (the home, the private sphere). Class is not absent from the account, but dressed as something else, reconfigured as 'fun like' tropes.⁴ It might be more accurate an analysis to comment that the term 'class' has become erased from the lexicon of marketing whilst its effects continue to structure knowledge of consumers; demographics enters by the back door.

It is perhaps not the case that market research reveals a greater complexity in the lifestyle patterns of consumers, but rather that companies are making the links between various patterns of consumption, taste and social difference. The information that the survey solicits is, in fact, reminiscent of Bourdieu's account of taste, albeit geared towards a different outcome. Lifestyle research describes precisely the *habitus*, a set of dispositions that inform, at a conscious and unconscious level, choices in cultural taste. More pertinent to the focus of this book, market research into cinema audiences in the United Kingdom deploys a mix of conventional demographics and lifestyle consumption. A major resource of Market research into cinema audiences is commissioned by the Cinema and Video Industry Audience Research Consortium (CAVIAR), and conducted by BMRB International, producing an annual report for the industry.⁵ The demographic model is utilized by the survey and analysis, producing information on consumers in terms of social grade, sex and age. The shift toward lifestyle research is evidenced in the range of topics surveyed. In addition to questions concerning the regularity of cinema-going and type of film viewed, respondents are asked about their ownership of forms of technology ('leisure equipment'), viewing patterns of terrestrial, satellite and cable television, video rental and purchase, and print media (magazines and newspapers).

There are two significant points to make about the structure of the survey. The first concerns synergy. The report is clearly focused on aspects of media consumption that extend beyond the choice of film text itself. Given the extent of cross media ownership, and the predicted trend towards home-based consumption facilitated by digital forms of delivery and media format, the report provides information on a range of markets that companies are likely to be providing for, now and/or in the near future. Second, the survey produces a body of information on the lifestyle patterns of audiences, connecting consumption across the areas of shopping, leisure, information and culture (in its narrowest sense). Thus data is gathered on specific media forms and sources of information leading respondents to these practices, cross-referenced by factors of age, social grade and sex. What emerges is a composite image of consumers emphasizing differences of age, social class and gender. In addition, genre is consistently used to classify filmic taste, whilst a selection of specific top box-office films are monitored individually.

The findings of the survey elucidate key differences of film consumption according to social class (or social grade, in line with the statistical discourse of the research). The social grades A/B and C1 are regular cinema goers, 29 per cent attending once a month or more, and 37 per cent attending at least twice annually. These social classes tend to watch and buy film on video less, and watch film on television (particularly satellite and cable) least of all. The most popular genres for this group are drama and thrillers, with a particularly low preference

for science fiction and musicals. Non-filmic video purchase is particularly high for subjects of health and fitness, and low for sport and music. The reverse is the case for the lower classes, grades C2, D and E. Home based consumption is high (as noted in Chapter 2), with watching film on forms of television (terrestrial, cable and satellite) far exceeding video rental. Video purchase occurs mostly in supermarkets (Asda and Tesco feature prominently). The most popular non-film video purchase categories are sport and music video. Particular films confirm the genre preference in linking social grade and taste. Out of the ten films profiled for 1998, the drama *Sliding Doors* attracted 72 per cent of its audience from social grades ABC1, and 28 per cent from C2DE, whilst the high concept, action-adventure film *Armageddon* attained a 45 per cent share of grades C2DE. In 1999, the audience for the drama *Shakespeare in Love* was constituted by 76 per cent of social grades ABC1 and 24 per cent grades C2DE; similarly *Notting Hill* drew 69 per cent of its audience from the ABC1 groups and 31 per cent from C2DE. The most popular films at the cinema for the lower social classes were the comedies/spoof horror *The Mummy* (51 per cent) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (50 per cent).

86

It would be tempting simply to read these statistical results as empirical evidence of taste cultures. Yet, it is important to recognize the discursive domain in which the reports are operating, domains that condition the terms of analysis. Commissioned by the industry, the research aims to provide a broad but accurate picture of the audience, and within that, to be able to highlight key trends, enabling companies to maximize areas of growth and profit for future targeting. The 'prompted' questions peppering the survey encourage respondents to select from the given menu, where recognition of film or magazine titles is likely to blur into a positive response of use. Thus, the resulting reports announce high levels of film going (a continual year-on increase since the reports began, the only downturn relating to video rental, which is ameliorated by the increased viewing of film on satellite and cable). Another example of such prompting concerns the categories of 'favourite leisure activities'; offered a limited choice, the responses to these categories far exceed the percentages of other categories of use where questions were more embedded in the respondent's everyday practices. The 1998 statistics present the activities in terms of overall audience preference: cinema going (78 per cent), videos (73 per cent), playing sport (63 per cent), computer games (63 per cent), and theme parks (53 per cent). The favourite leisure activities, other than sport, are all related to film or video in some manner, suggesting that narrative rather than genre or media format is the most pertinent feature of the film text.

Such statistical information does not purport to explicate what audiences think of a film, the value judgements they make in front of the text, or their various

engagements with it. But what it does provide is a mapping of the contours of consumption in terms of time and space. The social grade analysis applied to the various sites of film viewing throws into relief the disparate practices of film viewing in cinema, home rental and television. The information suggests that the initial filmic release window at the cinema is a culture supported by the higher grade classes, with a declining social grade correspondence to the practices of rental and television premiere respectively.⁶ This difference points not only to spatial practices of film viewing but to the temporal differentiation of film cultures. If we consider that film, as a dematerialized commodity, provides forms of symbolic capital in terms of its 'originality' and 'newness', the acquisition of this capital relies on accessing the film at the time of its release. The notion of the media 'event' to describe the practices of promotional culture orchestrated throughout the media has attracted comment in terms of the pervasive nature of promotion (Wernick, 1991). Yet, equally significant is the temporal management of film which reverses the problem of short life expectancy, returning as a positive in the promotional moment; release is the filmic moment which underscores and capitalizes on the ephemerality of the medium.⁷

The marketing of film constructs a momentary presence through a circuit of promotional materials and restricted screenings. The press screening secures a professional audience for the film in advance of its wider release, reviewing as a form of preparation for the event. Preview screenings again restrict access and create a notion of 'insider' knowledge. Often supplemented by the presence of 'celebrities' in addition to the standard cast and crew, preview screenings blur the fictional and factual signifiers of texts and the institutions of production.⁸ In addition to preview screenings, print and televisual media produce interviews with stars and, occasionally, directors. Promotional material simultaneously permeates other consumer spheres, such as food, clothing or music, combining sponsorship with promotion, as well as the standard advertisements for film in posters and trailers in various media formats. What this orchestration of materials effects is a symbolic profile for a film within a particular moment. The debate of filmic value, interest and innovation occurs in the public domain at this time as a shared social network of exchanges. The 'premium' moment of filmic consumption in terms of social and symbolic capital is then the initial release. Further windows of release and consumption are, in contrast, detached from the collective debate of film and the sense of public 'happening'. Home view as temporally disparate practice, whether video rental or televisual, is relatively disconnected from public circuits of debate and evaluation.⁹

The relationship of public and private spheres is a complex debate, where the distinction between two separate domains has been questioned from a number of quarters (Livingstone and Lunt, 1992; Tolson, 1991). Indeed, the Habermasian

emphasis on the rational as the characteristic quality that secures the operation of democratic interaction has rightly been critiqued (Mouffe, 1993). Research into the sense-making activities of subcultural groupings has provided insight into the diverse modes of interaction that characterize debate in less legitimate forums, such as fanzines, in an argument for a model of filmic consumption as historical poeticism, to take but one example (Jenkins, 1992, 1995). Yet, acknowledging that subcultural enclaves produce distinct paradigms of discursivity, the question of how these domains attain social legitimacy remains unclear. Whilst statistical 'evidence' provides a crude overview of cultural practices, qualitative academic research provides the counter detail in micro focus. Between these two approaches lies the infrastructure of circulation, the flows of information between differentially marked spaces. The moment of filmic release, as media event, sets out the temporal and spatial management of such flows and points of interchange.

film, lifestyle and individualism

Marketing resides at the nexus of debates in cultural theory that become polarized in the claims for commodity culture as either pluralized or homogenized, and of audiences as fragmented or socially demarcated. Frank Mort speaks as a proponent of the pluralized model:

88

There was a time when culture came clearly labelled. If there was no consensus about cultural values, then at least it was clear what we were getting . . . These certainties are fast disappearing. Late 20th-century culture scrambles styles, publics and patterns of taste to an unprecedented degree. Popular forms collide with high art genres and postmodernism celebrates the clash, while leisure industries re-think their markets for everything from concert-going to cycling. (Mort, 1990: 32)

The market research of the film-advertising industry forges together these two opposing positions in its enquiry into related lifestyle products and practices, and in the cross-referencing of this material with a demographic model of social difference; the 'clash' and scramble of styles and tastes features as the postmodern, leaving the structures of class and other social difference as the modern. How then do we come to understand the offerings of culture as both individual choice and part of a competitive act of social distinction? And what is there specific to the nature of film that provides for its position at the centre of lifestyle consumption?

At the heart of lifestyle consumption runs the faultline separating the postmodern and the modern, a failure of the two terms to meet. The concept of lifestyle purports to shed itself of the old affinities of class, identifications exceed the traditional lines demarcating social distinction. Lifestyle consumption appears to

offer the individual the opportunity to compose taste as a personal, idiosyncratic bricolage of eclectic elements. Yet it also suggests a conceptual coherence, an identifiable style that threads the diverse parts. And as these strands of style become stitched together in a fabric of taste, the old patterns of social distinction re-emerge. The marketing of film suggests linkages for us, not only in terms of extending the narrative into other media, but through product placement and sponsorship. The film text becomes a lifestyle advertisement in itself to the extent that major film companies employ product placement executives to consult with companies seeking to place brands in films. In turn, large-scale manufacturers employ a pool of script readers whose task it is to review scripts for product placement potential. An example from the 1980s testifies to the duration of this practice; in 1987 Adidas placed their product in 60 films.¹⁰ In addition to the linkage of products and lifestyle within the film text, the connection is also made in the relocation of characters from films into the texts of advertising for other products the 'character' of Bridget Jones for example appeared in women's magazines during the period of the film's release to advertise Diet Pepsi. In the hybridity of culture and commerce – the world of the film and the external world – products take on the significance of characters, and conversely characters are potential products. The film text then involves us in a intertextual space of commodity association reconfigured as style and taste rather than social distinction.¹¹

Film, I would argue, is a form of media peculiarly positioned as a privileged vehicle for lifestyle consumption. Although it is possible to buy film as an object, either video or DVD, the majority of film viewing is a culture based on an experience rather than the acquisition of an object. Thus, film escapes the paradox identified by Dittmar (1992), who argues that the concept of lifestyle consumption presents us with a difficulty figured by the conjunction of the terms idealism–materialism. Here the notion of lifestyle plays simultaneously into the historical tradition of positivism, that identity is self-willed, present, autonomous, free of the constraints of socio-political environments, and at the same time reminds us that consumption is dependent on exchange with others, goods manufactured elsewhere, and on forms of ownership. Thus the object of consumption cleaves open the gap between subject and object, revealing a form of dependency on social context which problematises consumption as self-will. For Dittmar, the middle classes have acquired a particular solution in the parodic practices of cultural play, denying the seriousness or meaning of the encounter between subjects and objects. However, if we consider the shift in consumption from the acquisition of material objects to experiences, which film as a dematerialized form offers, the idealist–materialist paradox is resolved in a different way.

If idealism and materialism are binary terms whereby idealism is the positive pole, film escapes the paradox by offering an experience rather than a commodity. 'Experience' then resonates as the opposite to possession and materialism (Lee, 1993). Thus, the reframing of consumption as experience converges with Anthony Giddens's writing on modern identity shifting from emancipatory politics to life politics (Giddens, 1991, 1992). Giddens locates a positive movement towards an ethical basis for identity, characterized by reflexivity, self-determination and responsibility in place of collective identification; consumer culture provides in part the resources for such a transition.¹² Whilst this model partially describes the movement towards a politics of global awareness, there is also a contradiction in the wielding of consumption as the facilitator of such movements; global awareness is fundamentally a movement in opposition to surplus consumption and the exploitative practices on which the system of multinational production and consumption depends. Self-reflexivity, I would argue, is both an ethical re-thinking of identity, and complicit with a culture of experientiality that is sharply distinguished in terms of social hierarchies and difference. To echo Sedgwick's remarks at the beginning of this chapter, the culture of experience produces the subject precisely as wilful, responsible and individual, eliminating the social infrastructure within which reflexivity is brought into being.

90

Film as a dematerialized, exhibitionary media lends itself to the present demand for experimented culture. Firmly embedded in the mesh of associated products and sponsorship, it leads us to a range of commodities through a media of the imaginary. The experiential in film is, of course, conceived of differently in what I have called the historical production of film cultures. In mainstream film culture, the experiential is played out in terms of an enhanced corporal experience of the cinematic in the development of technologies of production and exhibition: special effects, surround-sound, wide-screen and the Imax cinema format of three-dimensional viewing. Mainstream film culture elides the experience of everyday life with the corporal experience of the senses, imbricating the aestheticized world of the film with everyday life. In contrast, the arthouse and the art gallery remain focused on the image of the text. There is an historic irony to this development. Recalling the early development of cinema, part of the project of the avant-garde, such as the surrealists, was to reduce the distinction between art and life, to reduce the autonomy of art as a specialized domain. As Habermas notes, this project failed: 'These experiments have served to bring back to life, and to illuminate all the more glaringly, exactly those structures of art which they were meant to dissolve.' For Habermas, one of the outcomes of this failure has been the predominance of 'special cognitive judgments of taste' (1983: 11). The practice of cultural engagement is individualized at the level of the aesthetic. Ironically, the levelling of art and life has taken place through the process of

commodification, where the aesthetic, in a design-led market, connects our practices of film, shopping and leisure.

Notes

- 1 Sedgwick's point in this essay, 'Epidemics of the Will' is that commodity culture provides both the cause and the resolution of consumption; whilst it produces excess, it renames its own symptom as addiction of various sorts (food, alcohol, drugs, shopping).
- 2 Altman extends this argument to claim that genres operate 'like nations and other complex communities', as 'regulatory schemes facilitating the integration of diverse factions into a single unified social fabric' (see Altman, chapter 12). For Altman, the nation state is in the process of extinction 'The nation-state environment has lasted long enough to convince us that the processes that once contributed to the constitution of existing nations are now extinct.' Whilst I would agree that nation states are in a process of demise, there is also a counter movement for the production of nationhood in relation to the global economy (see Chapter 5).
- 3 In a discussion of television and the public sphere, Peter Dahlgren connects the question of discursivity with political competence, questioning the significance of 'interaction' alone: 'There are many topics which can be raised in regard to the discursive aspects of interaction; perhaps most relevant for the public sphere is the question of discursive resources and repertoires: what are the ways of meaning-making at work within given sectors of the populace and what bearing do they have on political competence? . . . regardless of possible inherent suppressive aspects of the dominant modes of political communication, if one does not have access to them or at least to their translatable equivalence, one is excluded from the processes of democratic participation' (1995: 19). It is also interesting to compare Altman's proposals for film as a public sphere with the examples provided by both Negt and Kluge (1972/1993), and Hansen (1991).
- 4 This practice has become common to marketing agencies; other consumer tropes include fruits, plants and weather systems. Tropes are by necessity drawn from the 'natural' world ensuring that commodities (objects such as cars) do not become imbricated with the consumer, the subject of discourse.
- 5 The research is conducted as face-to-face interviews with a sample of 3000 individuals including children from four years of age. A computer-assisted personal interviewing system (CAPI) was used to allow respondents to shift between relevant sections according to age, etc.
- 6 In the category of those who never attend the cinema, 21 per cent of respondents were cited as social category of AB, whilst twice that number, 44 per cent of the respondents were from social group DE.

- 7 The release windows for a film are often commented on in terms of an extension of economic potential, and/or in relation to the fundamental versatility of a film narrative. James Paul Roberts, in an analysis of the British film industry and marketing strategies, comments: 'Today, a film product, aimed at mass market, must now not only have the appeal and "legs" to be a success in the domestic theatrical market, its form and content must allow it to be exploitable in numerous other geographic and product markets. It must be easy to promote, have significant merchandising potential, be transferable and exploitable in the video sell-through and rental markets, suitable for TV syndication and so on' (1992: 108). Also see Hoskins *et al.*, 1997.
- 8 In *The Film Marketing Handbook: a practical guide to marketing strategies for independent film*, the notion of celebrity extends to royalty, somewhat confusing the 'how to' approach of the book with such observations. The authors note 'In Spain, the UK and certain other major European countries, a common practice is to invite royalty to major premieres, boosting the media profile of the event' (1993: 155).
- 9 The CAVIAR research supports this argument in many of its analyses, but particularly in the survey of how information about film is acquired. Lower social grades rely more on commercials than higher social grades, whilst higher social grades show a preference for specialist magazines and television review formats at the time of release such as 'Film 95'. There is also a difference in the degree of connection with national and international formats; higher social grades tend to utilize national information media, whilst lower social grades tend to refer to the more internationally circulated 'MTV at the Movies, and 'Movies, Games and Videos'.
- 10 Alex Abraham argues that the relationship between product placement and film production is more complex still. Using the example of the film *Castaway*, which featured Tom Hanks as a FedEx worker washed up on a desert island, he notes that the CEO of the company FedEx, Fred Smith, is an investor in the film's production company (from the online magazine *Feed*, www.feedmag.com, January 2001).
- 11 This shift from the film text as the object of value to the notion of characters as asset coincides with the emphasis of trade turning from products to copyright. This transition is addressed in a discussion of TRIPS in Chapter 5.
- 12 For Giddens, the present system offers both opportunities and constraints for individual reflexivity. As Lury notes, Giddens does not consider the social variegations of participation: 'But is this reflexive relation the same for all individuals? Do we all have access to the same freedoms and suffer from the same responsibilities?' (Lury, 1996: 241).